

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: **THE WHOLE NAKED TRUTH OF OUR LIVES: LESBIAN-FEMINIST PRINT CULTURE FROM 1969 THROUGH 1989**

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During the 1970s and the 1980s, lesbian-feminists created a vibrant lesbian print culture, participating in the creation, production, and distribution of books, chapbooks, journals, newspapers, and other printed materials. This extraordinary output of creative material provides a rich archive for new insights about the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), gay liberation (the LGBT movement), and recent U.S. social history. In *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives*, I construct and analyze historical narratives of lesbian-feminist publishers in the United States between 1969 and 1989. Interdisciplinary in its conception, design, and execution, *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives* is the only sustained examination of lesbian print culture during the 1970s and 1980s; it extends the work of Simone Murray on feminist print culture in the United Kingdom as well as the work of literary scholars Kim Whitehead, Kate Adams, Trysh Travis, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Martha Vicinus, and historians Martin Meeker, Marcia Gallo, Rodger Streitmatter, Abe Peck, John McMillian, and Peter Richardson. From archival material,

including correspondence, publishing ephemera such as flyers and catalogues, and meeting notes, oral history interviews, and published books, I assemble a history of lesbian-feminist publishing that challenges fundamental ideas about the WLM, gay liberation, and U.S. social history as well as remapping the contours of current historical and literary narratives.

In the excitement of the WLM, multiple feminist practices expressed exuberant possibilities for a feminist revolution. Cultural feminism and lesbian separatism were vibrant expressions of the WLM; they were not antagonistic to radical feminism or liberal feminism but rather complementary and overlapping. Economic restructuring in the United States (e.g. globalization, decreasing governmental support for the arts, and neoliberalism) tempered visions for a lesbian-feminist revolution. Lesbian-feminist publishers experienced economic restructuring as it unfolded and actively discussed the political, economic, and theoretical implications. The strategies and responses of lesbian-feminist publishers demonstrate the effects of and resistances to these macro-economic forces. Examining the economics of book publishing explains how literary artists and other creative intellectuals support themselves in capitalist economies, illuminates broader intellectual and cultural currents, and suggests how broader economic trends in the United States interacted with cultural production.

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LESBIAN-FEMINIST PRINT CULTURE FROM 1969 THROUGH 1989**

By

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Dedication

For my beloved, Kimberly A. Sherrill

Acknowledgements

Since the late 1980s, I have been reading books, journals and other artifacts of lesbian print culture. This project is one part of my long intellectual and personal engagement with these materials. First and foremost, I am grateful for and indebted to all of the authors, publishers, distributors, and booksellers who brought lesbian books into my life. Ultimately, this project is a way to honor their work, to let them know that I heard them through the text on the page. They made a difference in my life.

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Grateful appreciation to Judy Grahn and Red Hen Press for permission to include "Talkers in a Dream Doorway" and "I am the wall at the lip of the water."

Finally, I share my great appreciation for animal companions. Shelby spent hours sitting at my feet while I worked at the computer and was the first one to lead me back to my work room when I had been away too long. Emma brought delightful puppy distractions throughout the process, including ensuring that I took a break every day at five P.M. to give her food and love. Some animal companions did not get to see me at the finish line: Gertrude, HD, Homer, and Mary Claire. I appreciate them and miss them.

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Introduction

The Keeper of Accounts

“I am a keeper of accounts” - Irena Klepfisz, *Different Enclosures*.

“My subject is the extraordinary tide of poetry by American women in our own time. An increasing proportion of this work is explicitly female in the sense that the writers have chosen to explore experiences central to their sex and to find forms and styles appropriate to their exploration. These writers are, I believe, challenging and transforming the history of poetry. They constitute a literary movement comparable to romanticism or modernism in our literary past.” Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*.

The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives is a history of lesbian print culture from 1969 through 1989. The title is from Dorothy Allison’s poem, “The Women Who Hate Me,” the title poem of Allison’s poetry collection, first published by Long Haul Press in 1983 and later reissued by Firebrand Press in 1991. This rich poem, written in seven sections, explores the tensions between and among women in the narrator’s life. Allison says of the women who hate her, “they cut me/as men can’t. Men don’t count./I can handle men. Never expected better/of any man anyway.”¹ The pain of rejection by women, as opposed to men, highlights the centrality of lesbianism in the poem. Women reject the narrator for being poor, southern, fat, and having “life-saving, precious bravado.”² The women who hate the narrator often hate her for her lesbianism, for her open, carnal sexuality. The narrator confides that the women who hate her also hate her sister, “with her many children, her weakness for/good whiskey, country music, bad men.”³ Making this connection with her sister, Allison demonstrates how sexuality, not just lesbianism, is

¹ Dorothy Allison, “The Women Who Hate Me,” *The Women Who Hate Me* (Brooklyn, NY: Long Haul Press), 18.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 22.

suspect and the source of other women's derision. In "The Women Who Hate Me," Allison writes about an underbelly of feminism: antagonism between women, the desire to be accepted, the desire to be loved, homophobia, classism.⁴ Allison ends the poem with a series of rhetorical questions. The questions begin with an incident of domestic violence in the narrator's relationship when she "came to be held up like my mama" by a lover who locked her jeans and her shoes in a drawer, then called her, "'You bitch. You damned fool.'" Continually humiliating her, the lover asks her if she wants to "walk to Brooklyn / barefooted?" or "try it mothernaked?" In the final lines of the poem, Allison then writes:

Which meant, of course, I had to decide
how naked I was willing to go where.

Do I forget all that?
Deny all that?
Pretend I am not
my mama's daughter
my sisters' mirror

pretend I have not
at least as much lust
in my life as pain?

Where then will I find the country
where women never wrong women
where we will sit knee to knee
finally listening
to the whole

⁴ Allison wrote most of the poems of *The Women Who Hate Me* during the summer of 1981 after the April 1981 Barnard Conference on Sexuality. The events of that conference are chronicled in *Sex Wars* by Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter; in short, some feminists labeled Allison and seven other women perverts and anti-feminists. In an interview, Allison said, "The poem 'The Women Who Hate Me' is essentially aimed at the women I couldn't . . . speak to at the Barnard Conference because they were screaming at me." Dorothy Allison, interviewed by Susanne Dietzel, November, 1995, <http://www.tulane.edu/~wc/zale/allison/allison.html>.

naked truth
of our lives?

The final three lines of Allison's poem suggest many of my intentions for this study. I want to tell the whole naked truth of our lives in the complex, searching, and beautiful way that Allison does in her poems. The complexity of "The Women Who Hate Me," the ways that the poem confronts difficult issues within women's and lesbian's lives, inspires my work. The "whole naked truth" suggests a story that is unvarnished, undressed; a story not made up, not made pretty, for public. The final image of women, sitting knee to knee, is how I imagine lesbian print culture serving lesbian-feminist communities during the 1970s and 1980s. Even when women could not sit knee to knee, they could sit with their hands on a book, their eyes drinking the words on the page, their minds making meaning and connections, their ears listening for truth. Finally, while writing this book, I always returned to the question: how naked am I willing to go? Definitions: Constituting a Literary Movement

Before I bare all, let me begin with definitions of key terms that I use throughout the book. Lesbian print culture is how I describe published objects produced by lesbians primarily for lesbian readers. Generally, I refer to the producers of these objects as lesbian-feminists; often, though not always, that is their preferred term. Some women call their work as writers, printers, and publishers simply feminist; others call it lesbian-feminist or lesbian / feminist; some call it radical feminist; some call it socialist feminist; others describe it as part of the Women's Liberation Movement. Within the archives, women use multiple terms to describe their work, their socio-political analyses, their motivations, and their identities; often there is slippage and overlap among these terms. Sometimes women use the words feminist, lesbian, lesbian-feminist, radical feminist, and

woman with extraordinary precision to align with particular theoretical, social, and political positions; other times they use these words interchangeably. When possible, I try to honor the words used by the women I am discussing. Generally, I use the term lesbian-feminist, though sometimes I simply use lesbian. I apologize in advance to readers who find the nomenclature confusing, inconsistent, or difficult to follow. I encourage readers, however, to think of those feelings of confusion and difficulty with excitement and a sense of new possibilities unfolding, which is how many women experienced language during the 1970s and 1980s. With enthusiasm and zeal, lesbian-feminists created new meanings with words and crafted new political positions through language.

The term Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) describes the extraordinary activism that transformed the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. The WLM transformed the roles of women in families, communities, workplaces, and civic life. Moreover, the activism of the WLM transformed how women thought about themselves and their roles in society. I consciously resist ascribing dates to the WLM. For the timeframe of this study, WLM suffices to refer to a broad range of feminist activities. While many scholars use the phrase Women in Print Movement to talk about feminist print culture during the WLM, I do not.⁵ Rather, like the women of the 1970s and 1980s, I understand the writing, printing, and publishing activities by feminists during the WLM as deeply entwined with the WLM. I do not want to extract this work as a separate—or sub—movement. In addition, given the intensive focus of my subjects on labeling their

⁵ See Trysh Travis, "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications" in *Book History* 11 (2008): 275-300, and Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda C. Gable, "Women Ran It: Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981" in *Carryin' on in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 241-284.

activities, identities, political formations, and work, I am less interested in labeling their work retrospectively or in sorting them and their beliefs into different boxes. I want to understand what work they did, how they described it, what effect it had, and what effects it continues to have today.

While my strategy for writing and thinking about the WLM can be most accurately described as lumping, I use a splitting strategy to think about the LGBT movement.⁶ I use the term gay liberation to refer to activism by gay men and lesbians from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. To refer to activism in the 1980s, I use the term gay and lesbian rights or gay and lesbian movement. To refer to activism post-1990, I use the term LGBT movement. I use these different labels for a few reasons. First, there is a longer and more robust scholarly history of the WLM than there is of the LGBT movement; as a result there has been ample scholarly work that defines various strands of the WLM and teases out different historical periods and organizing strategies. For this reason, I use the term WLM to synthesize this history and to provide an umbrella for my own work in lesbian print culture. The history of the LGBT movement has not been documented as extensively as that of the WLM. Certainly, the field of LGBT history is dynamic and growing, but the volume of the historical record of the LGBT movement does not yet approach the volume written about the WLM. Thus, I employ splitting to describe different moments in LGBT history as a strategy to open future research by suggesting the rich multiplicity of issues that remain unanalyzed. The second reason that I treat the two movements with different levels of specificity is that I became active in the LGBT

⁶ I use the work of Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Starr in *Sorting Things Out* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 159-160, to think about “classification and its consequences.”

movement in the late 1980s. I narrate some of my own lived, historical understandings; therefore, splitting for me seems urgent and crucial.

I use the term lesbian communities of readers or simply communities of readers to refer to people who were reading materials produced by lesbian print culture. I struggled with how to write about the women who were reading books by lesbian writers during my time period. In some ways, these readers are vibrantly alive in my mind. Reading author correspondence, books reviews, letters to the editor in community newspapers and journals, and the books themselves, I imagine entering this community of readers. I imagine myself as one among many women reading these texts and responding to them with other women in community settings. Yet these settings no longer exist and these communities are now dispersed. In this way, lesbian communities of readers are strangely elusive. Mimi Van Ausdall surveyed women who were reading lesbian novels during the 1970s for their retrospective memories about their experiences as readers.⁷ Van Ausdall surveyed fifty readers of lesbian novels during the 1970s and 1980s to determine what they read, how they learned about lesbian novels, and what their perceptions were about race and class in lesbian literature. Readers reported a variety of entries into lesbian literature including friends, feminist bookstores, and college classes. Many readers identified books that explicitly discussed race, though generally in a black / white binary, and class. Van Ausdall suggests from the survey that lesbian literature and its readers were “inseparable from lesbian revolution. . . . [A]t time, it [lesbian literature] even

⁷ Mimi Van Ausdall, “A Survey of Lesbian Readers: Literature, Identity, and Activism” in *Sinister Wisdom* 82, 87-94. Van Ausdall also discusses this in her dissertation, “Writing Revolution in the 1970s Lesbian Novel” (University of Iowa, 2007).

inspired readers to take action, ranging from coming out to becoming revolutionaries.”⁸

In spite of these glimpses into lesbian communities of readers, I find them elusive. By its very nature, reading is a solitary activity. Reader communities, in the sense that I use the term, are not formal groups or gatherings; there are not membership requirements, nor records of meetings. Lesbian communities of readers are networks of people, friends, associates, comrades, who read and discuss similar texts in informal ways: over coffee, at meetings, at rallies, on the bus. They are occasional, informal, and ephemeral. In this way, they are elusive. In spite of this, I refer to communities of readers repeatedly.

Using Michael Warner’s framework, I consider communities of readers as both publics and counterpublics. Warner explicates the relationships between texts and publics as “intertextual.” That is, publics are “frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption.”⁹ With this definition of publics, Warner highlights the dynamic interplay of particular texts with the broader field, or habitus. Lesbian print culture between 1969 and 1989 reflects a particular mode of address and consumption, and it was an intertextual dialogue among a range of lesbian readers. In addition, lesbian communities of readers also were a counterpublic, “defined by their tension with a larger public.”¹⁰ Lesbians understood themselves as both an autonomous public and as a counterpublic. Thus, I situate communities of readers as both a mass public, in the sense

⁸ Ibid., 92-93.

⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 16.

¹⁰ Ibid, 56.

that lesbians at times envisioned themselves as speaking primarily to other lesbians, and as a counterpublic, engaged in critiquing a larger public sphere, one that was variably feminist and/or heterosexual.

The term community, within this phrase and in many other locations in this book, means a group of people with intellectual and affective relationships. I use community primarily out of convenience; I do not have another word to use to describe these relationships. I am mindful of the treacly overtones that community can have as well as of the powerful critique of community by Miranda Joseph.¹¹ Joseph demonstrates how communal subjectivity is “constituted not by identity but rather through practices of production and consumption.” For Joseph, community is used as a term to evoke particular qualities, but in practice it exists through the material practices of capitalism. While at times I use the word community in annunciatory and allusive ways, ultimately, this history of lesbian print culture further explicates and supports Joseph’s argument: production and consumption constitute community. In my study, the production and consumption are of books; community includes readers, writers, publishers, and others involved in bookmaking.

Like Warner’s publics and counterpublics, lesbian-feminism is both a subculture and a culture. Hebdige describes subcultures as representing “a ‘solution’ to a specific set of circumstances, to particular problems and contradictions.”¹² By Hebdige’s definition, lesbian-feminists are a subculture; they create their own communities, or solutions, to respond to the endemic conditions of sexism and homophobia. As a group, or subculture,

¹¹ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

¹² Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 81.

dominated by men and heterosexual people, lesbian-feminists lack access to cultural power. At the same time, lesbian-feminists, as a group, invested deeply in claiming and asserting power through active resistance to domination. They believed in and worked to create a world where they had cultural power, a world where they were not a subculture but the dominant culture. In this way, lesbian-feminists constantly telescoped between understanding their work as a part of a subculture and as a culture that would replace patriarchy. Lesbian-feminists believed in building a culture that would supplant the current, dominant, heterosexual culture. Like my subjects, I telescope between understanding lesbian-feminism as a culture and as a subculture. They understood keenly the dialectical nature of both culture / subculture and public / counterpublic; they envisioned their work as actively engaging in the displacement of these dialectical relationships.

During the 1970s and 1980s, lesbian-feminists viewed their work as creating a new culture, not as expressing a subculture, but to appraise lesbian-feminist activities historically, I revert to a lens that views lesbian-feminism as a subculture.¹³ Hebdige describes two ways that subcultures are incorporated into culture: “through commodities and through ideologies.”¹⁴ In the past two decades, lesbian-feminism has been incorporated into United States culture through both commodification and through ideological adoption.

Although I rarely use the word culture independently, it is a central component of the phrase lesbian print culture. I use culture with Raymond Williams’s definition in

¹³ It will surprise no one that the envisioned lesbian-feminist revolution was not realized.

¹⁴ Hebdige, 95.

mind. Williams notes that the complexity of defining culture emanates from an “argument about the relationships between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both the words and practices of art and intelligence.”¹⁵ It is exactly this nexus between a particular way of life, in this case lesbian-feminism, and words and practices of art and intelligence that this history explores. Williams notes that culture references a tension between “material production,” which is primarily how culture is used in archaeology and anthropology, and “signifying or symbolic systems,” which is how culture is primarily used in history and cultural studies.¹⁶ The stories in this book explore this tension between material production and symbolic systems and demonstrate the significance of both meanings of culture for lesbian-feminists.

Pierre Bourdieu’s work on how objects are given cultural value, or distinction, is also crucial for my work. At the center of Bourdieu’s analysis is the idea of habitus, which has two meanings. First, the habitus is “the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements;” second, it is “the system of classification (*principium divionis*) of these practices.”¹⁷ For Bourdieu, the habitus is the environment through which “objectively classifiable judgements” and the system of classification to make judgements emerge. From the habitus, “the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted.”¹⁸ I use the word habitus to refer to the political, social,

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 88-92.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) 170.

¹⁸ Ibid.

cultural, and economic field of lesbian print culture. Books and ideas are created out of and published into a larger habitus, or field of influence. Bourdieu further observes that

the cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures. . . . All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice.¹⁹

Bourdieu’s articulation of the habitus and its consequences makes plain the social and political consequences of this system of distinction for lesbians: social formations both shape and determine systems of classification. He continues, “primary experience of the social world is that of doxa, an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident.”²⁰ The dominance of heterosexuality as a norm renders lesbian, and all creation that flows from that dominated subjectivity, as inferior, lacking formal or aesthetic value, and not worthy of distinction. Moreover, these “social conditionings linked to a social condition tended to inscribe the relation to the social world in a lasting, generalized relation to one’s own body, a way of bearing one’s body, presenting it to others, moving it, making space for it, which gives the body its social physiognomy.”²¹ Bourdieu describes this as “[b]odily hexis, a basic dimension of the sense of social orientation.” Bodily hexis is for Bourdieu “a practical way of experiencing and expressing one’s own

¹⁹ Ibid., 468.

²⁰ Ibid., 471.

²¹ Ibid., 474.

sense of social value.”²² Bourdieu makes a critical connection between ideology and materiality. Ideology becomes materialized or embodied through the doxa. For lesbians, a variety of experiences in the social world inscribe bodily hexis; lesbian print culture is one important structure that inscribes bodily hexis. By studying the objects of lesbian print culture, we can understand how women both re-inscribed and resisted these inscriptions. Part of the project of this book is to understand the habitus of lesbian print culture as its own field of reference and to put it in dialogue with the literary habitus of the United States.

Throughout the text I use both the first person and the first person plural: we, us, our. I use these voices consciously to imbricate myself in the story. I was not a producer of lesbian print culture during the time period of this study, but I am today. Currently, I am co-editor of the lesbian journal, *Sinister Wisdom*, founded in 1976 and a touchstone of lesbian print culture for many of the subjects in my study; a small LGBT press, A Midsummer Night’s Press, published my single-author collection of poetry, *Handmade Love*, in 2010, and, in 2011, A Midsummer Night’s Press published *Milk & Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*, a collection of poetry that I edited. I feel a kinship with the women whose lives and work are included in this study. I use the first person plural to express my affective connection to these women. As a reader, you may or may not include yourself in that appellation, but by using the first person plural, I invite you to participate in the work.

Why examine lesbian print culture?

²² Ibid.

Lesbian-feminist publishers produce books. Simply stated, publishing is about making books and selling them to people. For me, there is something mystical and sacred about books. Books come into our lives from libraries and friends; we buy them at bookstores and other places of commerce. They are bound. Thick and thin. Glossy and flat. Colorful and plain. With hard and soft covers. Books appear to us as readers as though everything in them is perfect, correct, true. In spite of my training as a scholar, through which I have learned that what is inside books is not always perfect, correct, true, the romance with books continues. The same is true for many readers: there is something romantic about books. Throughout this narrative, I talk about how books were made by lesbian-feminists: what went into the design and creation of the pages, how they were duplicated, how they were bound together. There are many reasons I narrate these details. Even as I recognize and appreciate my own romance with books, I want to demonstrate that they are objects, made by people.

Books, like art, obscure the labor behind them—the labor of the author, the editor, the publisher, the printer, the distributor, the bookseller. I want to make this labor visible. By making it visible, I animate a dialogic process between the creators of books and the readers of books. By discussing the material production of books, I think about how women, and lesbians in particular, made and distributed books. I seek to understand the significance of their labor both to themselves at the time and to us as contemporary readers as we think about what they did, how they did it, and why they did it. Finally, by examining the process of book making, I suggest new ways of understanding lesbian-feminism. For lesbian-feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, publishing connected intimately with women's empowerment. Empowerment, meaning to take power for oneself, is a

central value of feminism during the WLM. Making books, typing them, typesetting them, printing them with a mimeograph machine, a printer, or on a letterpress, binding them with hand stitching, staples, or glue, was a form of empowerment not only for publishers, but for authors and for readers. Making a book with only women's labor or only lesbian labor was significant in a variety of registers for lesbian-feminists.

In addition, the materiality of the books tells us something important about the economics of publishing as well as broader economic. How is the type laid on the page of a book? What materials are used to produce the book? What is the quality of the paper? The binding? How many copies of the book were printed? How did readers find the book? Was the book purchased by libraries? How did publishers start publishing? How did they sustain their operations? What did they pay their employees? How did they structure payment to authors? Why did publishers fail? Answering these questions explains the material conditions of an individual book; collectively, the answers sketch the broader habitus of book publishing as well as the habitus of communities of writers and readers. Finally, understanding book publishing explains how literary artists supported themselves in capitalist economies, illuminates broader intellectual and cultural currents within communities, and suggests broader trends economically in the United States.

By reading the materiality of the books themselves in conjunction with close readings of the texts, biographical information about authors, bibliographical information about publishers, and other methodological strategies, I make a multifaceted, co-constitutive argument about the significance of lesbian print culture. Examining lesbian print culture helps us understand the history and significance of WLM in new ways. It

also transforms how we understand the creation and expression of lesbian identities. Finally, lesbian print culture invites us to rethink literary criticism and its function in literary and aesthetic appraisals.

Currently, scholarly and popular debate speculates about the end of print culture. Electronic media, such as the internet websites, blogs, ebooks, and electronic book readers, saturate contemporary reading practices. Some commentators suggest that the book will become a relic, an object at which future humans will marvel at for its antiquated technology. Simultaneously, more books are being published in the United States today than ever before²³ and different types of literacy are emerging to respond to these new forms of textual distribution.²⁴ My work is not that of a futurist; I suggest, however, that books will remain long into the future as a site of knowledge, organizing, pleasure, and identity elaboration. Moreover, I believe that studies of print culture from earlier decades provide an important lens to consider and reflect on the current changes in print culture today.

Why does material history matter?

Why does material history matter? What is material history? Does the materiality of a book matter? Isn't it enough to just read the text? Throughout this book, I am

²³ Bowker, the publishing industry's source for bibliographic information, reports on the release of new titles each year. In 2010, it reported on the continuing explosion of non-traditional publishing (publishing through independent platforms, not through traditional publishing houses). According to Bowker this category has experienced "exponential growth over the past three years" and shows "no signs of abating." <http://bowker.com/index.php/press-releases/616-bowker-reports-traditional-us-book-production-flat-in-2009>.

²⁴ See Alan Liu's "Imagining the New Media Encounter," in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/>.

attentive to a variety of aspects of lesbian print culture. Certainly, reading texts themselves, thoughtfully and critically, is always a central concern, but I am also concerned with the materiality of books. By the materiality of books, I mean the physical object of a book, including how it came to be in the world, and how it travelled in the world. By material history, I mean the study of the material conditions of the production of a book: the work of authors, publishers, booksellers, and others involved with book production. I use the term material conditions to mean the effects of money and capitalism on how women live their lives. For lesbian-feminists, writing and publishing can change the material conditions of the world, not only for the producers, but also for the readers through new consciousness and new opportunities for activism. For writers and publishers, the material conditions of book publishing bring money into their personal economies and free them from doing other labor to make money, allowing them to focus on labor that relates to their lives as activists and artists. For lesbian-feminists, materialism, whether the material production of a book or the material conditions of women's lives individually or collective, is imbricated deeply with politics, political values, and textual creations.

In 1981, Barbara Grier wrote to the contributors to *The Lesbian Path*, an anthology of lesbian coming out stories edited by Margaret Cruikshank. Grier wrote that a “new life ... will soon be enjoyed by *The Lesbian Path*.”²⁵ Angel Press published *The Lesbian Path* in 1980, but according to Grier, Angel Press “did not deal properly with it at all.”²⁶

²⁵ Barbara Grier to *Lesbian Path* Contributors, April 27, 1981, Box 68, Folder “1981-1985, Folder 1 of 2,” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²⁶ Ibid.

Cruikshank and the publisher at Angel Press disagreed about the initial cover design and argued about distribution of the book.²⁷ In 1981, Grier's Naiad Press took over the distribution of *The Lesbian Path*, including promoting it "to the 13,000 women on our mailing list and to the 2000 bookstores we do business with." Grier told the contributors to *The Lesbian Path* that this arrangement would "make it much more widely read as it richly deserves." For lesbians in the 1970s and 1980s, how books are published and how they are marketed and distributed to readers was just as important as content. Grier believed that there was a particular way to distribute books to reach lesbians; she developed and championed distribution to lesbians not only through feminist bookstores, but also, and perhaps more important, through direct mail, community activism, and networking. These were strategies for books to reach readers eager to read the stories of their lives bound into book form. How books came into the world and how they reached readers was important to the creators of the books, both publishers and writers.

The material practices of book publishing expressed political values and ideological commitments of lesbian-feminists. Recovering these histories reanimates the past and reframes its significance. For example, one central value of lesbian-feminists was empowerment. Empowerment became a buzzword for a variety of social change movements; today empowerment is a buzzword not even associated with social change. Within the WLM, however, empowerment, the act of taking and using power in one's own life, was a central element of feminism. By creating small publishing houses, distribution networks, bookstores, and communities of readers, lesbian-feminist writers

²⁷ Margaret Cruikshank to *Lesbian Path* Contributors, Box 68, Folder "1981-1985, Folder 1 of 2," Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

and publishers engaged in the act of empowerment, not only for themselves as artists, but also in service to a broad vision of empowerment in relationship to the WLM. These same activities—publishing, book distribution, bookstore operations—have economic value, both within feminist communities and within the broader United States economy. One strategy to attend to these disparate meanings, empowerment and economic value, is to explore the material history behind print culture.

Attending to the material histories of books, chapbooks, broadsides, and other objects of lesbian print culture allows us to examine the meanings of what was published and to imagine new meanings of these published works in our lives as readers today. Through this history, I demonstrate how books are made and how they come into the world, linking material history with literary history and linking the ideological intentions of the creators with the economic consequences. By making these connections, I not only honor the work of lesbian-feminists in lesbian print culture during the 1970s and 1980s, but I also create a narrative that expands our understanding of how work was done with the hope that, by knowing what happened and how it was done, readers, writers, and activists will feel inspired to recreate it, to make it anew, in our lives today.

Why 1969 through 1989?

On June 16, 1868 in San Francisco, Agnes Peterson incorporated the Women's Cooperative Printing Union (WCPU); the purpose of the business was "to give employment to women as type-setters and thereby enable them to earn an independent and honest living and to conduct and carry on a general printing business."²⁸ By 1870, the census shows that the business employed three males and seven females. Under the

²⁸ Lois Rather, *Women as Printers*, (Oakland, CA: Rather Press, 1970), 24.

direction of a later proprietor, Elizabeth G. Richmond, the firm prospered for many years publishing books as well as “a wide variety of jobbing work, all of it the equal of the work being done by competitors.”²⁹ In the early 1900s, the WCPU ended after a “disastrous fire, followed by mergers.”³⁰ The WCPU gestures to a broader history of women in printing and publishing and to the ways that printing and publishing function as a source of economic support for women.

Lesbian-feminist publishing is exciting and innovative in the 1970s and 1980s, but the WCPU reminds us that women have a long history in printing and publishing.³¹ While I circumscribe the decades of my study to 1969 through 1989, lesbian print culture has a long history as well as an active present. By acknowledging the long history of women in publishing with the example of the WCPU, I position the work of lesbian-feminists in the 1970s and 1980s as important but not exceptional.

Throughout this account of lesbian-feminist publishing, I resist exceptionality. I do this for three reasons. First, exceptionality suggests a form of engagement that is unattainable to other actors; framing something as exceptional creates barriers to entry for others. Second, exceptionality fixes a particular history as special; I see this history as important and special certainly, but I want it to engage and excite others by its very ordinariness, as opposed to its exceptionality. Finally, exceptionality suggests exclusion

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James Philip Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, eds, *Women in Print: Essays on the Print Culture of American Women from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), Martha Watson, ed., *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), and James Philip Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, eds., *Print Culture in a Diverse America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

and exclusivity. By and large the creators and promoters of lesbian print culture wanted their work to be read and understood by their sister comrades and by other people. The work of lesbian-feminist publishing is, in part, work about creating greater space and greater opportunities for inclusion in the United States. Seeing this work as exceptional separates it from the ordinary fabric of women's lives and from the ordinary fabric of U.S. history. I resist both of these ideas. Thus, rather than seeing lesbian-feminist publishing during the 1970s and 1980s as exceptional, I see it as one example of lesbian, feminist, and queer publishing in a long history. By resisting exceptionality, I invite other histories of lesbian publishing and feminist publishing, retain space for exciting publishing projects today, and assert that lesbian-feminist publishing had an extraordinary impact not only on women's history or LGBT history but also on United States history.

Now, more specifically, why these dates? Casual readers may think that 1969 corresponds with the Stonewall rebellion and thus frames my work. In fact, 1969 corresponds with the year of publication of *Woman to Woman*, a mimeographed anthology of lesbian poems published by Judy Grahn and Wendy Cadden through the Women's Press Collective. The publication of this book, *Woman to Woman*, is the point at which I begin my study. The physical object of *Woman to Woman* represents the types of printing practices that interests me and the effects that these printing practices had on individuals, communities, and social movements.

The year 1989 corresponds with the awarding of the Lamont Prize to Minnie Bruce Pratt. Many lesbians received awards between 1969 and 1989; I consider the award system in chapter six of this book. Pratt's award is significant because it was given to a

book that is very political, to a poet who was intimately involved with lesbian print culture beginning in 1977, and to a book published by the feminist press, Firebrand Books. Thus, 1989 becomes a good year to end the story, a pinnacle to bring the book to a gentle close. These two incidents bound my study and ultimately provide me with a way in and a way out of the work. I also use this twenty-year time frame because it corresponds to the timeframe that Bonnie Zimmerman uses in *The Safe Sea of Women*. Zimmerman's study focuses exclusively on lesbian fiction; my work focuses more on lesbian poetry. By using Zimmerman's time frame, I pay homage to her vital work in lesbian literary and historical criticism.

The period between 1969 and 1989 is also important politically and economically in the United States. Through this narrative about lesbian print culture, I argue that by examining what happens in lesbian-feminist communities and lesbian print culture, we can understand important themes in U.S. history during this time period. The WLM is an important grassroots, social change movement during these two decades. Historians of the WLM locate different moments of flowering and decline for the WLM during this period. In *Daring To Be Bad*, Alice Echols describes the years between 1968 and 1975 as the apogee of radical feminism after which radical feminism was displaced by a less political cultural feminism. Susan Faludi's *Backlash* shaped a generation of thinking about the powerful forces opposing feminism during the 1980s. The narrative for a period depends on the degree of granularity and political investments of the narrator. For my purposes, the WLM was a strong and vibrant movement to transform society during the entire two decades of my concern. Many political battles and milestones occurred between 1969 and 1989, including state, local, and federal organizing to pass the Equal

Rights Amendment (which ultimately failed to pass in 1981), political and legal activism to defend the right to abortion, continued struggles for access to public accommodations and public programs, and a series of firsts for women: Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman Supreme Court Justice, and Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman nominated for executive office on a major party ticket. In the private sphere during these two decades, feminism affected women's everyday lives and their relationships with one another and their families.

Economically, the United States suffered major economic recessions during both the 1970s and 1980s; these decades are also the beginning of a fundamental shift in the economy from the post-World War II industrial manufacturing-based economy to an economy oriented to information and service. These economic shifts evolved in tandem with a shift in economic focus from national to global. Jefferson Cowie describes the years between 1968 and 1982 as a period of a "decline in industry" and a "siege of working-class institutions" that resulted in an embrace by some of the "new Right's retooled discourse of what it meant to be born in the U.S.A.: populist nationalism, protection of family, and traditional morality." Yet as Cowie notes, this did little to "cure collective economic illnesses."³² The continued transformation of the United States economy from a manufacturing economy to an information and service economy continues throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Producers of lesbian print culture track this change; they saw their own labor and the material to produce their work transform from 1969 until 1989.

³² Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 362-364.

In reflecting on this time period, Lisa Duggan characterizes this period as an implementation of “neoliberal policies of fiscal austerity, privatization, market liberalization, and government stabilization.”³³ Duggan argues that during these years the United States dismantled the New Deal consensus and replaced it with new vision of “competition, inequality, market ‘discipline,’ public austerity, and ‘law and order.’”³⁴ The 1970s, in particular, were a period of “pro-business activism” with “a wide ranging political and cultural project—the reconstruction of the everyday life in capitalism, in ways supportive of upward redistribution of a range of resources, and tolerant of widening inequalities of many kinds.”³⁵ The values of “privatization and personal responsibility...define the central intersections between the culture of neoliberalism and its economic vision.”³⁶ For Duggan, identity is key to the consolidation of power for a neoliberal agenda. Lesbian-feminists were at the center of articulating identity politics, particularly through lesbian print culture; lesbian-feminist publishing was at the intersection of an emerging neoliberal economic system and feminist ideologies that critiqued inequality and capitalism. Lesbian-feminists fiercely resist neoliberalism, but lesbian-feminist publishers negotiated the increasing neoliberal economic and political structures emerging at the time.

What has been written? And why is this book different?

³³ Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), xii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

This book is indebted to a corpus of scholarly work that examines lesbian literature and history. This review of existing scholarship recapitulates elements of my overall argument. In particular, it demonstrates three points. First, a multifocal methodology is crucial for studies of lesbian literature and history. Second, throughout the time period of my study, the lesbian and gay rights movement and the WLM were imbricated in ways that need further examination. Third, the material conditions of production and circulation of lesbian literature are crucial to understanding the theoretical and political interventions of lesbian print culture. To this end, I review existing literature on lesbian and feminist print culture, examine the historiography of the WLM and LGBT movements, and conclude with a brief history of lesbian literary criticism.

Print Culture Studies

Feminist print culture is an area of study in textual studies and histories of books. Current scholarship on feminist print culture includes attention to print culture in conjunction with the WLM³⁷ and feminist print culture more broadly.³⁸ In the United Kingdom, Simone Murray's *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*

³⁷ See Trysh Travis "The Women in Print Movement: History and Implications," Simone Murray *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), Jan Whitt, "A "Labor from the Heart": Lesbian Magazines from 1947-1994" in *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 5, no. ½ (2001): 229-251, Kate Adams, "Built Out of Books — Lesbian Energy and Feminist Ideology in Alternative Publishing," *Journal of Homosexuality* 34, no. 3 (1998): 113-141, Mary Thom, *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1997), Amy Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Martha Leslie Allen, *The Development of a Communications Network Among Women, 1963-1983* <http://www.wipf.org/tableofcontents.html>.

³⁸ *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910*, ed. Martha Watson and *Women In Print*, eds. by James Philip Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand.

contextualizes feminist publishing by examining the business and publishing practices of Virago Press. In Canada, *in the feminine: women and words/les femmes et les mots*, a publication of conference proceedings from 1983, contains a few essays that document and reflect on Canadian feminist print culture during the decade preceding the conference; Doris Wolf's dissertation, *Cultural Politics and the English-Canadian Small Press Movement: Three Case Studies*, provides a context for Canadian feminist print culture during the 1980s and 1990s.³⁹

Three scholars explore lesbian and gay print culture in monographs: Martin Meeker's *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s*, Marcia Gallo's *Different Daughters*, and Rodger Streitmatter's *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*. Meeker's work examines how communication systems emerged in the gay and lesbian communities prior to Stonewall; Gallo attends to the history of the Daughters of Bilitis with an extensive treatment of the journal *The Ladder*; Streitmatter, a journalist, traces gay and lesbian press from its earliest beginnings with the duplicated and individually distributed magazine of Lisa Ben through the late 1990s. There are a variety of scholarly articles about lesbian print culture, including Jenny Wrenn and Carolyn Weathers's history of Clothespin Fever Press,⁴⁰ Jan Whitt's examination of lesbian magazines from 1947 until 1994,⁴¹ and Kate

³⁹ Doris Wolf, *Cultural Politics and the English-Canadian Small Press Movement: Three Case Studies*, (PhD Diss., University of Alberta, Canada, 1999).

⁴⁰ Jenny Wrenn and Carolyn Weathers, "Visibility through Book Publishing: The Story of Clothespin Fever Press," *Collection Building* 11, no 1 (1993), 32-34.

⁴¹ Jan Whitt, "A 'Labor from the Heart': Lesbian Magazines from 1947-1994," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 5, no. 1/2 (March 2001): 229-251.

Adams' analysis of lesbian-feminist publishing.⁴² Stacey Young's chapter on feminist presses, in *Changing the Wor(l)d*, includes history and analysis of Firebrand Press, Kitchen Table Press, and South End Press.⁴³ A number of unpublished dissertations address print culture: Kate Adams, Mimi Van Ausdall, Kayann Short, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Alisa Klinger all write about lesbian print culture.⁴⁴ Kristen Hogan⁴⁵ traces the history of feminist bookstores with particular attention to the crises among bookstores during the 1990s, building on Junko Onosaka's work in *Feminist Revolution in Literacy*,⁴⁶ and Agatha Beins's dissertation uncovers the meanings behind feminist periodicals in the 1970s.⁴⁷

The 1960s have received significant attention in relationship to print culture. Abe Peck's *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (1985), John McMillian's *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of*

⁴² Kate Adams, "Built Out of Books -- Lesbian Energy and Feminist Ideology in Alternative Publishing," *Journal of Homosexuality* 34, no. 3 (1998): 113.

⁴³ Stacey Young, *Changing the Wor(l)d* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 25-60.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Adams, *Paper Lesbians: Alternative Publishing and the Politics of Lesbian Representation in the United States, 1950-1990* (University of Texas at Austin, 1994), Mimi Imuro Van Ausdall, *Writing Revolution in the 1970s Lesbian Novel* (University of Iowa, 2007), Kayann Short, *Publishing Feminism in the Feminist Press Movement, 1969-1994* (University of Colorado at Boulder, 1994), Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves The Queer Survival of Black Feminism 1968-1996* (Duke University 2010), and Alisa Klinger, *Paper Uprisings: Print Activism in the Multicultural lesbian Movement* (University of California Berkeley, 1995).

⁴⁵ Kristen Hogan, *Reading at Feminist Bookstores: Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network* (University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

⁴⁶ Junko R. Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁷ Agatha Beins, *Free Our Sisters, Free Ourselves: Locating U.S. Feminism through Feminist Periodicals 1970-1983* (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2011).

Alternative Media in America (2011), and Peter Richardson's *A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America* (2009) all capture the milieu of radicalism from the 1960s as it translated into publishing activities, even as all fail to treat the engagements and contributions of women in substantive ways.⁴⁸

Studies of print culture exist within the rubrics of history, literary studies, and cultural studies; they overlap with the field of textual studies, a field that, according to the Society for Textual Studies, examines "the discovery, enumeration, description, bibliographical and codicological analysis, editing, and annotation of texts"⁴⁹ in a variety of disciplines. My interests in lesbian print culture emanate from the print culture of the WLM but with a specific focus on lesbians; I situate the field of lesbian print culture as making contributions to LGBT history, lesbian literary criticism, and textual studies.

Historiography of the WLM and the LGBT Movements

The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives joins a wide range of studies that examine the history and meaning of the WLM⁵⁰ and the significance of race as a key lens of analysis.⁵¹ Literature on the WLM and the Gay Liberation Movement tends to see the two

⁴⁸ See also Donna Lloyd Ellis, "The Underground Press in America: 1955-1970," *Journal of Popular Culture* 1 (1971): 102-124.

⁴⁹ From *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation*, the journal of The Society for Textual Studies, 4, no 2, (Autumn 2009).

⁵⁰ Anne Valk's *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, DC* (2008), Anne Enke's *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (2007), Judith Ezekiel's *Feminism in the Heartland* (2002), and Nancy Whittier's *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (1995) each explore feminist formations in different geographic locations.

⁵¹ Bettina Roth's *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (2004), Kimberly Springer's *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (2005), and Winifred Breines's *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist*

movements as separate formations. Historical treatments of the WLM including Anne M. Valk's *Radical Sisters* (2008), Anne Enke's *Finding the Movement* (2007), and Kathy Davis's *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders* (2007) all contain substantial discussion of lesbians' organizing and activism, but situate the work specifically in relationship to feminism and less in relationship to gay liberation. While histories of the Gay Liberation Movement are co-gendered, such as John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1988), Amin Ghaziani's *The Dividends of Dissent: How Conflict and Culture Work in Lesbian and Gay Marches on Washington* (2008), and Allida M. Black's edited volume *Modern American Queer History* (2001), and utilize feminist frameworks, they do not fully illuminate an intertwined history of the WLM and the Gay Liberation Movement. This history of lesbian-feminist print culture begins to uncover that history.

Lesbian Literary Criticism—A Brief History

The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives expands upon the work of Kim Whitehead, Alicia Ostriker, Linda Garber, and Bonnie Zimmerman, and many others, in literary studies,⁵² but I begin by tracing a longer genealogy of lesbian literary criticism, which began with Jeannette Howard Foster's self-published book, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*. Foster, a teacher and librarian, dedicated her life to finding and identifying

Movement (2006) contribute an understanding of the WLM as not exclusively a movement of white women.

⁵² Kim Whitehead, *The Feminist Poetry Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), and Alicia Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

literature that either included narratives about “sex variant women” or that were written by “sex variant women.” The publication history of Foster’s book is important, particularly in trying to construct a genealogy of lesbian literary criticism.

Vantage Press, a vanity publisher, released *Sex Variant Women in Literature* in 1956⁵³ after Foster paid Vantage Press \$2,000, nearly a year’s salary, to publish the book she had worked on for nearly two decades. The manuscript was rejected repeatedly by commercial publishers and a dozen university presses. In 1976, Foster wrote to historian Jonathan Katz, “I wish you could see some of the answers I got from University presses (or their readers).”⁵⁴

The response to *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was a deafening silence that lasted for nearly twenty years, until two new lesbian-feminist publishers reintroduced the book. Diana Press, a feminist press based in Baltimore, Maryland, reprinted *Sex Variant Women in Literature* in 1976, and, in 1984, Barbara Grier’s Naiad Press, a lesbian press based in Tallahassee, Florida, reprinted it. There was no audience for *Sex Variant Women* when it was published initially. The audience was born as Foster researched and wrote the book and was old enough to read it when it was released in reprint editions by small feminist and lesbian presses. This temporal and generational syncopation demonstrates how for lesbians in the twentieth century, books themselves operate as an archive. Sometimes, at the time of publication, the archive is illegible, but the exteriorization of an artist’s interior subjectivity becomes legible later when new communities of readers

⁵³ Passet, *Sex Variant Woman*, 189.

⁵⁴ Katz Papers, Series 1. A. Correspondence 1960s-1990s. Box 3.

emerge with new discursive formations. Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* is an example of a book operating and circulating in this way.

After *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, lesbian literary criticism continues throughout the next two decades, but not among literary critics or authorized scholars. Foster herself is not a literary critic in the formal sense. Her work as a lesbian literary critic precedes the entry of lesbian literary criticism into authorized literary criticism by at least fifteen years. In spite of this lack of lesbian literary criticism among authorized literary critics, there is vibrant community-based lesbian literary criticism among groups of lesbian readers and writers.

Literary criticism is of keen interest to the women of *The Ladder*, which features regular book reviews and posts updates about important books published each year. While some would frown on the book review as a form of literary criticism and scoff at the notion that literary criticism could be contained in the pages of a newsprint magazine circulated among lesbians, I maintain that the work of Barbara Grier and other writers about lesbian literature between the years of 1956 and 1972 was lesbian literary criticism. In fact, the collected writings of Grier's lesbian literary criticism in *Lesbiana*, published in 1976 by Naiad Press, remains the most sustained engagement with lesbian literature between 1958 and 1972. Little rivals it in its scope of literary review and its attentions to shaping lesbian literary aesthetics and lesbian literary sensibilities.

Lesbian literary criticism enters scholarly locations during the 1970s. Two publications are exemplary of the influences of the feminist movement and the gay liberation movement on lesbian literary criticism. In 1974, *College English* published a special issue on "The Homosexual Imagination." The issue addresses a wide range of

issues about homosexuality in scholarly locations, from critical readings of gay texts to issues about homosexuality for teachers and students. It included an introduction focusing on homophobia in education systems, an interview with Allen Ginsberg, poems, an article by Dolores Noll titled, “A Gay Feminist in Academia,” and an article by Julia Stanley,⁵⁵ “When We Say ‘Out of the Closet!’” Stanley does a linguistic analysis of the gendered inflections of language in the rhetoric of gay liberation. The second publication, from *Radical Teacher*, is a 1978 essay by Elly Bulkin titled, ““Kissing/Against the Light”: A Look at Lesbian Poetry.”⁵⁶ Bulkin works to situate lesbian poetry as a subject for teachers in the academy and makes important moves to situate lesbian poets in relationship to canonical poets. These two publications indicate some of the energy and ideas about lesbian and gay literature that infused the academy during the 1970s as lesbian literary criticism was entering academic formations.

Lesbian and feminist literary critics generated at least four strands of lesbian literary criticism in the past forty years. First, the recovery of texts written by lesbians parallels the feminist praxis of textual recovery. Second, lesbian literary criticism grapples with what it means to be lesbian either for authors or through textual analysis. Third, lesbian literary criticism examines how lesbian lives are narrated (narrative theory) and how lesbians respond to lesbian narrations (reception theory). Fourth, in the early 1990s, lesbian literary criticism turns from feminist to queer as a framework for lesbian literary criticism.

⁵⁵ Julia Stanley, a linguist, later wrote under the name Julia Penelope and co-edited with Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*.

⁵⁶ Elly Bulkin, “Kissing/Against the Light: A Look at Lesbian Poetry,” *Radical Teacher* 10 (December 1978), 8.

In her genealogy of feminist literary criticism, Elaine Showalter identifies sexism and misogyny in canonical texts as the first phase, and then the discovery of “a literature of their own” as the second phase of feminist literary criticism. Showalter writes, “the focus on women’s writing as a specific field of inquiry, moreover, led to a massive recovery and rereading of literature by women from all nations and historical periods.”⁵⁷ The recovery of lesbian literature tracks with the recovery of writing by women. Books such as H.D.’s *HERmione*, written in 1927 but not published until 1981, and Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Feux*, published in 1936 but translated into English in 1981, are examples of the recovery of lesbian texts through feminist literary scholarship. Outside of the academy, activist and publisher Barbara Grier returned Renee Vivien’s poetry to print in 1974 with *A Woman Appeared to Me*, translated from French by Jeannette Howard Foster.

A second strand of lesbian literary criticism grapples with what it means to be lesbian either for authors or through textual analysis. Adrienne Rich’s 1975 essay “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson” argues that “we will understand Emily Dickinson better, read her poetry more perceptively, when the Freudian imputation of scandal and aberrance in women’s love for women has been supplanted by a more informed, less misogynistic attitude toward women’s experiences with each other.”⁵⁸ In her influential 1977 essay, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” Barbara Smith argues for a lesbian reading of Toni Morrison’s *Sula*. Smith argues that in *Sula* “though their [Nel and Sula’s] flirtations with males are an important part of their sexual exploration,

⁵⁷ Showalter, *New Feminist Criticism*, 6.

⁵⁸ Rich, “Vesuvius at Home,” 163.

the sensuality that they experience in each other's company is equally important."⁵⁹ Re-reading Morrison's *Sula* in order to explore lesbian desire and lesbian eroticism is as critical a move for lesbian literary criticism as Rich's argument that to understand Dickinson one must be open to the possibilities of friendship and eroticism between women. Reading lesbian desire is an important element of lesbian literary criticism.

In lesbian literary criticism, what it means to be lesbian is central for authors and literary critics, and includes the following questions: What is lesbian literature? Must it be about lesbians? Must it be written by lesbians? This area of lesbian literary criticism overlaps, of course, with the prior strand of recovery; some work by lesbians has been out of print and unavailable to readers, either as a result of the author's gender or sexual orientation or the treatment of lesbianism in the text.⁶⁰ In addition, questions in this mode of lesbian literary criticism overlap with historical questions, what is a lesbian? The question, what is lesbian literature?, has political significance because it situates literature by, for, or about lesbians as discrete objects of inquiry, and imbricates it with systems of canonization and literary appraisal. Yet, this mode of inquiry is not entirely concerned with questions of establishing a canon, although that is a significant element of it. In addition to questions of canonization and disciplinary boundaries, the question, what is lesbian literature?, frames inquiries into pulp novels of the 1950s and 1960s, which have been studied extensively.⁶¹ It also asks questions about books whose authors are lesbians, though their literary products are not necessarily about lesbians, such as those by Mary

⁵⁹ Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," 177.

⁶⁰ For instance, *Olivia* by Olivia was out of print for a long time as was Gayle Wilhelm's *We Too Are Drifting* (which appears to be out of print again).

⁶¹ For discussion of lesbian in pulp novels, see Foote, Keller, and Carter.

Renault. While scholarly works that define lesbian literature in the past four decades engage different questions at different historical moments, there is persistence in thinking about what objects operate to define lesbian literature.

A third area of inquiry for lesbian literary criticism is how lesbian lives are narrated (narrative theory), and how lesbians respond to lesbian narrations (reception theory). The narration of lesbian lives falls into four major thematic areas over the twentieth century: coming out/becoming a lesbian, lesbian love and relationships, woman-centric environments, particularly girls' schools and all-women institutions, and lesbian life stories, including narratives of passing or gender crossing. Bonnie Zimmerman's *A Safe Sea of Women*, the only book length study of lesbian novels of the 1970s and 1980s, uses narrative theory to situate these texts and explores how the novels express various formations of lesbian identity at the time. While narrative theory examines textual evidence from the author figure, reception theory concerns itself with how readers read and understand texts. There has been extensive attention to reception theory by feminist scholars.⁶² Kennard and Juhasz have done important work in reception theory in relationship to lesbian readers.⁶³

⁶² Patrocinio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A Flynn, eds. *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004), and Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, and Suzanne Juhasz, editors, *Gender and Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁶³ See Jean E. Kennard "Ourself behind Ourself: A Theory for Lesbian Readers" in *Gender and Reading*, edited by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, and Suzanne Juhasz, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 63-82; Suzanne Juhasz, "Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 17, no. 1 (1998): 65-82.

The early 1990s bring a new direction in lesbian literary criticism, queer theory. While scholars like Linda Garber, Theresa de Lauretis, and Elizabeth Grosz take great pains to situate queer theory in relationship to feminist theory in the early 1990s,⁶⁴ there is a turn from the formation of lesbian as imbricated with feminism to lesbian as imbricated with gay male and queer communal formations. This is a productive engagement, resulting in new queer literary criticism, such as Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinities* and Kathryn Bond Stockton's *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*.

Even as there is a turn to queer theory, however, canonizing texts about lesbian literature continue to be published. Bonnie Zimmerman's encyclopedia project, *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* (1999), links literature and history in a reference volume. Terry Castle's *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (2003) includes a selection of literature that engages lesbianism as its subject. This framework departs from earlier anthologies, which took as their organizing rubric literature by lesbians.⁶⁵ As the terrain of lesbian is remapped with different emerging meanings and identities in scholarship, the canonizing forces of the academy stabilize the idea of lesbian literature through publishing projects.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See Garber *Identity Poetics*, de Lauretis *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, and Grosz "The Labors of Love," in de Lauretis *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*.

⁶⁵ Faderman's 1995 project *Chloe Plus Olivia*, an anthology of lesbian writing, takes as its subject the portrayal of lesbians in literature, but also privileges lesbian writers, which Castle does not. Earlier publishing projects of lesbian anthologies (such as *Lesbian Poetry* and *Lesbian Fiction*) exclusively privilege work by lesbians.

⁶⁶ Greenwood recently published a new two-volume set, *Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Literature in the United States*, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson, which further suggests canonization.

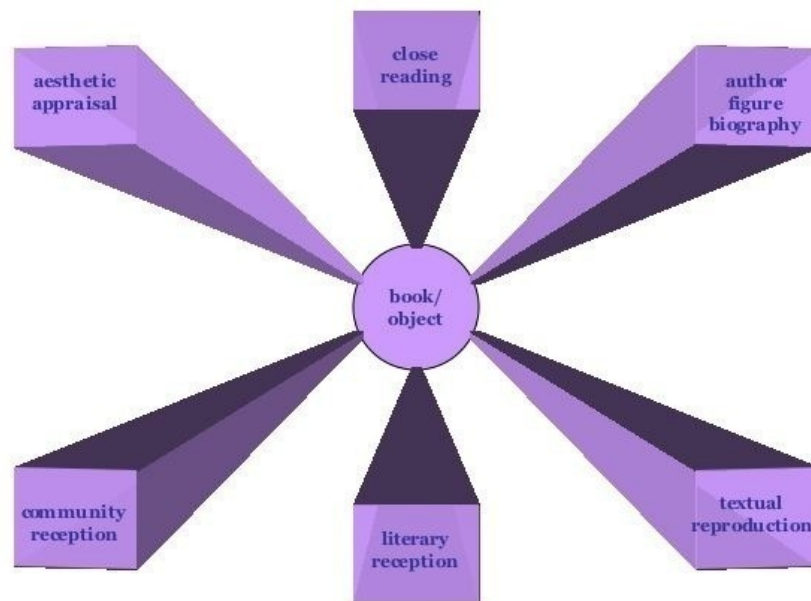
Contemporary lesbian literary criticism continues to emerge from locations that are both literary and historical. Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality* explores early twentieth-century American texts, including Nella Larson's *Passing*, as a way to understand the interplay of regulation of race and homosexuality. Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* is a thoughtful and sensitive rereading of modernist texts that dwells on "backwardness" and a range of what might be labeled negative affects to encourage us to rethink modernism and positive queer frameworks in the spirit of Leo Bersani's *Homos* and Lee Edelman's *No Future*.

Lesbian print culture shaped both the literary output of lesbian poets and writers and the identities and lives of women engaged directly in its production and consumption in the broader culture of the United States. Through the examination of lesbian print culture, *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives* situates the objects of lesbian print culture in a theoretical, historical, literary, and cultural context, and it positions similarly the creators and distributors.

Parallelepiped Materialities: A Method for Understanding Lesbian Print Culture

In part, the accretion of the idea of lesbian (or any other term–sex variant, invert, queer—that describes the intimate, erotic, communal, and public lives of women who structure their lives around other women) happens through publishing during the twentieth century. Publishing makes lesbian bodies and lesbian identities visible, replicable, and re-authorable. Publishing makes lesbian bodies and lesbian identities dynamically available to current and future communities of readers. Thus, the practice of publishing in the twentieth century serves as a way to understand lesbian community

formations. To understand publishing practices, particularly lesbian print culture, I utilize a methodology that I call “parallelepiped materialities” from the Foucauldian description of the book.⁶⁷ Parallelepiped refers to a prism with six, parallelogram faces. In envisioning “parallelepiped materialities,” the six faces, or facets, I examine are: 1. close readings, 2. author figure biographies, 3. means of textual reproduction, 4. reader reception, 5. literary reception, and 6. aesthetic appraisals.⁶⁸



⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Unities of Discourse,” *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 23.

⁶⁸ My formulation of “parallelepiped materialities” is indebted to Martha Nell Smith’s work on “triangular intertextualities” in *Rowing In Eden* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), in which she defines as “the influences of biography, reception, and textual reproduction upon one another” (2) and Katie King’s thinking about lesbian-feminist cultural objects using the Necker Cube.

Each of the facets corresponds to a set of questions of theoretical and material concerns. Close textual readings (facet one), with engaged, even obsessive, attention to the words and images on the page and the meanings that they suggest and evoke, invites questions about what meanings are being reflected and created through this text, as well as about what the texts say about lesbians and lesbian identity at different historical moments. Author figure biographies (facet two), narratives about the lives of authors from archival and published sources, provide a second facet of information through which texts can be understood and engaged.⁶⁹ Author figure biographies encourage questions such as, What does the biography of the author figure bring to the meaning of the text?, and What does biographical information reveal about lesbian and lesbian identities in relationship to the text?

Throughout this study, I list extensively the books and materials published by lesbian publishers because for lesbian-feminist publishers, bibliography is a type of biography. Bibliography is a narrative of what was published, by whom, and when. Attention to bibliography for lesbian-feminist publishers is attention to author figure biographies in a different register, one which illuminates important stories and meanings for each of the publishers.

Textual reproduction (facet three) refers to how words, sentences, ideas, stories, poems, and other written material are transformed from a writer's notebook, loose leaf papers, typewritten manuscripts, or, more often today, computers into an object that can be duplicated for distribution. Duplication may include hand-copying, printing,

⁶⁹ Here, I use Barthes's term as the theoretically engaged substitute for the term author, but note that my intention is framed in a politically engaged fashion, similar to Susan Stanford Friedman's usage, in her description of Nancy K. Miller's work, in the essay, "Negotiating the Divide" in *Mappings*.

photocopying, or HTML-rendering; duplication might further be called bookmaking or magazine, newspaper, journal, or website publishing. Textual reproduction is tied intimately to the material conditions of the author; the author's relationship to capital—economic capital and cultural capital—influences textual reproduction. In considering the means of textual reproduction, specifically, how the text came to be printed and published,⁷⁰ I ask these questions: how did these objects come to be in the world? What technologies were used for printing and publishing? What meaning did these technologies have for the author and the publisher? How does the physical object address the author figure's biography? What resources does the author have to pursue publication? What editors and publishers does the author know? How does the physical object relate to the textual elements of the book?

Reader reception refers to a specific type of literary critical theory that examines how readers encounter, receive, and interpret texts. Wolfgang Iser argues for literary texts that force “the reader into a new critical awareness of his or her customary codes and expectations,”⁷¹ while Stanley Fish argues that texts are no “objective” work of literature,

⁷⁰ By printing, I mean the physical creation of the text through any of a variety of means: off-set printing, letter press printing, Xeroxing, etc. and include material considerations such as typesetting, paper used for the physical object of the text, and image reproduction within the physical object. By publishing, I mean the range of activities that brings the printed object into the world including distribution, marketing, and promotion.

⁷¹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 79. As Eagleton notes, Barthes's theory of reader reception in *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975) departs sharply from Iser, whose formulation of reader reception is most useful; Barthes's work illuminates lesbian poetry usefully, particularly in work by writers such as Gertrude Stein, Lynn Lonidier, Nicole Brossard, Betsy Warland, and Daphne Marlatt.

but rather written by the reader through the process of reading, or experiencing the text.⁷² Robert Jauss sees the history of literature as “a dialogue between work and audience” with “opposition between its aesthetic and its historical aspects” both of which are “continually mediated.”⁷³ Reader reception is informed by all three of these critics and examines the reception of books by individual lesbians and by communities of lesbian readers. As an aspect of parallelepiped materialities, reader reception leads to inquiries such as: how did these objects reach readers? How were these objects received by other lesbians? What meaning do individual readers and communities of readers make with the objects? To answer questions of reader reception, I examine book reviews, references to books in community publications or other material circulated within the community, as well as other archival sources, including extant interviews and surveys.

Literary reception is how a book is received by formally authorized communities of literary appraisal such as critics, scholars, and award committees among other authorized communities. Some of these communities are predominately heterosexual, some are mixed lesbian and heterosexual, and some are predominately lesbian and/or LGBT. Literary reception investigates how readers received texts, what the composition of the community of literary receptors means for lesbian writers, what critical apparatus is used to appraise these objects, how these texts circulate after their initial publication, whether

⁷² Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980). Fish’s work has been used effectively by feminists in examining communities of women readers, specifically Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Jacqueline Bobo’s *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁷³ Robert Jauss, “Literary History As a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota, 1982), 19.

they are reprinted in anthologies and other locations in order to gain greater circulation and recognition, and how the texts are recognized in traditional systems of awards, recognition, and accolades. To consider literary reception, I examine an archive of book reviews and scholarly engagements but also consider additional elements that situate writers canonically including inclusion in anthologies, the availability of inexpensive teaching editions, editorial interventions, and formally researched biographies.

Finally, aesthetic appraisals are particular statements by critics and authorized taste-makers in which models of judgment are invoked. Paul Lauter makes a distinction between formalist, or speculative, criticism and canonical criticism.⁷⁴ The former, formalist, or speculative, criticism, maps roughly to this sixth facet of the parallelepiped, and the latter, canonical criticism, maps roughly to the fifth facet of the parallelepiped: literary reception. While my concerns are strongly materialist, I am unwilling to concede the aesthetic as a site of inquiry and examination for lesbian poets. In short, while I believe in the critiques of aesthetics as mobilized by Lauter and Eagleton, I also value speculative criticism, particularly when embedded in a materialist framework. Therefore, the sixth facet of the parallelepiped is aesthetic appraisals, embedded in a materialist framework. To examine this facet of the parallelepiped, in addition to interrogating the source of the aesthetic appraisal, I consider questions about how the object is appraised aesthetically, who makes aesthetic judgments about it, what the composition is of the people making aesthetic appraisals, how texts are appraised aesthetically within a dominant (heterosexual) milieu, and how appraisals change when a lesbian milieu is centered.

⁷⁴ Paul Lauter, “The Two Criticisms—or, Structure, Lingo, and Power in the Discourse of Academic Humanists,” in *Canons and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Parallelepiped materialities animate the book by examining its component parts. A physical object is recognizable as a book, in part, through the relationship of each of the component parallelograms—binding, front cover, back cover, and stacks of paper with words and images contained inside. The recognition of an object as a book, however, is more than the relations between the six geometric figures; it is the use of the object by people in the word—reading, engaging, responding, altering, and imagining anew. Similarly, the different aspects of parallelepiped materialities are recognizable as areas of study in relationship to history, literary studies, and textual studies. Taken together, however, through the rubric of parallelepiped materialities, individual meanings interact to produce new meanings and materialities, at least for the particular moment of the attention and analysis.

The purpose of parallelepiped materialities is not to create another object for fetishization, but rather to articulate a system of thinking about books and other objects of lesbian print culture in conjunction with archival sources to create an effective history, in the Nietzschean and Foucauldian sense, while allowing for a prism complex enough to contain my contemporary set of intellectual and political stakes. The parallelepiped, a metaphorical way of thinking about the book, offers a filter through which we have different ways to see and understand archival sources.

The methodology of parallelepiped materialities when applied to lesbian texts throughout the twentieth century is a strategy to examine the accretion of lesbian into individual and communal identity formations and examine how those were produced and what stakes they have for lesbians at different junctures in the century. Parallelepiped materialities also explore more expansively the relationships within lesbian literary

cultures and between lesbian literary culture and non-lesbian literary culture with the political intention of situating lesbian literature more broadly in canonical formations.

While there is an apparent complexity to parallelepiped materialities with these six prisms for analysis, it is exactly this sort of complexity and thick reading that lesbian poetry deserves. Lesbian poetry has been overlooked broadly, with the possible exception of the poems of Adrienne Rich; the remedy to this ignorance is an ambitious methodology that engages not a single strand of the problem, but rather the entire tangled ball of yarn. Parallelepiped materialities expose an array of new relationships between and among lesbian texts and lesbian communities.

Chapter Outline and Synopsis

Like my methodology with its six facets, there are six chapters, each with six parts. As a whole, this story about lesbian print culture from 1969 until 1989 animates Darnton's "Communications Circuit."⁷⁵ Darnton identifies six nodes in the outer circle of the communications circuit: 1. author, 2. publisher, 3. printer/supplier, 4. shipper, 5. bookseller, and 6. reader/binder. Woven throughout this history are stories of each of these nodes within lesbian print culture. Between each chapter is a brief story that animates one element of the lesbian-feminist communications circuit as Darnton outlines it. These stories are: 1. Judy Grahn, poet and publisher, 2. Granite Press, letter press publisher, 3. Iowa City Women's Press, a printer, 4. Women in Distribution (WinD), a feminist distributor that operated from 1975 until 1979, 5. the Women in Print Conferences, held three times during the period of my concern as a networking event for

⁷⁵ Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" (*Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83) and Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books? Revisited" (*Modern Intellectual History* 4 no. 3 (2007): 495-508).

a variety of constituents, particularly booksellers, and 6. Barbara Grier, not as the publisher of Naiad Press, but as a reader and cataloguer of lesbian literature. These stories augment the chapters by bringing into focus a particular node of Darnton's Communications Circuit.

Although I attend to the outer circle of the Communications Circuit, for my story, the center of Darnton's Communications Circuit is crucial. In the center are three conjoined areas: 1) intellectual influences and publicity; 2) economic and social conjuncture; and 3) political and legal sanctions. For my lesbian-feminist subjects, these were the engines driving their work. Darnton describes these as the other elements of society, "which could vary endlessly. For the sake of simplicity, I have reduced the latter to the three general categories at the center of the diagram."⁷⁶ For my story, these are the elements that drove lesbian print culture. Lesbian-feminists were interested in intellectual influence and publicity, in understanding the economic and social conjuncture as a way to transform it through the feminist revolution, and in the political implications of their work.⁷⁷ The center of Darnton's Communications Circuit, while a catch-all of influences for him, is the most important aspect of the story of lesbian print culture.

Each chapter spans between 1969 and 1989. The timeline for the book overall doesn't proceed linearly, though each chapter is linear. The circular fashion of the overall book resists the idea of history as a progressive narrative. Ideas and moments return throughout the book, much as books continue to circulate after their initial release,

⁷⁶ Darnton, "What Is?," 67.

⁷⁷ Here I diverge from Darnton. The political and legal sanctions he is thinking about are things that effect the communications circuit for books. Lesbian-feminist publishers encountered this, particularly in moving books across national borders, but my concern as the concern of my subjects is with how books make political changes in the world.

influencing different readers in various times and spaces. This circular organization also evokes a central tenet of feminism: to reposition power as not hierarchical but shared throughout a group. Finally, each chapter begins with a short story—an imagined narrative about some aspect of lesbian print culture within the chapter. Most of these narratives, these interludes of creative non-fiction, are grounded in my archival research, though they are filled with flights of fancy—my fancy as the author. I include them in the book to animate the content of the chapter, to bring emotional urgency to the stories, and to evoke an imagined affective experience of different moments in this history.

Chapter One examines three lesbian-feminist presses that operated primarily in the 1970s: Women's Press Collective, Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc. and examines how feminism informed each of the presses as well as explores the material conditions of publishing. The second chapter examines three lesbian-feminist presses that operated primarily in the 1980s: Persephone Press, Kitchen Table Press, and Long Haul Press. With these presses I think about how publishing animated different identity formations in feminism in the 1980s. The third chapter examines five smaller lesbian-feminist publishers and thinks about the relationship between readers and publishers. The fourth chapter looks at a series of anthologies of lesbian poetry to look at how anthologies animated lesbian identities and consider how anthologies functioned as a vehicle for the animation of identities. The fifth chapter looks at lesbian-feminist encounters with literary power to think about how the identity of lesbian was adumbrated during the period of my concern particularly in national formations. The sixth chapter considers how lesbian-feminist texts from the 1970s and 1980s were taken up in popular culture and

thinks in particular about the aesthetic contributions of lesbian-feminist authors. A brief conclusion brings the story to rest.

Two notes on style. First, by and large, I refrain from using quotation marks to set off particular words. While I recognize that using quotation marks is convention in some circumstances, particularly in scholarly prose, I resist them for their suggestion as “scare quotes.” While quotations marks are a convention to highlight particular words especially in scholarly writing, they also suggest a performance of almost but not quite, as in “lesbian” poetry being almost but not quite either lesbian or poetry. For this reason, I refrain from using them. Second, I quote material directly from archival sources and do not correct any grammatical or spelling errors or designate them with the conventional [sic]. Most errors are immediately recognizable; I trust that you as the reader will realize they are from source documents and not my errors. In all cases, they are errors that I would be comfortable making; if you ascribe them to me, it is fine. Most often, when I encountered documents with errors and even when I repeatedly encountered the errors while working on this book, I found the errors delightful. Some have a particular exuberance or felicity associated with them that expresses for me some of the energy and intensity of the WLM. I eschew designating them with the [sic] because I do not want to call attention repeatedly to small typographical or grammatical errors. I make them. The subjects of my study make them. Small publishers make them; large, commercial publishers make them. Errors are a part of our life in print culture. I do not want to deride subtly the subjects of my study by pointing out typographical or grammatical errors in their work.

Finally, four important lesbian-feminist presses are not included in this dissertation: Firebrand Press, Aunt Lute, Spinsters Ink, and Cleis. I am interested keenly in the work of these four presses and will devote proper attention to them in future scholarly projects.

Conclusion

I began with the quotation from Alicia Ostriker's book *Stealing the Language*. I read that book when I was nineteen years old. My copy is filled with underlining and pencil marks. Many of the notes from my younger self say, "Use this in my dissertation!" When I first read *Stealing the Language*, I was enchanted with the power of Ostriker's language, particularly the strength and courage of her claims. Then, I imagined doing for lesbian poets what Ostriker did for women poets. Now, more than twenty years later, I take as my subject "the extraordinary tide of poetry by American" lesbians. Ostriker wrote, "These writers are, I believe, challenging and transforming the history of poetry." I make a similar claim. Lesbian-feminist writers and publishers transformed United States history. I am only the keeper of accounts. I am here to tell their story.

/Interlude 1/ A Bio-bibliographic Sketch of Judy Grahn

Judy Grahn was born on July 28, 1940 in Chicago, Illinois. She grew up in New Mexico and, at the age of eighteen, enlisted in the Army. She was dishonorably discharged from the Army for homosexuality at the age of twenty-one. Interested in learning more about “who I might be, what others thought of me, who my peers were and had been.”⁷⁸ Grahn went to a library in Washington, DC to research homosexuality. There, the librarian told her that those books were locked away. This began Grahn’s life-long quest to make information, history, ideas, and opinions about homosexuality and lesbians widely available.

In 1963, Grahn picketed the White House to increase visibility of gay and lesbian people. A total of fifteen people participated in this action, organized by the Mattachine Society; three, including Grahn, were women. In 1964, using a pseudonym, Grahn published an article in *Sexology Magazine* saying that lesbians were normal, ordinary people. In 1965, Grahn wrote *The Psychoanalysis of Edward the Dyke*, an angry satire about the ways that psychologists regarded lesbians and gay men. This poem would be the title poem of her first collection, published six year later. In the interim, Grahn published a few poems, again using a pseudonym, in the lesbian periodical published by the Daughters of Bilitis, *The Ladder*. By 1969, frustrated with the lack of publishing outlets available for her work and meeting other writers and activists in the San Francisco Bay area, Grahn began a revolution. With a mimeograph machine, Grahn began publishing her own work. With a group of women, she founded the Gay Women’s Liberation Collective in 1969.

⁷⁸ Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xi.

The Gay Women's Liberation Collective became one of the most influential west coast organizations in the lesbian-feminist movement and the lesbian print movement. The collective founded a women's bookstore, A Woman's Place in Oakland, California, which operated until the late 1980s. The collective also founded the Women's Press Collective, a publisher that operated until 1978. The Women's Press Collective published many of Grahn's early chapbooks and poetry collections including *Edward the Dyke And Other Poems* (1971), *Elephant Poem Coloring Book* (1972), *The Common Woman*, (1973) and *A Woman is Talking to Death* (1974). These early books were published as small print-run chapbooks. They were distributed by Grahn through readings and through women's bookstores around the country. The Women's Press Collective, Judy Grahn's involvement in it, and her poetry represents the spirit and practice of the feminist poetry movement during the 1970s. At this time, women and poets took control of the means of production and wrote, produced, and promoted their own work through small presses in which they were intimately involved in all aspects of the publishing.

Judy Grahn's poetry is plain-spoken, grounded in a world of women in general and of lesbians in particular. Her work is also highly aural; she uses anaphora extensively and much of her work can be appreciated best by reading and hearing it. Grahn is a keen observer of how women live their lives. She writes about children, family, domestic scenes, but not to the exclusion of women's working lives. Grahn writes with compelling urgency about work, including the labor of secretaries, electricians, waitresses, and pipe fitters. Above all, Grahn infuses her work with humanity and a sharp, honest humor.

Diana Press also published two volumes of short stories edited by Grahn titled *True to Life Adventure Stories volume 1 and 2*. After the Women's Press Collective closed,

Diana Press published Grahn's poetry as well, including *She Who: A Graphic Book of Poems with 54 Images of Women* and a new version of *A Woman is Talking to Death*. During the 1980s, larger publishing houses, The Crossing Press and Beacon Press, published Grahn's subsequent books of poetry, *The Queen of Wands* and *The Queen of Swords*. Publishers developed an interest in lesbian and feminist work as a result of the demonstrated audience that writers and poets had created for their work.

In 1984, Beacon Press published Grahn's *Another Mother Tongue*, a highly creative and imaginative account of gay and lesbian culture, myth, and history. Told in a personal, authoritative voice, *Another Mother Tongue* synthesizes Grahn's historical research and contemporary narrative accounts of gay and lesbian life throughout history. A year later, in 1985, Grahn published *The Highest Apple: Sappho and the Lesbian Poetic Tradition* with the San Francisco-based independent, feminist publisher Spinsters Ink. *The Highest Apple* provides a similarly-styled history from Grahn's research in the history and literature of the Sapphic tradition. These two books establish the significance of Grahn's writing and thinking as a social theorist for the feminist and gay and lesbian movements.

In 1989, The Crossing Press published an anthology of Gertrude Stein's work, titled *Really Reading Gertrude Stein*; Grahn edited this collection and it includes her critical essays about Stein. This anthology made Stein more available to contemporary lesbian readers. Grahn has also published a novel, *Mundane's World*, a feminist, ecological utopia set in an imagined prehistoric world. More recently, Grahn has been developing and teaching about her metaformic philosophy. This philosophy, rooted in her fiction and her research for *Another Mother Tongue*, was first articulated in Grahn's 1993

book, *Blood, Bread and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World*. In this book, Grahn re-conceptualizes human history to place women at the center and to explore ways to realign the values, ideologies and beliefs shaping our world. Grahn continues this work in the online journal that she co-edits with Deborah J. Grenn, *Metaformia: A Journal of Menstruation and Culture*.⁷⁹

Judy Grahn's work has received many awards and recognitions. She has won a National Endowment for the Arts grant, an American Book Review Award, an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1983, an American Library Award, a lifetime Achievement award (in Lesbian Letters, and a Founding Foremothers of Women's Spirituality Award. Triangle Publishers, a GLBT association of people working in publishing, feature a Judy Grahn Nonfiction Award annually.

Grahn has appeared in two featured films, *Stolen Moments* (1997), about three centuries of gay life, and *Last Call at Maud's* (1993), about a lesbian bar in San Francisco closing after operating since the 1940s. Whether studying history or participating in it, Grahn is often turned to as an expert on gay and lesbian experience. Throughout her writing career, Grahn has collaborated with a variety of artists, musicians, and dancers, and she has inspired many artists as well, including Ani DiFranco. Grahn has taught extensively on feminism, gay and lesbian history and culture, and women's spirituality at colleges and universities in the San Francisco Bay area. Currently, she serves as Research Faculty for the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California.

⁷⁹ The journal is available online at www.Metaformia.org.

Thirty years later, Grahn's *The Work of a Common Woman* is still fresh and revelatory. From the first poem, "I'm not a girl," which concludes, "I'm a straight razor/look at me as if you had never seen a woman before/I have red, red hands and much bitterness," Grahn announces that this is poetry that is unexpected, poetry that will change and transform your sense of what poetry is and, by extension, who the poet is, who women and who lesbians are. She moves easily between the polemic and the poetic when she writes at the conclusion of the poem, "The Subject of Lesbianism," "The subject of lesbianism/is very ordinary; it's the question / of male domination that makes everybody/angry." In the poem "If you lose your lover," Grahn writes,

If you lose your lover
rain hurt you. blackbirds
brood over the sky trees
burn down everywhere brown
rabbits run under
car wheels.

This small, devastating poem uses a layered idiom to build meaning. Without punctuation, the images may read, "blackbirds brood over the sky trees" or simply "blackbirds brood." Similarly, in the next line, "sky trees burn down everywhere" or "sky trees burn down." The effect of this indirect diction to describe location, particularly in the prepositional phrases, is a sense of disorientation, a lack of ability to locate oneself in space, as one feels when a lover is lost. Grahn continues, "should your / body cry? to feel such / blue and empty bed[.]" Again Grahn splits the diction for the line to read "to feel such blue and empty" or "blue and empty bed." This syntactic indeterminacy does not extend to the conclusion; Grahn ends the poem with the determination—even certainty—of the poetic voice that infuses *The Work of a Common Woman*. Grahn writes, "comb hair go here / or there get another." These are poems of certainty, though Grahn is

never too pat or easy with her answers. Her awareness of the complexities of the world, the sometimes disconcerting absence of easy places for thinking people to sit, is on display elegantly in her long poem, “A Woman Is Talking to Death.” This meditation on communal life, gender, and class is a tour de force that reads to a contemporary audience as potently as it did in 1974.

In reflecting on her work in 1983 when the book *The Work of a Common Woman* was published, Grahn wrote in the introduction to *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*, “At 16 I thought that the apex of poetic success would be to appear in the same anthology with Amy Lowell. What has actually happened is infinitely more real.” She continued,

I called my first, woman-produced, mimeographed book *Edward the Dyke and other Poems* for two reasons: first, by insisting that Edward was a poem, I was telling myself that women must define what our poetry is. I believe this about every other aspect of our lives also. Secondly, it meant people had to say the word dyke. What would Amy Lowell say to this? She would probably offer me a cigar.

Yes, Amy probably would; it seems appropriate over three decades later to extend to Grahn a cigar and a lifted glass to toast her work. This bio-bibliographic sketch is a toast to Grahn, an under-toasted, under-appreciated poet. It also reveals how the author is a crucial element of Darnton’s communications circuit. Grahn’s life and work wends its way through multiple communications circuits, from small periodicals like *The Ladder* and *Sexology* to small press publications through the Women’s Press Collective to larger publishing houses like Beacon Press. Grahn is an author whose work is published in multiple ways throughout her career, and her work reaches audiences in multiple ways, not only through printed books but through how people take those printed books and adapt them to other creative and cultural expressions. Her biography and the bibliography

of her work trace some of the paths of lesbian print culture during the twenty years of my concern.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Portions of the bio-bibliographic sketch originally appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary LGBTQ Literature of the United States*, volume 1 A-L, edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2009), 268-270.

Chapter 1

Women's Press Collective, Diana Press, and Daughters Publishing Company, Inc.

Common and Uncommon Beginnings

I'm not a girl
 I'm a hatchet
I'm not a hole
 I'm a whole mountain
I'm not a fool
 I'm a survivor
I'm not a pearl
 I'm the Atlantic Ocean
I'm not a good lay
 I'm a straight razor
look at me as if you had never seen a woman before
I have red, red hands and much bitterness

—Judy Grahn, *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*⁸¹

“I’m not a girl / I’m a hatchet” is the first poem of Grahn’s poetry collection *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*. In 1971, the Women’s Press Collective published this fifty-two page collection, with thirty poems and a handful of line drawings by Wendy Cadden. Imagine encountering *Edward the Dyke* for the first time in 1970. At a bar. Not a printed and bound book, but a stack of mimeographed pages. Folded, crumpled, stained. Imagine arriving tonight at the entrance, off the alley. A single light outside casts shadows, if it is working; often broken by a flung pebble, shards of glass on the concrete below. The alley smells vaguely of urine, but that odor is overwhelmed by alcohol from the garbage. Walk by the dumpsters, pass three large women wearing fedoras, smoking.

⁸¹ Judy Grahn, *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems* (Oakland, CA: Women’s Press Collective, 1971).

They look at you, challenging. You fix your eyes to theirs. Reach for the propped open door. There is no handle on it. When closed, it is locked with a large padlock and chain. Inside, it is darker than in the alley. The large bouncer grunts as you walk through the door. You've been here before. She knows you. You know she is a woman. You know her name is Gert. In the bar, you hang your coat. The bartender, Mel, gives you these poem. She says, *Hey, you might like to read this*. She thrusts the pages at you. They get wet from the leavings of beer mugs, smudged by the dirty bar. You shove them into your pocket.

The next morning, over coffee, you pull out the mimeographed pages. The cover says, *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*. You flip through the pages until the end. At this moment, you don't know it, but your life is about to change. You don't know it, but your world is about to change. You simply read,

1. Helen, at 9 am, at noon, at 5:15

Her ambition is to be more shiny
and metallic, black and purple as
a thief at midday; trying to make it
in a male form, she's become as
stiff as possible.

You stiffen, riveted by the story of Helen. You haven't read anything like it before. You continue reading. You reach the end,

Her grief expresses itself in fits of fury
over details, details take the place of meaning,
money takes the place of life.
She believes that people are lice
who eat her, so she bites first; her
thirst increases year by year and by the time
the sheen has disappeared from her black hair,
and tension makes her features unmistakably
ugly, she'll go mad. No one in particular
will care. As anyone who's had her for a boss

will know
the common woman is as common
as the common crow.

The poem enrages, gnaws, and satisfies you. As you turn the page, you almost hear the caw, caw, caw of Helen. It would be uncanny if it weren't so common.

Judy Grahn wrote and circulated “The Common Woman Poems” in 1969. About their origin, Grahn writes, it was “completely practical: I wanted, in 1969, to read something which described regular, everyday women without making us look either superhuman or pathetic.” She did that. In seven poems, she captured seven portraits of “common” women. Each concludes with a simile. Helen is “as common / as the common crow.” Ella, “as common / as a rattlesnake.” Nadine, “as common as / a nail.” Carol, “a thunderstorm.” Detroit Annie, “the reddest wine.” The seventh, Vera, is “as common / as the best of bread / and will rise.”

Grahn's desire to write common women expresses feminism in the early Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). She wanted to write not about exemplary or exceptional women but about common women. Working class women. Women who are often, but not always, lesbians. Women who are living lives, not of privilege or even great interest to others, but lives which suddenly become, by their very commonness, of interest to Grahn and a whole new generation of women. In writing “The Common Woman” Grahn hearkens back to Virginia Woolf, writing for the “common reader.” Grahn positions herself with a single word in a lineage of women writers, writing for women readers. The word—common—would be iterated by others, including Adrienne Rich in her collection of poems, *The Dream of a Common Language* (1974), the

publishing collective of *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives*, a quarterly journal published in Iowa City, Iowa from 1981 until 1996, and Ann Arbor, Michigan feminist bookstore Common Language, almost becoming an anthem of the WLM.

Edward The Dyke and Other Poems is groundbreaking in its content and also in its textual reproduction and distribution. Judy Grahn is one of the sparks of the lesbian-feminist poetry movement, a movement which would illuminate the lives of women, bringing them out of back-alleys across the United States and into the U. S. literary mainstream. Part of the significance of Grahn's *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems* is its publication in 1971 as an early book from the Women's Press Collective, but, outside of the bound book, "The Common Woman" poems grow in their influence through wide circulation. These poems, in Grahn's words, "all by themselves. . . went around the country. Spurred by the enthusiasm of women hungry for realistic pictures, they were reprinted hundreds of thousands of times, were put to music, danced, used to name various women's projects, quoted and then misquoted in a watered-down fashion for use on posters and T-shirts."⁸² In some ways, the story of the poems of *Edward the Dyke* is not a story of a book but the story of how lines of texts took hold in women's psyches and spread throughout the United States and eventually around the world. The story of *Edward the Dyke*, in particular, and lesbian print culture between 1969 and 1989, more broadly, is a story about changing political and economic contexts and emergent lesbian identities in the United States.

I first read the poems of Judy Grahn in a collection titled, *The Work of a Common Woman*, published by The Crossing Press. The copyright of this book is 1978. My copy,

⁸² Judy Grahn, *The Work of a Common Woman* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1978), 60.

purchased in the early 1990s at a feminist bookstore in Ferndale, MI, must have been published after 1983 because the back cover features two photographs of Grahn, one in 1973 and one in 1983. The photograph from 1973 was taken by Lynda Koolish; in it, Grahn stands in front of a microphone with a small stack of note cards in her hands, inviting the reader to imagine hearing Grahn read the very poems contained in the volume. The photograph from 1983, taken by Tee A. Corinne, features a seated Grahn, her head looking slightly to the left, her eyes looking confidently into the camera. *The Work of a Common Woman* contains all of the poems of *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems* from the original edition. The credits page of *The Work of a Common Woman* states that the collection was “[o]riginally published by Diana Press, reissued by St. Martin’s Press, this edition is part of The Crossing Press Feminist Series.” The publishing genealogy of *Edward the Dyke* sparked my interest in lesbian print culture more than twenty years ago; Grahn’s poems and the words of dozens of other common women fueled my research and writing. I hope these stories, whether imaginatively rendered or compiled through archival research, will inspire and delight you as they have me.

Introduction

Simone Murray identifies the “paucity of book-length research on the subject of feminist publishing” and proposes a theoretical framework for conceptualizing feminist publishing that incorporates both publishing history and women’s studies.⁸³ In *Mixed Media*, she narrates compelling histories of publishers in the United Kingdom, particularly Virago, Pandora, and Sheba, to explore how they negotiated intellectual, political, and economic issues in their publishing. Stacey Young in *Changing the Wor(l)d*

⁸³ Simone Murray, *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 27.

reads narratives of presses as sites of discursive feminist politics that challenge liberalism and liberal feminism.⁸⁴ In this chapter, I narrate histories of three lesbian-feminist presses, Women's Press Collective (WPC), Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc., as negotiations among different strands of feminist ideologies and also as complex negotiations of feminism within capitalism and emergent neoliberalism in the 1970s. WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters all operated exclusively during the 1970s, a time of intense feminist engagement in a variety of spheres—economically, politically, socially, and culturally. In narrating their histories with a particular focus on textual reproduction, that is, the physical production of books, I delineate different feminist ideas and ideologies informing their work. Perched between the demands of operating within an increasingly globalized capitalist system and feminist visions of creating new, more egalitarian social and economic structures, lesbian-feminist presses negotiated these challenges and conflicts in different ways, depending on the economic conditions, political ideologies and personal circumstances of the women involved.

In this chapter, I first lay out some central feminist formations and particularly ideological tensions within them. Then I consider the histories of three important lesbian-feminist publishers, the Women's Press Collective (WPC), Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc. I conclude with a consideration of the economic contexts and pressures that both circumscribed and enabled lesbian-feminist publishing during the 1970s.

While I am attentive to a variety of ideological feminist formations in the lesbian-feminist presses, I am particularly attuned to how these narratives help us to rethink narratives of radical feminism and cultural feminism in the WLM. In *Daring to Be Bad*,

⁸⁴ Stacey Young. *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Alice Echols argues that radical feminism, the analysis that “women constituted a sex-class, that relations between women and men needed to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction,” was eclipsed by cultural feminism around 1975.⁸⁵ For Echols, cultural feminism is a strain of feminist thinking that aims “at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female.”⁸⁶ While I appreciate Echols’s history enormously and use her methodology of close attention to archival print sources supplemented by oral histories as a way to tease out political and ideological formations, I disagree with her overall assessments of the trajectory of the WLM and feminist history. Cultural feminism did not eclipse radical feminism. Cultural feminism was politically engaged and a new, vibrant expression of the philosophy and politics of radical feminism, using culture as the means of social and political transformation. Of course, it is easier to draw different conclusions now, with an additional twenty-five years of hindsight and new scholarship that offers countervailing ways to think about cultural feminism and radical feminism, including work by King, Taylor and Rupp, and Rensenbrink.⁸⁷

The Redstockings’ position on cultural feminism in relationship to radical feminism shapes Echols’s definition of cultural feminism in *Daring to Be Bad*. In fact,

⁸⁵ Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-6.

⁸⁶ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 6.

⁸⁷ Katie King addresses these issues in *Theory in Its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women’s Movements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); as do Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp in “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” *Signs* 19.1 (1993): 32-61, and Greta Rensenbrink in her dissertation, *Reshaping Body Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Cultural Politics of the Body, 1968–1983* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

the analysis of the Redstockings, in general, and Brooke Williams, in particular, is so central to Echols's historical narrations and conclusions that I closely trace original sources that discuss cultural feminism during the 1970s and early 1980s. The use of the term cultural feminism during the 1970s and early 1980s is almost exclusive to Brooke Williams. Moreover, cultural feminism as a feminist formation is not a term used by feminist activists and cultural producers during the 1970s; rather, cultural feminism is a term used to describe a group of feminist activists by other activists who are ideologically opposed to their work. Cultural feminism during the 1970s, rather than being a term used by the creators of feminist culture themselves, is a term used exclusively to identify and deride feminists—and feminist activities—who are perceived as a threat to radical feminists by radical feminists themselves.

In 1975, the Redstockings' self-published book, *Feminist Revolution*, circulated widely in feminist networks.⁸⁸ In *Feminist Revolution*, an article by Brooke, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," is a withering analysis and attack on cultural feminism as "an attempt to transform feminism from a political movement into a lifestyle movement."⁸⁹ For Brooke, cultural feminism is "the belief that women will be freed via an alternate women's culture."⁹⁰ Brooke argues that cultural feminism "avoids the whole issue of power, bases its thought on moralism, psychology, sex roles, and culture and is fatalistic

⁸⁸ *Feminist Revolution* was initially self-published by the Redstockings in 1975; an expanded edition was published by Random House in 1978. A large controversy surrounded the 1978 publication, resulting in the excision of several articles for legal reasons. My citations are from the 1978 Random House edition, but all of the material I cite is also in the 1975 edition.

⁸⁹ *Feminist Revolution*, 83.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 79.

in its political views.”⁹¹ For her, cultural feminism is “inimical to revolutionary change” because “real revolution” is about “power” and “real conditions.”⁹² The solution is “polarization” between radical feminism and cultural feminism to relegate cultural feminism “to the sidelines of the movement.”⁹³ Brooke argues, presumably on behalf of her comrades in Redstockings, for a way to strengthen radical feminism, a feminist formation that they had worked to establish and promulgate, and that she and other members of the Redstockings perceived, accurately, as weakening in the feminist field. Cultural feminism emerges in Brooke’s analysis as a feminist practice in opposition to the more righteous, radical, and revolutionary radical feminism that the Redstockings espouse. I am sympathetic to the Redstockings’s polemic against cultural feminism, as I imagine Echols was as a young scholar. Brooke’s article, as well as *Feminist Revolution* as a whole, is less an attack on cultural feminism than it is a strategy to shore up support for their radical feminist visions and practices. The radical feminist visions of the Redstockings, particularly when read within the polemic of *Feminist Revolution*, are compelling for people who care about feminism as an ideology that can offer radical social, political, and economic transformation. At the same time, cultural feminism also is compelling, both for feminists during the 1970s and 1980s and now in historical appraisals of the WLM.

Since Echols relies not only on what Brooke says but also on how Brooke positions radical feminism and cultural feminism, “The Retreat to Cultural Feminism”

⁹¹ Ibid, 83.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

emerges in the history of the WLM as a crucial document. I analyze it closely in conjunction with a later piece by Brooke expressing similar ideas. Brooke, who also published using her full name, Brooke Williams,⁹⁴ was outspoken about how cultural feminism was diminishing radical feminism not only in *Feminist Revolution* but also on the pages of *off our backs* and in her later article in *Heresies*. Although Brooke's purpose is to diminish the significance of cultural feminism, by reading against the grain of her text I identify emergent values of cultural feminism as well as different tendencies within cultural feminism. Three ideas within Brooke's article are significant to my understanding of cultural feminism. First, Brooke writes that "cultural feminism has always emphasized process rather than content." For her, this results in making "the women's movement into a goal-less movement." In fact, debates about process are not exclusive to cultural feminism. Consciousness-raising (CR) groups emphasized process as a central focus of their work, and CR is not associated with any particular feminist formation. Still, the adherence of concerns about process to cultural feminism by Brooke is valid; process is a theme that emerges in narratives of lesbian-feminist presses and other lesbian print culture organizations.

Second, Brooke recognizes that "the rise of lesbianism as an issue within the women's movement coincided with the rise of cultural feminism." She continues, "The two have had a mutual impact on each other's development, and have blended to some extent."⁹⁵ The adherence of lesbianism and cultural feminism is on one hand lazy thinking on Brooke's part. There are examples of cultural feminist work that are not

⁹⁴ Since the two articles that I cite primarily only have the authorial attribution "Brooke," I refer to her using only that name in subsequent references.

⁹⁵ *Feminist Revolution*, 80.

exclusively or even primarily lesbian. The linkage of any form of feminism with lesbianism, as a way to deride its meaning and legitimacy, was, and continues to be, lesbian baiting. At the same time, the linkage between the two has merit. Many of the cultural institutions that Brooke cites and critiques were founded and operated by lesbians; throughout the 1970s and 1980s, lesbians are in central roles of leadership, creation, and distribution of feminist cultural work. Thus, as Brooke suggests, lesbian-feminism and cultural feminism are in some ways co-constitutive. In this 1975 article, Brooke identifies three tendencies within cultural feminism: lesbian separatism, matriarchal practices, and individualized and therapy-oriented feminist practices. Lesbian-feminism is a strand of feminism that weaves through all of these tendencies of cultural feminism. In these histories of lesbian-feminist publishers, the focus is on how lesbian separatism and cultural feminism intertwine at different moments, though evidence of all three tendencies of cultural feminism exist in this history of feminist print culture, and I gesture in those directions where appropriate.⁹⁶

Third, Brooke critiques feminist businesses. She identifies feminist businesses as similar to other locations of cultural feminism, such as women's centers, women's communes, and women's art centers. All of these formations are important to lesbian-feminist publishers in developing distribution networks and communities of readers. Brooke recognizes that feminist businesses "can provide useful services and support people financially" even as "they cannot be seen as a solution to women's oppression."

⁹⁶ Jo Freeman's history of the WLM in *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1979) asserts that feminist activity focused on "women's culture" arises out of the conflict between heterosexual and lesbian women in the WLM (567). Freeman does not use the term, cultural feminism, but describes women's culture. Freeman's investments are different than Brooke's.

This I think exposes a strategic fault line between radical feminists and cultural feminists, a fault line that, I argue, must be situated within the broader political field of the United States.

Radical feminists envisioned solutions to the conditions of sexism in women's lives; businesses and cultural formations did not offer solutions directly, they offered alternatives. Books, music, concerts, and other feminist gatherings were alternatives to ameliorate temporarily the sexist and patriarchal conditions in the world. Perhaps the alternatives would result in solutions, but cultural feminists were more focused on alternatives that allowed them to express their visions and values in the current environment of what was possible. In the United States, the years between 1968 and 1975, the focus of Echols' history, inspire both visions of broad cultural and political transformation and beliefs in a realistic probability of revolution or at least foundational transformation. The convergence of multiple social justice movements in the United States and a powerful anti-war movement created an optimistic atmosphere in which radical feminists could believe that sexism was a problem that could be solved. During the final years of the 1970s, however, the exuberance of the belief in revolutionary change lessens. This is not because of an inadequacy in the thinking and theory of feminists but rather because of changes in the broader field of United States politics and the United States economy. A deep economic recession, the energy crisis, the failure of the Vietnam War, all temper the environment. Solutions become less palpable; alternatives to address problems like sexism and homophobia, which seemed more intractable, became more realistic. The election of Ronald Reagan in November 1980 and the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment to gain ratification in June 1982 changes what

radical feminists imagine as possible and, as a result, changes their political practices. Brooke's connection between feminist businesses and cultural feminism in 1975 is prescient. The next dozen years narrows what seemed possible and achievable for radical feminists in the political and economic fields. The narrowing field for political gains focused feminist energy on building alternatives, including extraordinary growth in feminist publishing and bookstores. Rather than envisioning revolutionary strategies to undo sexism in the political and economic field as radical feminists did, cultural feminists negotiated the realities of limited political progress and globalizing capitalism by creating lesbian-feminist economies.

In 1980, in *Heresies 9*, Brooke publishes a second article elaborating on her first one. This article is titled, "The Chador of Women's Liberation: Cultural Feminism and the Movement Press."⁹⁷ In this article, Brooke expands on her thesis about the hegemonic take-over of radical feminism by cultural feminism, particularly in the feminist press. She articulates three other tendencies within cultural feminism, "spirituality and goddess-worshipping," which maps closely to the matriarchal practices she identified earlier, "disruptive 'dyketactics'," and "academic cultural feminism," which she describes as "the

⁹⁷ Brooke, "The Chador of Women's Liberation: Cultural Feminism and the Movement Press," *Heresies 9*, 1980, 70-74. The formulation of cultural feminism as a chador is jarring to me as a contemporary reader distressed by the rise in Islamophobia and attacks on Muslim people in the United States and Europe over the past decades. Moreover, Brooke's usage of it is problematic. She constructs an elaborate analogy between women wearing the chador in Iran "as a symbol of resistance to the oppressive regime of the Shah" and Western feminists at a science conference embracing "passion and subjectivity." Ultimately, Brooke wants her readers to act in solidarity with women in Iran who "held mass demonstrations demanding equal rights and shouting, 'No to the veil!'" While Brooke's work is polemical, this analogy doesn't seem apt, particularly for contemporary readers, but even for readers in 1980, it must have been jarring.

main activity. . . seems to be reading novels by women.”⁹⁸ All of these tendencies outlined by Brooke seem congruent to me with practices of cultural feminism in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, though I attach a different valence to them. All are worthy of more elaboration and investigation.

Somewhat ironically, during the 1980s, the academic cultural feminism that Brooke identifies, which included disciplinary work in literature, history, anthropology, psychology and other areas as well as the growing interdisciplinary field of women’s studies, pays minimal attention to the formation of cultural feminism. For instance, Jaggard and Rothenberg’s textbook, *Feminist Frameworks*, does not invoke cultural feminism as a feminist framework.⁹⁹ One of my interests in examining these lesbian-feminist publishing is to redefine and reposition cultural feminism in the history of the WLM. The three elements identified by Brooke—attention to process, engagement with business formations as a feminist intervention, and the blending of lesbianism separatism with cultural feminism—form one rubric for defining cultural feminism. Later feminist scholars offer other frameworks.

In 1981, Gayle Kimball defines cultural feminism as a third wave of feminism that emerged in the 1970s, when “women created their own institutions for publishing, bookselling, teaching women’s studies, music production, filmmaking, displaying and teach art, worship, theatre, counseling, rape crisis intervention, refuges for battered

⁹⁸ Brooke, *Heresies* 9, 70.

⁹⁹ Alison M. Jaggard and Paula S Rothenberg. *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978. Neither the first edition in 1978 nor the revised edition in 1984 describe cultural feminism. There was a third edition in 1993.

women, health care, banking, travel, and farming.”¹⁰⁰ This definition of cultural feminism brings together a wide array of feminist activity during the 1970s, though Kimball in her definition foregrounds publishing and bookselling. Kimball’s expansive view of cultural feminism is characterized by six themes: (1) anger about women’s powerlessness and a search for alternatives to patriarchal and hierarchal power; (2) search for alternative family structures, (3) respectful description of women’s actual lives and experiences; (4) reclamation of sensuality, health care, control over contraception and birthing, and free choice in sexual preference; (5) emphasis on knowledge lodged in the unconscious; (6) concern for wholeness and overcoming duality.¹⁰¹ These themes are present in much of the content of what lesbian-feminist publishers publish during the 1970s; they echo both the characteristics of cultural feminism and the three strands of cultural feminism identified by Brooke. At the same time, this expansive definition of cultural feminism could stand in for all of feminism during the 1980s; thus while Kimball’s work is important in considering cultural feminism, I am interested in identifying a slightly narrower definition.

Allison Jaggar captures the interconnections between radical feminism and cultural feminism in her 1983 book *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. She notes that radical feminism, populated by younger feminists who “no longer have previous political experience in left organizations” are “less influenced by Marxist categories” and “no longer address themselves to a left audience.” She sees these feminists as “part of a grass-roots movement, a flourishing women’s culture concerned with providing feminist

¹⁰⁰ Kimball, *Women’s Culture: The Women’s Renaissance of the Seventies* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

alternatives in literature, music, spirituality, health services, sexuality, even in employment and technology.” Jaggar identifies them as radical feminists, but notes they “might now prefer to call themselves cultural feminists or lesbianfeminists.” For Jaggar, the variety of radical feminist ideas and practices is “an indication of the originality and vitality of the movement.”¹⁰² Jaggar adeptly negotiates a variety of names for feminist practices in her description of radical feminism and cultural feminism.¹⁰³ Kathy Rudy, in her 2001 essay reflects on her experiences during the 1980s in Durham, North Carolina, working for Ladyslipper, a lesbian-feminist music distribution company. Rudy expresses dissatisfaction with the terms radical feminist, cultural feminist, lesbian separatist; she eventually uses the term radical feminist to describe her life and political practice. This slippage between and among the terms, which Echols herself acknowledges even as she works to separate and codify the formations, indicates the ways that a variety of feminist formations overlapped during the 1970s and 1980s. As they emerged, the terms and their meanings were inconsistent.

By the late 1980s, definitions of cultural feminism are mediated by debates about essentialism and social constructionism. Linda Alcoff’s definition of cultural feminism is representative of this dynamic. Alcoff writes in 1988 that cultural feminism is “the ideology of a female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in

¹⁰² Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1983), 84.

¹⁰³ While I am sympathetic with Sandoval’s critique of Jaggar, I also appreciate Jaggar’s description of radical feminism and how it demonstrates the fluidity between and among feminist formations.

an effort to re-validate undervalued female attributes.”¹⁰⁴ She aligns Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich as two key contributors to the elaboration of this strand of feminism. Recent scholarship recapitulates this definition, including Eileen Hayes’ work on women’s music festivals. Hayes writes that the ideas of cultural feminism are rooted in “essentialist notions about gender, sexuality, politics, and in this case, music.”¹⁰⁵ While essentialism is an element of cultural feminism during the 1980s, cultural feminism as a formation emerged prior to the 1980s and to the distillation of debates about essentialism and social constructionism in feminist activist formations. Current scholarship lacks a meaningful definition of cultural feminism that both describes the variety of activities during the 1970s and 1980s and recognizes the intervention of post-structuralism in debates about essentialism and social constructionism. An important exception is Bettina Aptheker’s 2005 essay on cultural feminism in Wilma Mankiller’s *The Reader’s Companion to U.S. Women’s History*. Aptheker frames cultural feminism as “the multiracial, multicultural movement of women’s expressive art that arose with and deeply influenced the women’s movement begun in the 1970s.”¹⁰⁶ Aptheker thoughtfully positions lesbianism and lesbian separatism as part of a broader feminist cultural renaissance. Throughout this book, I try to follow Aptheker’s lead and tease out definitions for cultural feminism from the lesbian-feminist work I examine. For now, let me define cultural feminism as a set of feminist practices that takes culture as the raw

¹⁰⁴ Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988), 408.

¹⁰⁵ Eileen M. Hayes, *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women’s Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 53.

¹⁰⁶ Bettina Aptheker, “Cultural Feminism,” in *The Reader’s Companion to U.S. Women’s History*, Wilma Mankiller, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 70.

material for transformation through feminist analysis and activism. This basic definition provides narrower parameters than Brooke or Kimball suggest: it extricates cultural feminism from debates about essentialism; and it reclaims cultural feminism as an important strand of feminism during the WLM.

While I have dwelled on cultural feminism as a construct for thinking about these histories of lesbian-feminist presses, I want to iterate that I don't see the work of the women in the presses as exclusively informed by any single feminist ideology. Rather, in thinking about the feminisms enacted by lesbian-feminist publishers, I am inspired by the work of Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Sandoval articulates an "oppositional ideology" that "apprehends an effective oppositional consciousness igniting in dialectical engagement between varying ideological formations."¹⁰⁷ Challenging hegemonic models of feminism, Sandoval employs a taxonomy that accounts for the fluidity of thought and action based on different formations and different exigencies for feminists. Sandoval articulates four forms of oppositional consciousness that activists may use: (1) equal rights, (2) revolutionary, (3) supremacist, and (4) separatist. Sandoval argues that "the differential mode of social movement and consciousness depends on the practitioner's ability to read the current situation of power and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations."¹⁰⁸ Although Sandoval's work is focused primarily on articulating strategic standpoints for women of color, her framework is useful for thinking about the work and activism of lesbians, some of whom are women of color, some of whom are white, in publishing.

¹⁰⁷ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 44.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

Sandoval's framework and, more importantly, her method of thinking about different ideologies as tactics, as opposed to entrenched and immutable positions, help me to examine the types of feminism animated in lesbian-feminist publishing. To think about feminist theories and ideologies in the practices of lesbian-feminist publishers, I telescope between and among Sandoval's forms of oppositional consciousness and "hegemonic taxonomies" as a strategy to animate overlapping and emerging theories and practices of women working at this time. While one of my investments is in recuperating cultural feminism as a term that expresses important elements of lesbian-feminist publishing activities, I am not interested in inscribing cultural feminism into taxonomic system for thinking about theoretical and strategic positions of activists in the WLM. Ultimately, by examining different types of feminism in publishing, I rethink narratives of the WLM and the ideologies that informed WLM activists.

Women's Press Collective

Poet Judy Grahn had large ambitions; she also wanted big things—large printing presses, a web press, and a freighter. In conversation with Carol Seajay, the publisher of the *Feminist Bookstore News*, Grahn recalled: "I wished that I had the time and energy to get \$1,000 from 1,000 women and buy a freighter because I wanted to know what we could do if we owned a freighter." Seajay, astounded, asked, "A sea freighter?" Grahn responded affirmatively. Seajay continued, "And set out to sea with. . . ?" Grahn replied, "With cargo. What would we carry and to whom would we sell it, I wondered."¹⁰⁹

In objects not conventionally gendered female, Grahn imagined possibilities of what women might create. Although the freighter never materialized, in the years

¹⁰⁹ "Some Beginnings: An Interview with Judy Grahn (Part Two)," *Feminist Bookstore News*, Summer Supplement (August 1990), 58.

between 1969 and 1977, the Women's Press Collective (WPC) accomplished many things with a small budget and without ever owning a web press.¹¹⁰ Although I open with Grahn and her penchant for large things, the WPC, founded in 1969, is, at its heart, an anarchist collective. In some ways, to emphasize Grahn is to betray the spirit and philosophy of the group.

The original collective of the WPC included Grahn and her lover Wendy Cadden, a graphic artist. Together, they began "to reprint articles about lesbianism" for lesbians to read.¹¹¹ "There was so little material available and people were so hungry for it." The WPC soon learned, "The more we put out this stuff, the more people wanted."¹¹² As they circulated mimeographed articles and poems, they "got the idea of doing a collection of women's poetry and drawings."¹¹³ This idea became the anthology, *Woman to Woman*, the first printed book of the WPC. The first edition of 1,000 copies was printed on a mimeograph machine and bound with a stapler. The pages were lavender and the cover was red. The anthology circulated through lesbian networks as members of the WPC sold it to the people they knew.

Glide Church, a local social justice congregation in San Francisco, California, saw a copy of *Woman to Woman* and approached the Women's Press Collective about

¹¹⁰ A web press would have allowed the WPC to produce mass-market paperback books. Grahn discussed the web press plans with Carol Seajay in *Feminist Bookstore News* 13, no. 3 (September/October 1990), 27.

¹¹¹ "Women's Press," Undated article from lecture by Judy Grahn at Lesbian Herstory Archives, June L. Mazer Archive.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

publishing it with national distribution.¹¹⁴ The women of WPC were intrigued by the idea but believed that “women should hold onto whatever they were doing.” Moreover, they discovered that Glide “wanted to take it over and soften it,” including editing out parts from Valerie Solanas’s *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*.¹¹⁵ For the WPC, the discussion with Glide about publishing was productive. Glide made a \$500 grant to the WPC, enabling them to purchase their first press.¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, this press was “a horrible mistake, an ancient German press you couldn’t get parts for in the U.S.” One repairman came out to look at it, but would only fix it “if one of the women in our collective would sleep with him.”¹¹⁷ The collective members kicked him out and dedicated themselves to learning how to fix and run the press themselves. That particular press never worked properly; eventually it was replaced by a Multilith 1250.

The Multilith, “just a piece of office machinery for in-house printing, running off memos,” put the WPC into business. The WPC published its second book in 1971: Judy Grahn’s poetry collection *Edward the Dyke*. Grahn recalled that she had been working at jobs to earn money and she didn’t “want to continue taking those jobs so I decided to

¹¹⁴ Ruth Gottstein with Glide Church operated Volcano Press, another early feminist press. Volcano Press published the first edition of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon’s *Lesbian/Woman* in 1972.

¹¹⁵ Echols identifies Solanas’s *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* as the “earliest articulation” of the view of gender as “an absolute rather than a relative category” in her article “Cultural Feminism: Feminist Capitalism and the Anti-Pornography Movement” (*Social Text* 7 (Spring/Summer 1983), 35). Recent scholarship by Breanne Fahs and Greta Rensenbrink reconsiders Solanas as a feminist.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

give myself the job of printing *Edward the Dyke* and selling it.” She printed 2,000 copies. Distributing the book was another challenge; Grahn reached out to people to sell copies for her and found few people to sell it, “hand to hand. One book store took it, China Books, which was owned by a gay man. The window display was all books imported from China plus *Edward the Dyke*.”¹¹⁸ The following year, in 1972, the WPC published three poetry books: *Eating Artichokes* by Willyce Kim, *Child of Myself* by Pat Parker (reissued with graphic images after the original publication by alta’s Shameless Hussy Press)¹¹⁹ and Judy Grahn’s *Elephant Poem Coloring Book*. All are illustrated with striking graphic art work, both photographs and line drawings, by Wendy Cadden, Brenda Crider, and other women.

In 1973, the WPC produced a brochure that explained the origin and intentions of the WPC.¹²⁰ In the very first sentence, the WPC wrote, “We are feminists with widely different life-experiences,” an assertion of the multi-racial and multi-class composition of the WPC. In an interview with Seajay, Judy Grahn affirms that a core value in growing the WPC for her and Cadden was multiculturalism. “Both Wendy and I really believe in multi-cultural society—so we made sure that the press was multi-cultural and expanded

¹¹⁸ Carol Seajay, “Some Beginnings: An Interview with Judy Grahn,” *Feminist Bookstore News (FBN)* 13, no. 1, (May/June 1990): 24.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. In her discussion with Seajay, Grahn recognizes that persuading Parker to come to WPC violated a tenet of publishing. She says, “I didn’t know how you act as a publisher, and that you don’t steal people’s authors. So that was unethical of me, and alta graciously forgave me for doing that years later.” *FBN* 13, no. 1, 24.

¹²⁰ WPC 1973 brochure/flyer, Mazer Archives, Drawer #3. I analyze this document closely and note that the production of the document was most likely a collective effort to write, which often involves painstaking attention to each word and its meaning; it is an important artifact for thinking about the meaning and intentions of the WPC women.

our membership strategically.”¹²¹ She says that the group was “solidly” multi-racial by 1974 and included, in addition to African American lesbian Pat Parker, “Anita Onyang, who is Filipino American and Willyce Kim who is Korean American and Martha Shelly who is Jewish American and Wendy [Cadden], who is also [Jewish American].”¹²² In addition to racial-ethnic diversity, class diversity was important. Grahn continues, “two or three white working class lesbians were involved including Anne Leonard, Sharon Isabell, Paula Wallace and myself, working class white WASP people and then Joanne Garrett, who is Black, and there were young middle class white women, Karen Garrison and Jane Lawhon, fresh out of college and very supportive. They had a lot of energy and they slipped us money and they got training for printing and worked with us three years.”¹²³ This conscious formation of the WPC as a multi-racial, multi-class group demonstrates an early commitment within the WLM to multiculturalism.

The statement from the WPC about their work continues, “For three years we have been learning to run a print shop, as well as to collect materials to publish. We are beginning now to build a broader distribution network for feminist books, with prices most women can afford.” Here the WPC articulates the labor that they are doing— learning how to run a print shop and finding materials to publish as well as building distribution networks. Martha Shelley describes her role in the WPC; she “folded books together, sold books, went around and did poetry readings, did a lot of collating.” She captures the mundane tasks of publishing, as well as the ways in which limited resources

¹²¹ Carol Seajay, “Some Beginnings,” *FBN* 13, no. 1, (May/June 1990): 25.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

shaped their labor. “A lot of stuff we did by hand that would have been done [by machine] if we’d had more machinery and more of a budget.”¹²⁴ The emphasis on labor in the WPC statement, as well as Shelley’s later reflections on the relationship between labor and capital, demonstrate a commitment to a form of materialist feminist analysis.

The focus of the collective on producing affordable books is also significant. One strategy that the WPC used to keep their books affordable was to “buy paper at the cheapest place in town, the place where no one else will go because it comes to you in odd lots with holes in the middle.” Purchasing paper this way influenced the design of the books produced by the WPC; “they have blue this month, so that’s the cover stock,” though when it came time to reprint, it was “difficult” because when they would return “green is on sale.”¹²⁵ The contingencies of learning printing, such as experimenting with the machinery—the WPC had their own equipment and borrowed time on other equipment throughout the San Francisco Bay area—and learning to estimate and purchase necessary supplies, shaped both the books and the experiences of the women working as members of the WPC. Affordability and accessibility were an important values for the WPC, informed by a feminist sense of economic justice, but these values conflicted with the economic realities of publishing. Books from the WPC were underpriced in relationship not only to the broader book publishing market but also to other feminist publishers. Actual costs of publishing—material and labor in all phases,

¹²⁴ Martha Shelley, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, October 12, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 52.

¹²⁵ “Women’s Press,” Undated article from lecture by Judy Grahn at Lesbian Herstory Archives, June L. Mazer Archive

creation, production, marketing, and distribution—are not calculated accurately in the price of books from the WPC.

While access and affordability are crucial issues for the WPC and other feminist publishers, the price of books from the WPC demonstrates a lack of business acumen. In addition to low book prices, the WPC wanted publishing to provide economic support to collective members. The 1973 brochure states, “Although we still barely meet our expenses, we are working towards supporting some of our group through the press.” The WPC did not see their work as primarily volunteer or donated time and energy; rather they wanted to build an operation that would support some of the members. Later in the life of the WPC, the collective instituted a system to pay collective members. “At the end of the month, we add up our income from sales, and deduct rent, overhead on the shop, payments to writers and artists, and a certain percentage for reprints.” From this description, the WPC understood the basic economics of publishing, particularly reserving money for reprints. After paying the direct cost of publishing, the WPC divided “the rest among ourselves. Each woman keeps track of how many days she worked that month, and we each get paid the same rate per day.”¹²⁶ The WPC employed an egalitarian principle for payment: each person was paid the same for a day’s work. Unfortunately, the money was never enough to actually support any of the members of the WPC. Willyce Kim eventually left the WPC because she “took a job.” She recalls “I needed money. All that time I’d been working for the Press Collective, and I needed more money, so I left them to get a forty-hour-a-week job. It was hard. Sometimes I’d go back to the press after I got off the job, and I found out I was too tired after [work] to be really

¹²⁶ “Women’s Press,” Undated article from lecture by Judy Grahn at Lesbian Herstory Archives, June L. Mazer Archive.

committed.”¹²⁷ Although the WPC compensated artists and writers with royalty payments and paid members of the collective for their labor in producing books, the WPC never became a sustained source of economic support for any of the members.

The linkages among theory and materiality are a crucial dimension of feminist theory at the time. Theory (visions and analyses) informs the material production of books and printed materials. The final paragraph of the 1973 brochure asserts that the WPC is “a resource of the women’s movement” with “two functions.” First, “It is a school where we can learn skills and new ways to work together.” The feminist value of process, attention to how things are done, connects with the physical labor of skill-building in printing. The other function of the press was as “a tool for spreading new visions of ourselves and analyses that are useful to us.” In this function of the press, the theoretical and analytical aspects of feminism unite with process and the materiality of publishing. The WPC acknowledges their process of needing to find “financial backing . . . for each individual project” and affirming that they “welcome manuscripts and all forms of feedback.” The transparency of their process as a collective and a publisher is central to this statement about their work.

The 1973 brochure also promoted the next three books planned for publishing by the WPC: *Poetry and Drawings* by Brenda Crider, Pat Parker’s *Pit Stop*, and *Lesbians Speak Out II*. In reflecting on the collective, Grahn says that the anthology *Lesbians Speak Out* “exemplifies our idea of what a collective is, that it’s anarchistic; and we stress people making their own decisions whenever possible trying to be cooperative and

¹²⁷ Kate Brandt, *Happy Endings: Lesbian Writers Talk About Their Lives and Work* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1993), 218.

autonomous at the same time.”¹²⁸ From this document we learn that the WPC animated a variety of feminist formations from the early 1970s without specifically employing any descriptive adjectives for their work or their thinking about feminism. They articulated principles congruent with a variety of feminist formations, including cultural feminism as well as socialist feminism.

The WPC focused on the political possibilities and political meanings of books. The first book published by the WPC, *Woman to Woman*, expressed the value that all women should have a voice; something was included in it from all who submitted work. This was an important statement about literary politics for the WPC when they published the anthology.¹²⁹ One idea that circulates about feminist and lesbian-feminist publishing is that in the exuberance of publishing, everything was published without editorial oversight or discrimination. For the WPC, however, there was an intensive editing process. Willyce Kim recalled, “When I handed in my manuscript to Judy and Wendy, it wasn’t like I handed it to them and they said, ‘Okay, we’ll publish the whole thing.’ They went through it; it was a weeding-out process of, ‘Well, this would [be] good with this theme; these poems, as a group, would be the basis of *Eating Artichokes*, these poems maybe something later on.’ There was a definite order to the way things got published there.”¹³⁰ Narratives about lesbian-feminist presses and especially assessments of the

¹²⁸ “Women’s Press,” Undated article from lecture by Judy Grahn at Lesbian Herstory Archives, June L. Mazer Archive.

¹²⁹ I explore this collection further in a subsequent chapter.

¹³⁰ Brandt, *Happy Endings*, 224.

quality of the work that the presses published often overlook the attention to editing by peers.¹³¹

The intensive attention to editing extended to the graphics in the books as well. The process of adding images to Pat Parker's book *Child of Myself* demonstrates the importance of physical proximity for the WPC. When Parker joined the WPC, she "moved into our [Grahm and Cadden's] house for a month and Wendy [Cadden] would gather pictures and put them on the wall." Parker with members of the WPC, "got together, two or three times a week, and talked about what pictures should go with what, and what color the cover should be, and the book grew out of that."¹³² The process of selecting artwork to accompany the poems was a collective process, intensified by a collective living arrangement. The selection process was a dynamic dialogue among Parker as poet, Cadden as artist, and the collective of the WPC.

The interconnections between art and feminist revolution were a primary concern for the WPC in all of the projects they published. Grahm reflected on the political significance of artwork for the WPC. "We had to think about why we are doing this, and that's the whole idea of useful art. It's not that we set up this wonderful alternative press and now every woman in the world can be printed, and every word that all of us write, and every picture we take."¹³³ Grahm, like Parker, undermines the idea of absolute egalitarianism in publishing in the feminist movement. Rather than accepting everything,

¹³¹ This elision occurs in exuberant descriptions of lesbian-feminist and feminist publishing. See for example Honor Moore's introduction to *Poems from the Women's Movement* (New York: Library of America, 2008).

¹³² "Women's Press," Undated article from lecture by Judy Grahm at Lesbian Herstory Archives, document from Diana Press Papers, June L. Mazer Archive, Drawer #3.

¹³³ Ibid.

Grahn was committed to a curatorial process grounded in the philosophy of art as useful to the readers of the books published. She continued, “Our art has to do with reinforcing the attitudes that we want women to have, giving us words and images to use as weapons to continue building our movement. What we’re doing isn’t a luxury, isn’t art for its own sake, isn’t a leisure class activity at all. It’s a tool and that’s the way we use it.”¹³⁴ Grahn positions art as a material component of the feminist movement. She rejects the positioning of art as something only for the leisure class and instead recasts it as an important revolutionary tool.

Art as a tool for a feminist revolution included not only language arts, but visual art as well. In describing the kinds of graphics that the WPC wanted to print, Grahn noted that “women are still depicting each other as limp, totally passive, objects to be seen and admired, with no sense of self at all.”¹³⁵ The WPC wanted instead “graphics that describe the kind of energy, muscle and spirit that our books are also describing.” Grahn contrasts two types of artwork, both created by women, and stakes her claim—and the claim of the WPC—on artwork that is vibrant as opposed to limpid. Moreover, she unites the visual and the literary; the desire of the WPC was for both the words and the images to capture “energy, muscle, and spirit.”¹³⁶ Grahn describes the guiding question of the WPC as “What stories do we need to hear, what pictures to see, about what women are doing in their lives?” The WPC wanted to get “this material together and making the best quality

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

books we can out of it.”¹³⁷ The linkages between language, visual arts, and feminist revolution that Grahn makes, as well as the political exigencies of all three, provide an example of cultural feminism as deeply political and engaged in transformations of cultural production, reproduction, and circulation.

The WPC published a total of twenty-four books and pamphlets, the bulk of them between 1970 and 1976. In August of 1977, the collective issued an open letter announcing that “[a]fter eight years of publishing and printing, The Oakland Women’s Press Collective is disbanding as an entity.” The Women’s Press Collective affirmed that “the people who took primary responsibility for it are continuing with the work and the ideas” and that “[w]omen’s publishing has more potential than ever.” The Women’s Press Collective believed that they had “a tremendous impact,” but that “the ‘collective’, hobby shop form is economically backward, excludes the full participation of workingclass women, and functions only for small numbers of books.” This statement reinforces the continued commitment of the WPC to multi-class engagement as primary to their political practice. Collective members believe that “It is vitally important to go on with more complex structures and in greater volume.” And they affirmed, “Our committment [sic] to radical women’s literature remains strong and we are determined to make this literature available to more people.” In 1977, the WPC characterizes the work that they have been publishing as “radical,” uniting the idea of radical feminism with cultural production. After the WPC disbanded in 1977, titles from the WPC, including books by Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, and Sharon Isabell, were available from Diana Press; a

¹³⁷ Ibid.

handful of titles were still available through Women In Distribution.¹³⁸ While this letter indicates that the WPC was shuttering its operation, Grahn and Cadden were in discussions with Coletta Reid and Casey Czarnik of Diana Press about merging the two operations. This merger was controversial within the WPC because of Reid's and Czarnik's involvement with the Feminist Economic Network (FEN), a project that was sharply criticized by WPC collective member Martha Shelley.¹³⁹

Throughout these narratives about lesbian-feminist press publishing, I explore why publishers stopped publishing. Often, as in the case of the WPC, the publisher operated with time, attention, and energy invested by one or two people - even when it operated collectively as the WPC did. When the people at the center of the operations became tired, worn out, or ready to turn their attention elsewhere, the press closed. The WPC disbanded for both economic and personal reasons. In the case of the WPC, the personal and the economic are intertwined. The WPC's statement on their disbanding articulates the economic limitations of their publishing model and envisions more complex structures in greater volume for feminist publishers; a vision that was realized by subsequent publishers. In addition, Grahn personally wanted more time to devote to her own writing. Evident in the end of the WPC is an imbrication of the personal and the political. Moreover, social and economic forces facilitate burn out for movement activists—and most publishers considered themselves movement activists. Martha Shelley, reflecting on the end of the WPC, describes both the personal commitments and

¹³⁸ Letter from the WPC, August 1977, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives, Drawer #3.

¹³⁹ A complete discussion of Diana Press and FEN follows in the next section.

sacrifices of Grahn and Cadden to the WPC and the economic and structural realities that brought about the eventual end of the WPC:

Judy and Wendy, I think, got burned out because for years they had been working and working and never making any money and constantly selling books and getting contributions but they never made any money. They were always living in poverty. And they were really burned out about it, and I don't think they quite understood – I know Judy didn't – that you can't do everything politically correct and expect the world to support you, and you're not going to get rich that way. It's not designed that way. The economic structure isn't designed that way. If you put in a huge amount of labor to craft each book, you know, lovingly and without high technology and then you sell your books cheap and you don't have an advertising budget, you're not going to make money.¹⁴⁰

Shelley articulates these economic, social, and political structures well in her reflections on the end of the WPC. Hard work, combined with perpetual poverty, have a grinding effect on people living in the United States, even when they have an activist vision for social change. Thinking about the publishing activities within lesbian print culture, it is important to recognize both the personal components of what causes people to start publishing and what causes them to stop—burn out, the end of key relationships, the need to focus on other remunerative or creative work—as well as the political, social, and economic components. All of these women knew the feminist adage, the personal is political. They elaborated the meanings of and connections between the personal and the political in their daily lives. In publishing, personal and political have a co-constitutive relationship; often, as is the case in the WPC, the decision to stop publishing is a dynamic combination of personal and political reasons.

The impact of the WPC is, as they describe it in their statement about disbanding, tremendous. During its eight years of operation, the WPC published more than two dozen

¹⁴⁰ Martha Shelley, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, October 12, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 53.

books, chapbooks, or pamphlets on a wide range of topics, including rape, hand gun usage, and electric shock treatment. WPC materials address a variety of political issues, including the Weather Underground, the case of Joann Little,¹⁴¹ and of course lesbian-feminism. These topics demonstrate the political engagements of the WPC in issues that can be labeled retrospectively as “radical” feminist. In addition to these very political materials, the WPC also published poetry; in addition to Grahn’s and Parker’s books, the WPC published books of poems by Donna Shipley, Willyce Kim, and Zelima. The WPC also published *Witch Dream: Matriarchal Comix* by Max Xaria.¹⁴² *Witch Dream* is two graphic short stories; the first recounts a dream sequence of the protagonist, Casey, who while in the hospital dreams of time with the “witches of the sun” in a matriarchal community. The imagined matriarchal past is counterpointed with a critique about medical institutions and their poor treatment of women. The second graphic short story is titled “The Rise of the Amazing Amazons. . . the women who bow to no man.” *Witch Dream* expresses the matriarchal tendency of cultural feminism, invested in remembering and envisioning a history prior to patriarchy. Thus, the content of the books from the WPC reflects a range of feminist theories and investments; the production and circulation of the books, however, is rooted in a practice that aligns with cultural feminism, even as it expresses a variety of other political investments.

¹⁴¹ In 1974, Joann Little killed a prison guard who tried to attack her sexually. The case drew national attention in feminist communities and many women worked in solidarity with Joann Little’s defense team. The pamphlet published by the WPC was a first hand account of the situation in North Carolina and the case against Little. Proceeds from the pamphlet benefited the Joann Little Defense Fund. The full pamphlet is available at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org.

¹⁴² Max Xaria is now known Max Dashu and is a feminist historian.

Materials published by the WPC circulated widely. Joan and Chesman report that in 1977, they had “distributed over 60,000 copies of their books with eighteen titles in print.” Four of these titles were by Judy Grahn, including *Edward the Dyke*, *Elephant Poem Coloring Book*, *A Woman Is Talking to Death*, and *The Common Woman*. In 1977, Judy Grahn’s first book, *Edward the Dyke*, had “sold over 6,000 copies.”¹⁴³ “The Common Woman Poems,” a series of seven “americanized sonnets”¹⁴⁴ as Grahn describes them, were “quoted and passed from person to person so thoroughly they became an anonymous talisman for the women’s movement as a whole.”¹⁴⁵ During the 1970s, the poems or lines from the poems were reprinted by women’s bookstores, in feminist journals, and on t-shirt. The poems continued to spread through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s; lines from “The Common Woman” Poems showed up as graffiti around the world, in the work of artists and musicians, including Ani DiFranco, and adapted as songs by jazz groups, women’s choruses, and others. The dispersion of Grahn’s “The Common Woman” poems demonstrates how widely feminism circulated and how it was embraced in multiple, disparate locations. Grahn describes her poetic voice as “forged in communities of lesbian feminists, activist feminists, and disenfranchised gay men.”¹⁴⁶ Her self-assessment of her political formation includes a variety of feminist and activist locations, demonstrating the shifting alliances and mutability of labels for political and cultural practices. For eight years, her work was

¹⁴³ Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 180.

¹⁴⁴ Grahn, *love belongs to those who do the feeling*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Grahn, *love belongs to those who do the feeling*, 55.

¹⁴⁶ Grahn, *love belongs to those who do the feeling*, 17.

developed and nurtured in conjunction with her work at the WPC. The lasting impact of both—the WPC and Judy Grahn—is a rich heritage of lesbian-feminist poetry and a testament to what can be accomplished with vision and ambition through publishing.

While I see Grahn’s work as one of the important contributions of the WPC, I want to reemphasize that Grahn and her poetry are not the full story. The full story is that from 1969 until 1977, a small group of women with a set of political ideals, rooted in feminism influenced but not bound by anarchism and socialism, published books, chapbooks, anthologies, pamphlets. They published what was important and compelling to them and to the women around them. Initially, they distributed what they published largely by hand, person to person; they also helped to grow distribution networks through readings, travel, and alliances with women’s bookstores, women’s spaces, and eventually women distributors. Within the books, bound by hand with staples, string, or glue, the WPC captured dreams, images, desires and ideas about feminism and lesbianism. They gave them to the world as a gift that would last, as long as libraries held them, new publishers reissued them, or computers rendered them. That is the story of the Women’s Press Collective.

Diana Press

Diana Press began in a building at 12 W. 25th St. in Baltimore, Maryland, as a “small instant print shop with one small press and an instant platemaker.”¹⁴⁷ Initially founded in January 1972 by a small group of volunteers, including Casey Czarnik, who studied printing and commercial art in New York City and then worked in a Baltimore

¹⁴⁷ “History of Diana Press – 1976,” undated document, Mazer Archives, File Drawer 1. The Mazer Archives has an extensive collection of materials from Diana Press stored in four file cabinets with multiple folders, many unlabeled. I reference individual documents found there by name and by file drawer number.

printing shop, by July 1972, Diana Press incorporated as a business. Casey Czarnik and Coletta Reid were the owners and operators as well as intimate partners. Reid and Czarnik wanted to run a women's print shop to "train women in the printing industry," with an emphasis on training other working-class women like themselves, and to provide printing services for the women's community.¹⁴⁸

In the fall of 1972, Rita Mae Brown was not known yet as the chanteuse she would become—writing the songs of lesbians in novels and poems. Yet, her charisma as an activist and feminist must have been unmistakable. In later reports of her readings and speeches in *Lesbian Tide*, writers describe her as "appealing and vibrant"¹⁴⁹ and as someone who carried herself with "ease and wit."¹⁵⁰ I imagine her as energetic, funny, direct, and irresistibly sexy, personal characteristics that would only be amplified by her future success. Brown was already a poet in 1972; her first book of poetry, *The Hand That Cradles the Rock*, was published in a hardback edition issued by New York University Press, with modest sales of about 650 copies in two years.¹⁵¹ Brown was known best in lesbian and feminist communities as one of the organizers of the Lavender Menace protest of NOW, as the co-author of the Radicalesbians's statement "Woman-Identified Woman," and as a member of The Furies. Even though lesbian feminist

¹⁴⁸ "Coletta Reid deposition," August 26, 1979, Mazer Archives, File Drawer 4.

¹⁴⁹ Ellen Loughlin, "An Army of Lovers," *Lesbian Tide*, April 1973, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Aleida Rodriguez and Claire Krulikowski, "Portrait of Woman as Artist," *Lesbian Tide*, June 1974, 6.

¹⁵¹ June Arnold, "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics," *Quest* III, no. 1 (Summer 1976), 19.

communities questioned hierarchies and challenged institutional credentials, Brown had impeccable *bona fides* in the movement.

In the fall of 1972, Brown approached Reid, also a former member of The Furies and one of the founders of the feminist newspaper *off our backs*, and Czarnik about publishing her second book of poetry, *Songs for a Handsome Woman*. Prior to Brown's proposition, Reid and Czarnik had seen their business primarily as commercial printing. Early negotiations for the book reflect their mindset as commercial printers as opposed to book publishers. Reid and Czarnik agreed to print the book without charge for their time and expertise; Brown gave Diana Press \$300 to purchase the paper for the first printing. The three agreed that when the first printing of 2,000 copies of the book sold, Diana Press would repay Brown her \$300 and reimburse the press for printing expenses. They then would split the profits, if any, among Diana Press, Brown, and the illustrator, Ginger Legato.¹⁵² This model of compensating authors, not with royalties for each copy of the book sold, as is the convention in commercial publishing, but with a split of net profits from the sale of each edition of the book, became the economic model for Diana Press for all of its books.

Songs to a Handsome Woman was finished in December 1972; the official book release was in early 1973.¹⁵³ The publication of Brown's *Songs to a Handsome Woman* launched Diana Press as a publisher. In later accounts of Diana Press, Reid and Czarnik emphasize the primacy of commercial publishing. In fact, commercial printing paid the

¹⁵² Statement of expenses for *Songs for a Handsome Woman*, Mazer Archives, File Drawer 1.

¹⁵³ Reid deposition, Mazer Archives.

bills and was central to Reid and Czarnik's initial vision and passion for the business,¹⁵⁴ but publishing makes Diana Press significant historically.

During its first year, *Songs to A Handsome Woman* sold 998 copies to bookstores, individuals, and libraries for a total revenue of \$1,281.60.¹⁵⁵ The book sold for \$2.00 (with some women protesting the high cost!).¹⁵⁶ Reid and Czarnik's initial plan was to sell the book to bookstores at a 24% discount, far below the publishing industry standard. Ultimately, bookstores refused this discount rate and Diana Press had to comply with the standard discount of 40%.¹⁵⁷ By 1978, just before Diana Press closed, *Songs to a Handsome Woman* was its best-selling title ever, with more copies sold than any other single title.¹⁵⁸ Part of the reason for this success is embedded in the material realities of publishing: older titles that continue to sell gross more than newer titles.

If *Songs to A Handsome Woman* and Rita Mae Brown's charisma launched Diana Press into publishing, Reid and Czarnik embraced it wholeheartedly. In 1973, Diana Press published two other books, E. Sharon Gomilion's collection of poetry, *Forty Acres*

¹⁵⁴ See for example "The History of Diana Press – 1976" and Reid's deposition, both at the Mazer Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Statement of expenses for *Songs for a Handsome Woman*, Mazer Archives, File Drawer 1.

¹⁵⁶ The price of the book is actually quite reasonable. \$2.00 in 1972 is worth approximately \$9.81 (source: <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>) or \$10.59 (source: <http://www.coinnews.net/tools/cpi-inflation-calculator>) in 2011. The average book of poetry today costs between \$12.95 and \$18.95.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Reid to Brown, Mazer Archive, Drawer 4.

¹⁵⁸ Reid deposition, Mazer Archives.

and a Mule, Lee Lally's poetry collection, *These Days*,¹⁵⁹ and a calendar. In 1974, Diana Press again published three books. They obtained the paperback rights from New York University Press for Rita Mae Brown's *The Hand that Cradled the Rock*, and released *Women Remembered: A Collection of Biographies from The Furies*, edited by Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, and *Class and Feminism: A Collection of Essays from The Furies*, also edited by Myron and Bunch. In addition, Diana Press published a calendar and a datebook. The Myron and Bunch essay collections are significant for three reasons. First, the books circulated more widely and for a longer period of time than *The Furies* newspaper; this greater circulation helped to establish the reputation of *The Furies* as an important lesbian-feminist, radical feminist, and lesbian separatist formation in feminism. Second, the collection of biographies articulates an important trend of lesbian-feminist publishing throughout the 1970s: uncovering and reclaiming lesbian history. Third, the collection *Class and Feminism* articulates class as a significant lens of analysis for lesbian-feminism and lesbian separatism; in doing so, it also conceptually links both formations with socialist feminism, demonstrating the ways these strands of feminism were overlapping and co-constitutive.

In spite of two years of strong publishing, Diana Press faced a significant setback in late 1974. On December 27, 1974, a fire on the third floor of 12 W. 25th St. damaged the physical plant of Diana Press, located in the basement of the building. Extensive water damage from the fire stilled the Multilith 1250 press, destroyed paper purchased for forthcoming books, and damaged the composer and a new high-speed collator that had

¹⁵⁹ Some controversy surrounded this publication; it was printed by Diana Press, but attributed to Some of Us Press, a small Washington, DC-based press. In one catalogue Diana Press lists this among its publications, but it is dropped from future catalogues.

been purchased over the summer for \$7,000, half of which was loaned to the press by individual women. Diana Press was insured, but the timing of insurance payments put the press in a precarious position.¹⁶⁰ Publishing in 1975 was delayed; Diana Press only published two books, Charlotte Bunch and Nancy Myron's *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement* and a reprint of Jeannette Howard Foster's 1956 classic, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, in addition to their now annual calendar,¹⁶¹ and a datebook.

In 1976, Diana Press returned to publishing feverishly, producing eight books and a calendar. In 1976, Diana Press published Z Budapest's *Selene: The Most Famous Bull-Leaper on Earth*, *All Our Lives: A Women's Songbook*, edited by Joyce Cheney and Marcia Diehl, Elsa Gidlow's *Sapphic Songs: Seventeen to Seventy*, three anthologies from *The Ladder*, all edited by Reid and Barbara Grier, *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from The Ladder*, *The Lesbian's Home Journal: Stories from The Ladder*, and *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder*.¹⁶² Also in 1976, after extensive revisions and negotiations between Reid as editor and Brown as author, Diana Press published Rita Mae Brown's book of essays, *A Plain Brown Rapper*.¹⁶³ By 1976, Brown's success with *Rubyfruit Jungle* was legendary in the lesbian community. It was a best-selling book for Parke Bowman and June Arnold's Daughters, Inc. as a trade paperback book; Daughters, Inc. sold the mass paperback edition to Bantam, a

¹⁶⁰ Diana Press Press Release, undated, Mazer Archives, Drawer #1.

¹⁶¹ The 1976 calendar was created by Casey Czarnik and Coletta Reid and titled *The Day Before: A Graphic Datebook of our Female Ancestors*.

¹⁶² The calendar was titled 1977 a year and a day calendar and authored by Carol Clement and Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest.

¹⁶³ There is an extensive editorial correspondence between Reid and Brown in the Diana Press Collection at the Mazer archive.

commercial New York publishing house. In spite of the editorial strife between Reid and Brown, keeping Brown on the list of Diana Press ensured continued revenue for Diana Press.

Although publishing resumed after the fire, 1975 and 1976 were difficult years for Reid, Czarnik, and Diana Press for reasons other than their publishing or printing businesses. During the mid-1970s, feminists organized a growing constellation of feminist credit unions, bolstered by the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act, which made it illegal to discriminate against women in credit decisions. In May 1975, at a conference of feminist credit unions in New Haven, CT, Valerie Angers and Joanne Parrent of the Feminist Federal Credit Union (FFCU) of Detroit, the first feminist credit union, proposed a national organization for feminist credit unions and other women-owned businesses. At that time, there were thirteen feminist credit unions around the country.¹⁶⁴ The credit unions met again over the Thanksgiving weekend in 1975 in Detroit, joined by an array of other feminist businesses, including Diana Press. During the November meeting, Angers and Parrent, representing the FFCU of Detroit, and representatives of the Oakland Feminist Credit Union proposed the Feminist Economic Network (FEN). Angers and Parrent conceptualized FEN not as a network or loose confederation of feminist credit unions and businesses but as a holding company for a variety of business. They envisioned FEN as a business that could leverage more resources and increase the economic viability of the members through a single balance sheet. Angers and Parrent thought that there would be universal support for the concept from the other women at the conference. They were wrong.

¹⁶⁴ There is a dearth of scholarship addressing feminist credit unions, and it is an area ripe for additional research.

In fact, the proposed FEN created controversy and, eventually, a split in the conference. Besides the primary proponents of FEN, the Detroit FFCU and the Oakland FFCU, only a small group of people and organizations supported FEN: Diana Press, New Moon publications (publishers of *The Monthly Extract*), and the Washington area FFCU. Together, these five groups left the conference to start FEN. The remaining conference attendees ratified by-laws for the Feminist Economic Alliance, which valued not corporate centralization but grassroots control.¹⁶⁵ Such ideological splits among feminists were commonplace, but the controversy around FEN was major and reported extensively in the feminist press by both local outlets like *Her-self* in Ann Arbor, MI, and *Big Mama Rag* in Denver, CO, and by national outlets like *off our backs*. Many women had questions about FEN and offered sharp critiques. Some women wondered about the efficacy of a large loan to purchase a building when smaller loans for tuition, school books, and tools for women to enter the trades might be financially safer and have a bigger impact to achieve feminist visions for social change. Other women questioned the entire economic model of FEN, which they perceived as too corporate and too amenable to recreating the structures of patriarchal capitalism. Others believed that some feminists were being ripped off by other feminists in the deal.

In spite of the criticism within the feminist press, FEN shortly became operational and leveraged a large loan of \$252,000 from the Feminist Women's Credit Union in Detroit, underwritten by the Michigan Credit Union, to purchase the old Detroit Women's Club as the Feminist Women's City Club. The Feminist Women's City Club, hailed as the largest 'womanspace' in the country, opened in early April of 1976. Gloria

¹⁶⁵ The Feminist Economic Alliance appears to have done little work in spite of its widespread support.

Steinem attended the dedication. Feminist opponents of FEN protested the gala weekend of events. Eventually the Detroit police were called to mediate. Unfortunately, the FEN didn't have the cash flow to support the loan payments for the building. The entire network collapsed in bankruptcy in September 1976.¹⁶⁶ Diana Press was entangled with FEN legally and financially. Eventually, Reid and Czarnik paid \$5,000 to extricate Diana Press from FEN and return it to its operation as a privately-held partnership. The financial implications of the FEN partnership weren't the worst consequences, however, for Diana Press.

As FEN was collapsing, Czarnik and Reid were contemplating a move. They needed more space for both the commercial printing business and the growing publishing business of Diana Press. The cost of space in Baltimore was prohibitive. Reid and Czarnik had been collaborating long-distance with Judy Grahn and Wendy Cadden of Women's Press Collective. They learned that space was cheaper and more available in Oakland, CA. Czarnik and Reid decided to move the business across the country in the spring of 1977.

The joint operations of the WPC and Diana Press in Oakland, facilitated by Reid and Czarnik's move, could have created a powerful feminist publishing operation. That potential, however, was never realized. Moving the business and their family to

¹⁶⁶ This history of FEN comes from a variety of documents at the Mazer Archives including "Diana Press: An Overview 1972-1979" (Drawer #1), "What is FEN" by Martha Shelley (Drawer #4), and responses to the controversy from Kathleen Barry and the LA Women's Center (folder FEN articles, Drawer #4). Alice Echols also recounts a history of FEN in her article "Feminist Capitalism and the Anti-Pornography Movement," *Social Text*, No. 7 (Spring - Summer, 1983), 34-53.

Oakland¹⁶⁷ was an ordeal for Reid and Czarnik and, in retrospect, a setback for Diana Press. More devastating than the move, however, was a small pamphlet, titled, “What is FEN?” Written and circulated Martha Shelley, “What is FEN?” was a scathing critique of FEN and Diana Press. Shelley argued that the women involved with promoting FEN, including in particular Reid, Czarnik, and Laura Brown, were racist and fascist in their treatment of others. She believed that the business model embraced by FEN and by extension Diana Press was both cravenly capitalist and also fascist. Shelley had been a regular contributor to *The Ladder* when it published, was a member of the Women’s Press Collective and was well-known within lesbian-feminist communities as a poet, writer, and feminist thinker. Shelley was circulating the pamphlet when Reid and Czarnik arrived in Oakland. As Czarnik and Reid were getting their sea-legs in Oakland as new residents, adapting to the political environment there, and responding to Shelley’s rebuke of FEN, they were also dealing with the challenges of finding experienced printers for their business; women weren’t widely trained in the printing trades. In addition, the personal relationship between Czarnik and Reid was deteriorating. These economic and personal problems festered throughout the summer and fall of 1977.

Then on October 27, 1977, Diana Press was vandalized. The vandals destroyed many active printing jobs, damaged machinery, and ruined a substantial portion of Diana Press’s printed books. Although feminists rallied around Diana Press, including a \$5,000 loan from Adrienne Rich to help keep the press operational,¹⁶⁸ there were also rumors that the damage was done by other feminists in response to outrage about Diana Press’s

¹⁶⁷ Reid and Czarnik were raising Reid’s daughter.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Adrienne Rich to Coletta Reid, November 1977, Mazer Archives, Drawer #3.

involvement with FEN. The effect of this vandalism, combined with management issues and the deterioration and eventual end of Czarnik and Reid's personal relationship, was fatal for Diana Press. Books were cancelled throughout 1978, authors sued for royalty payments;¹⁶⁹ commercial printing came to a halt, and eventually Diana Press permanently shut its doors in 1979.

The commercial challenges that Diana Press experienced included difficulty finding women staff to operate the presses as well as changes in the commercial printing business. While off-set printing continued to have a market in the late 1970s and subsequent decades, new business machines were replacing commercial printing. Seajay recalls, "suddenly we could do a good looking magazine relatively cheaply, much more quickly and with much less effort—all because of this blossoming technology." This technology had a downside, though, as Seajay explains it, "No one [of the feminist presses] could afford the new Xerox technology and classy printing machines, so there's a way that our whole printing movement collapsed due to that same technology."¹⁷⁰ Technology, while enabling some publishing, like Seajay's *Feminist Bookstore News*, also made other publishers like Diana Press obsolete.

In seven years of publishing, however, Diana Press had an extraordinary impact on lesbian-feminist culture. What distinguishes Diana Press's list of publications is not the selection of enduring titles—that distinction probably goes to *Daughters, Inc.*—but how their work defined issues important to lesbians in the 1970s. An important part of Diana Press's publishing was reprinting collections from *The Ladder* and *The Furies*.

¹⁶⁹ Rita Mae Brown sued for royalty payments as well as Elsa Gidlow and Jeannette Howard Foster (Mazer Archives).

¹⁷⁰ "A Conversation with Judy Grahn," *FBN* 13, no. 3 (September/October 1990), 40.

Diana Press books ensured that the work, political formations, and ideas from *The Ladder* and *The Furies* were not lost and remained in circulation among women. Moreover, the editorial selection of what to reprint from these publications shows a keen interest in articulating lesbian history. Diana Press anthologies *The Ladder* and *The Furies* constructed a lesbian identity that was simultaneously contemporary and grounded in a history, real or imagined. Diana Press also was an early publisher of materials that promoted women's culture, particularly datebooks, posters, and calendars; these materials helped to distill ideas labeled retrospectively cultural feminism. At the same time, Diana Press, its founders, and the published books reflect a strong grounding in socialist-feminism and in a material practice dedicated to empowering working-class women and opening new economic opportunities for women.

It is possible to read the publishing history of Diana Press as straddling a period of change in feminist attentions from radical feminism to cultural feminism, as Alice Echols argues in *Daring to Be Bad*. In this view, Diana Press represents, through their publishing activities, the political changes in feminism between 1972 and 1979. Diana Press's history as a publisher, however, is more complex than a turn from radical feminism to cultural feminism; in fact, the history of Diana Press actually challenges Echols's history. The commitments of Reid and Czarnik to building economic power for working-class women situates them as sympathetic to formations of socialist-feminism. In addition to their material practice, Bunch and Myron's book *Class and Feminism*, a collection of articles in *The Furies*, demonstrates similar intellectual and ideological allegiances with socialist-feminism. At the same time, Czarnik, as a graphic artist, engaged in a material practice that articulated elements of cultural feminism, celebrating

women as producers of culture. Similarly, books by Z. Budapest and Diana Press's calendars and day books promote the emergence of cultural feminism, particularly matriarchal ideologies. In fact, the history of Diana Press as both a publisher and a feminist institution testifies to the intertwining of radical feminism, socialist-feminism, and a variety of tendencies of cultural feminism in the thinking and material practices of its owners, authors, and readers.

The end of Diana Press as a business and publishing house does not suggest the unsustainability of a feminist ideology denuded of its radical political analysis of gender or sexual orientation. That is, the business didn't fail because of its lack of a radical political analysis. Rather, the failure is the material consequence of the vandalism from 1978, the dissolution of the personal relationship between its two principles, and the move to Oakland and its attendant difficulties of rebuilding a commercial business to sustain the publishing business. Again, the personal and the political both contribute to the demise of Diana Press.

By examining and reconstructing the history of Diana Press, I demonstrate the complexities of their feminist ideologies and lived practices. The feminist work of Diana Press cannot be defined with a single adjective; Diana Press engaged multiple feminist formations in both its publishing and its commercial printing. The impulse to analyze the ideology of feminists and locate ideological conflicts within feminism as a source for political and organizational failures as well as waning activism and engagement during the WLM is misguided. Although it locates culpability for the outcomes of feminism with feminist themselves, admirable for the power it aligns with feminists, it fails to examine the broader social, political, and cultural milieu in which feminists are embedded.

Economic restructuring in the United States, coupled with the rise of neo-conservative coalitions, go farther in explaining challenges to feminism than feminist activity itself. The material challenges to sustaining and continuing the work of Diana Press is partially a result of these broader changes in the United States economy and political environment.

Daughters, Inc.

If Diana Press demonstrates both radical and socialist feminist principles in their publishing work, and the Women's Press Collective similarly reflects both radical and socialist principles with a twist of collectivity and anarchy, Daughters Publishing Company, Inc. is, in many ways, the antithesis to both of these ideological enactments. From the beginning, Daughters, Inc. was a commercial business. Lovers Patricia "Parke" Bowman and June Davis Arnold invested their personal resources—earned and inherited wealth—in building Daughters Publishing Company, Inc., and making it a success. Daughters, Inc. also was Arnold's passion as a feminist. She believed that a novel published out of the WLM would change the consciousness of the world; she believed Daughters, Inc. would publish that novel. In some ways, she was right.

Daughters, Inc. was founded in 1972 in Plainfield, VT. Plainfield was a hotbed of radical feminist activism during the 1970s because of Goddard College. June and Patty (Bowman was Patty to her friends) ended up in Plainfield because June bribed her daughter, Fairfax, to attend Goddard by offering her a horse. Fairfax (called Faxy by friends) agreed to this proposition, so June, Patty, and June's two children, Faxy, and Gus all moved to Plainfield. Faxy attended Goddard; Gus was still in high school. June and Patty bought a farmhouse in Plainfield. The old farm house had "pine paneling, narrow

windows, low ceiling, and a pond filled with cow manure.”¹⁷¹ It also included a barn for Faxy’s horse and a carriage house.¹⁷² Arnold taught herself “plumbing, wiring, and carpentry and gutted the kitchen as she worked on her novel.”¹⁷³ The home was also the worksite for Daughters, Inc.

Patricia “Parke” Bowman was born “on February 7 in either 1933 or 1934” in New Jersey.¹⁷⁴ There is scant biographical information about Bowman; she was raised by her grandmother, attended Bucknell, and then became a lawyer. According to Samn Stockwell, who worked at Daughters, Inc. for two years, Bowman came from a Virginia family with some money; she received money from her family to attend law school, but she used that money to travel the world. “Patty worked to support herself through law school,” a point of pride for her.¹⁷⁵ There is ample biographical information about June Arnold. June Fairfax Davis was born on October 27, 1926 in Greenville, SC. She was the daughter of Robert Cowan and Cad (Wortham) Davis. The Wortham family had money from the Houston-based American General Insurance Company. Arnold attended Vassar College for a year but returned to Houston where she completed her B.A. at Rice Institute (now Rice University) and then earned a master’s degree in literature. She married

¹⁷¹ Email communication with Fairfax Arnold, May 2, 2012.

¹⁷² Telephone Interview with Samn Stockwell, October 28, 2011.

¹⁷³ Email communication with Fairfax Arnold, May 2, 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Harris, *Lovers*, New York: New York University Press, 1992, lxiii. Throughout this narrative I rely heavily on Bertha Harris’s account of Daughters, Inc, in her introduction to the NYU edition of *Lovers* in 1993. While Harris’s narrative introduction is a treasure trove of details for this press particularly in absence of other documents, I do want to acknowledge that Harris is deeply bitter about her experience with Daughters, Inc.

¹⁷⁵ Stockwell Interview.

Gilbert Harrington Arnold; the couple had five children (one drowned in a swimming pool around the age of two) before they divorced.¹⁷⁶ Arnold's first novel, *Applesauce*, was published by McGraw-Hill in 1967.

Arnold was involved in feminist politics in New York in the early 1970s as a community activist and rabble-rouser. One focus of her activity was "The 5th St. Women's Building." A community of feminist activists, including Arnold and a hundred other women (and Arnold's son Gus), took over the building on New Year's Eve in 1971. The building was formerly a welfare center and women's shelter. A collective of women, including Arnold, organized the grassroots political action as a "conscious response to women's activism as a tool for helping us as women to take care of ourselves and each other."¹⁷⁷ Eventually, the city ordered them out, and when they resisted, "the cops dragged them out."¹⁷⁸ When it came time for the women who occupied the building to appear in court, Arnold had the idea for them all to "dress up in stockings, high heels, dresses, set hair-dos, and make up to challenge the arresting officers to identify" them. The officers couldn't identify the women and so the charges were dropped.¹⁷⁹ Arnold was involved with other feminist actions, often bringing along her daughters Roberta and Fairfax, including one action to stop "a wealthy landlord from evicting tenants on low

¹⁷⁶ Arnold's oldest daughters, Kate and Roberta, were grown and living independently when Arnold and Bowman moved to Plainfield.

¹⁷⁷ Email communication with Roberta Arnold, May 1, 2012.

¹⁷⁸ Harris, "Introduction," *Lovers*, liv.

¹⁷⁹ Email communication with Roberta Arnold, May 1, 2012.

rent by being ‘squatters.’” Arnold, Roberta, and Fairfax all went to jail during this action as well.¹⁸⁰

Bowman and Arnold met at a cocktail party and fell “in love in the middle of this hot-bed of a time.” Roberta recalls, “Mom fell in love with her, among other things, because she wasn’t afraid to say whatever came out of her mouth, unlike my mother who thought about every word.”¹⁸¹ Together, Bowman and Arnold began Daughters with an initial investment of \$15,000 from Arnold, a word processor and a mimeograph machine.¹⁸² Initially, no one knew how to operate the equipment, so Arnold taught herself and then trained the other women at the press.

The vision of Daughters, Inc. was “as kind of a Hogarth Press.” Daughters, Inc. would “do what Virginia Woolf’s press had done for her books for the Women’s Liberation Movement. It would introduce to the world a different kind of novel that would change consciousness.”¹⁸³ Transforming consciousness was the vision; brass tacks of publishing was the day-to-day operations. Bowman and Arnold ran the publishing house on the model of New York publishing houses, which Bowman called collectively “Random House,” punning on the name of the commercial publisher. Arnold and Bowman prided themselves on operating as a business: “their writers got contracts, advances, royalties, royalty reports, etc., identical, according to Parke, to those issued to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Email communication with Roberta Arnold, May 1, 2012.

¹⁸³ Stockwell Interview.

writers by the mainstream houses.”¹⁸⁴ Not only did they want to operate using the model of Random House, they wanted to outdo Random House: to beat big publishing at its own game. For Bowman, “the way to beat Random House was through the tried-and-true methods of cutthroat capitalism.”¹⁸⁵ Arnold, however, was invested in publishing as a part of “the independent women’s communication network.”¹⁸⁶

During this time, Arnold embrace lesbian feminist separatism “in an idealized way” and even, at times, a “romantic, euphoric way.” These ideas shaped Arnold’s work. Whether learning to operate business machinery, renovating the farmhouse, or publishing work by lesbian-feminists, Arnold’s “ideas of women being ‘self-sufficient’ from men were part of her lesbian-separatist ideology as well as her inherited work-ethic.”¹⁸⁷

Harris recalls that in 1972, Arnold “believed wholeheartedly that a full-scale feminist revolution was at hand. With the patriarchy (and mainstream publishing) in ruins, Daughters would replace Random House, and the works published by Daughters would sell like hotcakes in the new world of empowered women.”¹⁸⁸ This belief in the imminence of a successful feminist revolution is echoed in many accounts of feminists from the early 1970s. The possibilities for revolutionary change were palpable. The Redstockings would have us believe that this fervor was a result of the analysis and

¹⁸⁴ Harris, “Introduction,” *Lovers*, xxxiii.

¹⁸⁵ Harris, “Introduction,” *Lovers*, xxxiii.

¹⁸⁶ Arnold, *Quest*, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Personal communication with Roberta Arnold, May 2, 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Harris, xxxiii.

activism of radical feminists.¹⁸⁹ Certainly, that was part of it, but Arnold's fervor is also the result of a broader cultural milieu in which revolutionary possibilities seemed realistic and at hand—a milieu that changed in the subsequent years.

While Arnold believed in a full-scale feminist revolution, she also believed in culture as a site of feminist activism. In a radio interview with the Great Atlantic Radio Conspiracy, Arnold reflected that “Women, because they have a low opinion of themselves from the culture, tend to undervalue things that women do without even knowing that they are undervaluing it. They say, oh, this is good, it could have been published by a real publishing house.” For Arnold, the dominant culture was a source of women's diminishment of women's work. Acting to change culture was a way to change women's position in the world and their perceptions about themselves and other women. Arnold continued, “. . . They see women's culture as a stepping stone, whereas we see it as a takeover. And I think we have to continue to see it that way. We have to see women's culture as having real status. I think it is going to take time for women to believe in themselves that much.”¹⁹⁰ Arnold combines the language from the corporate sector—takeover—with her desire to transform women's culture. She argues for women to not undervalue what they are doing and instead to give status and significance to what women create. In short, Arnold sees culture as a central component of a feminist revolution.

In 1976, mainstream, New York publishers published lesbian and feminist authors prominently. Rather than the feminist revolution replacing Random House, Random

¹⁸⁹ Redstockings, *Feminist Revolution*.

¹⁹⁰ 13th Moon Papers, New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, Box 16, Audio Tape.

House was embracing feminist authors. Arnold addresses this issue directly, writing in *Quest* that “Madison Avenue publishers, now owned by such as Kinney Rent-a-Car, Gulf and Western, and RCA, are really the hard-cover of corporate America.”¹⁹¹ The editors at the Madison Avenue publishers are “the intellectuals who put the finishing touches on patriarchal politics to make it sell: what we call the finishing press because it is our movement they intend to finish.” Arnold’s analysis puts the power of finishing off the feminist movement in the hands of corporate-controlled publishers, an assessment that more accurately locates power than Brooke’s desire to scapegoat cultural feminists.

The landscape for feminists and feminist publishers had changed by 1976 since the founding of Daughters, Inc., Diana Press, and the WPC in the early 1970s. Mainstream, commercial publishers were open to publishing books by feminists and about feminism. Arnold’s article, “written with the help and criticism of Wendy Cadden, Judy Grahn, Parke Bowman, Casey Czarnik and Coletta Reid,”¹⁹² outlines the reasons why women should publish with feminist presses as opposed to “finishing presses.” For an array of economic and political reasons, Arnold argues that “feminist presses are not stepping stones to being published by the ‘real’ (artificial and false) male publishers.”¹⁹³ Arnold concludes, “It is time to stop giving any favorable attention to the books or journals put out by the finishing press. It is time to recycle our money and refuse to let any male corporation make profit—off of us. It is time to understand what male status really means and withdraw support from any woman who is still trying to make her name

¹⁹¹ Arnold, “Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics” in *Quest* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1976), 19.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 18.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 25.

by selling out our movement.”¹⁹⁴ Arnold articulates a strong separatist position and situates feminist and lesbian publishing as a material practice that can strike at the heart of patriarchy and male supremacy.

Arnold synthesized this position further when she was asked by *New York Times* Reporter Lois Gould if they were building an “alternate society” at Daughters, Inc. Arnold quipped, “Of course not! We are building the *real* society! *Theirs* is the alternate.”¹⁹⁵ This articulation of the vision of Daughters, a group that at the time of the interview included Bertha Harris and Charlotte Bunch along with Bowman and Arnold, is a clear separatist position, though not particularly lesbian separatist.

As ideas about lesbian separatism and feminist separatism were being developed in the 1970s, separatism as a political, economic, and social practice, was a variegated phenomenon. In the *Guide to Feminist Publishers*, Polly Joan describes Daughters, along with the WPC and Diana Press, as depicting “a strong political position for separatism in women’s publishing.” She continues, “It would be inaccurate to simplify this policy of radical independence as simply feminist separatism. The term itself implies many things even within the Women’s Movement.” Joan continues that broad use of separatism negates and simplifies “differing modes of operation or thought.” While it is unlikely that any of the women at WPC, Diana, or Daughters, would have embraced the term “separatist,” their material practice of publishing only women and primarily lesbians reflects one type of separatism, one which was productive and profoundly creative and

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 26.

¹⁹⁵ Lois Gould, “Creating a Women’s World,” *New York Times Magazine* (January 2, 1977), 10. There was a substantial controversy recounted in the pages of *Big Mama Rag* with feminists and separatists objecting to Arnold’s, Bowman’s, Harris’s, and Bunch’s talking to the *New York Times*.

generative for both the publishers and the authors. Joan continues, “It [the term feminist separatist] accounts for a certain amount of mistrust and misunderstanding between women’s presses. For Daughters, Inc. the real issue of separatism is economic and is far more complicated than being or not being lesbian. Daughters maintains that it will be only when women can withstand the lure of immediate money, and at some personal cost, support all-women’s businesses, that women will be able to build structures necessary for real economic independence.”¹⁹⁶ Through Daughters, Inc., Bowman and Arnold built a structure that brought economic independence, not to them because they already had it, but to some of their authors as well as to women in the lesbian-feminist movement through book selling.

Bertha Harris remembers Bowman and Arnold almost as polar opposites. Arnold was a socialite who wanted attention and acceptance from radical feminists; Bowman was the churlish capitalist who wanted “nothing to do with the presses. The radical politics, the nonprofit status of most of them, their collective organization—it all smelled strongly of the left wing.”¹⁹⁷ In addition, it is also clear that Arnold embraced lesbian-feminism and her life as a lesbian, whereas Bowman was ambivalent about her lesbianism, even to the point of being at times homophobic. Whether Bowman and Arnold were polar opposites is impossible to assess, but together they negotiated their radical feminist publishing operation within the realities of commodity capitalism.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 125-6.

¹⁹⁷ Harris, xxxxi. Harris continues, “Parke got involved in publishing women writers because she was in love with June Arnold.”

¹⁹⁸ To my knowledge, there are no archives from Bowman, Arnold, or Daughters, Inc. I have assembled this history from previously published sources, archival material

The first five books published by Daughters in 1973 were June Arnold's own second novel, *The Cook and the Carpenter*, published with the pseudonym of "the carpenter," Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Pat Burch's *Early Losses*, *Nerves* by Blanche M. Boyd, and the novel, *The Treasure*, by Nobel-award winning novelist, Selma Lagerlöf. The mix of titles on the first list demonstrates Bowman and Arnold's commitment to publishing literary fiction with feminist consciousness. Daughters published twenty-three books by eighteen authors during their seven years as a business.¹⁹⁹ The most famous book published by Daughters was Rita Mae Brown's novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*. In 1977, Daughters, Inc. sold the paperback rights to the book to Bantam for \$250,000, an unprecedented - and unrepeated - sum for a feminist publisher. Bowman and Arnold split the \$250,000 with Rita Mae Brown. Brown recalls, "I remember standing on the corner of Seventh Avenue near Bleecker Street, outside the Daughters office, with a check for \$125,000 in my hand. It seemed like a dream: Poverty that grinds you to dust, and suddenly a mess of money."²⁰⁰ The sale happened at a time when mainstream publishers were purchasing a number of lesbian and gay books for paperback reissues. In addition to Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Bantam acquired Patricia Nell Warren's *Fancy Dancer*, Pyramid released a pocket version of the Allen

compiled from archives not dedicated to Daughters, Inc, and interviews with two of June Arnold's daughters.

¹⁹⁹ Bertha Harris omits one book in her review of Daughters Press in the introduction to *Lovers*.

²⁰⁰ Brown, *Rita Will*, 280.

Young/Karla Jay anthology *After You're Out*, and Avon released a series of Christopher Isherwood books.²⁰¹

In 1978, Joan praises Daughters for breaking “many small press feminist myths by publishing excellently written novels with high quality production and effective distribution methods.” She echoes the expectations of both Arnold and Bowman by noting, “with each year Daughters becomes more and more solid for women as a real alternative to the big press.”²⁰² For Joan, Daughters successfully positioned itself as ‘real’ publishers, just as Arnold and Bowman wished. Joan also describes the literary effect of Daughters, “With publication of each Daughters book a new literary form seems to be launched. So far every novel from Daughters has been without literary precedent. We have grown to expect highly innovative literature, as well as good stories.” Although Joan praises the literary and aesthetic merits of the novels published by Daughters, Inc., critical treatments of these novels remain sparse.

Unfortunately, Joan was unwittingly writing a retrospective about Daughters. In 1978, Arnold and Bowman moved back to New York to “June’s Manhattan loft building” and “Parke bought the townhouse on Charles Street in Greenwich Village to serve as company headquarters.”²⁰³ They published their last four books from New York, Lois Gould’s *X: A Fabulous Child’s Story*, Bertha Harris’s *Confessions of a Cherubino* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich did the original edition in 1972), Joanna Russ’s *Kittatinny: A Tale of Magic*, and Verena Steffan’s *Shedding*. In the fall of 1979, Arnold, fifty-three at

²⁰¹ Ed Jackson, “Paperback Traffic,” *Body Politic* 43 (May 1978): 19.

²⁰² Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 124.

²⁰³ Harris, liii.

the time and Bowman forty-five or forty-six, moved back to Arnold's childhood home, Houston, TX. The move to Houston was in part to escape the continued attacks on Arnold by feminists. Bowman incorporated Daughters, Inc., in Texas, but shortly after the incorporation, Arnold was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor. The work of Daughters ground to a halt as the two faced Arnold's health crisis. June Arnold died on March 11, 1982. *Body Politic*, a Canadian gay and lesbian newspaper, ran an obituary for Arnold. When Bowman died in February 1992, there appear to be no notices of her death in the feminist or gay and lesbian press. Arnold's literary career enjoyed a brief exhumation in 1987 when her final novel, *Baby Houston*, was published.

Critiques of Bowman and Arnold, the most vituperative from Bertha Harris, point to many of the reasons for the closing of Daughters, Inc. Bowman and Arnold, while espousing political beliefs in separatist, woman-centered publishing, made editorial decisions without authorial consent, sold rights without authors' consent, and acted often in business terms instead of what was understood at the time as feminist terms.²⁰⁴ Harris describes the end of Daughters "in the manner of any publishing company going out of business. All titles abruptly went out of print; rights reverted to the authors; leftover copies of the books were distributed among the authors and to remainder houses."²⁰⁵ Harris suggests that Arnold and Bowman "might have sold the company to other women" and posits that their decision to not do that "was their revenge, their particular Tet

²⁰⁴ Elana Dykewomon in the afterward to the Naiad Press edition of *Riverfinger Women* recounts how Bowman and Arnold sold the rights to a section of the novel in the early 1980s against her wishes.

²⁰⁵ Harris, xxxiv.

offensive, against women in general and the women's movement in particular."²⁰⁶ In fact, Arnold's illness seems to be the primary motivator for ending Daughters, Inc. In Houston, Bowman and Arnold faced a grueling period of illness, compounded by their reliance on alcohol as a primary coping strategy.

June Arnold invested an extraordinary amount of money in the feminist community overall during the 1970s, giving generously to a variety of community projects as well as providing the initial start up capital for Daughters, Inc. Arnold's money and the labor that Bowman and Arnold gave to Daughters, Inc. was crucial to the success of Daughters; Daughters had a transformative effect on feminist and lesbian literature. Yet, there is little positive recognition of Arnold and Bowman's work within feminist communities. Rather than recognizing how Arnold invested in feminism and lesbian-feminist literature and the many positive effects of these investments, Harris asserts that:

In fact, June risked nothing, and lost nothing, when she left Houston for New York and the women's movement. She had absolute control over her fortune, and very sensibly she never neglected to foster it. She never felt the cost of Daughters, nor did her generous handouts to feminist enterprises ever make a noticeable dent in her wealth. She enjoyed the enviable position of being able to indulge in charity (and buy alliances) without feeling the pinch of self-sacrifice. She once told me that she was always very careful not to give to feminist causes any of the money she meant her children to have. Her mother, she said, would want her grandchildren raised as much as possible as she had been, and well taken care of after her death.²⁰⁷

Certainly, there is truth in Harris's statements; Arnold's personal trust was set up in 1963, and in 1973, Arnold set up and funded a trust for three of her children with extensive

²⁰⁶ Harris, lv.

²⁰⁷ Harris, lv.

corporate holdings.²⁰⁸ At the same time, Arnold invested in and propagated a vision of lesbian-feminism that was profoundly transformative.

There are ways to see Daughters as an anti-hero in any narration of feminist practices. Daughters, Inc. operated with no collective, no scrimping and saving to do work. Daughters, Inc. was a capitalist enterprise and an investment vehicle for the wealthy couple. At the same time, Daughters, Inc., articulated a vibrant vision for cultural feminism through not only the words of the founders of the press, but also through the materials they published.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, four books from Daughters, Inc., were reissued. New York University Press re-released Bertha Harris's *Lover* and June Arnold's *The Cook and the Carpenter*. The Feminist Press reissued June Arnold's *Sister Gin*, and Naiad reissued Elana Dykewomon's *Riverfinger Women*. These reissues, two by independent feminist or lesbian presses, and two by a university press, reflect both renewed interest in lesbian novels and the timelessness of the books from Daughters. As editors, Bowman, Arnold and Harris were astute in their choices of what to publish. Kayann Short in a review for *The Women's Review of Books* notes that "confronting the writing of our history helps us to see its gaps, its lapses, even its deliberate lies, with eyes not uncritical, but perhaps less judgmental for recognizing that these narratives have ensured our survival."²⁰⁹ While the publishing entity Daughters, Inc. did not survive and

²⁰⁸ The Gus S. Wortham family and business records, MS 514, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Series 1 Series I: Personal and Family, 1864-1997, Subseries A: Gus S. Wortham personal.

²⁰⁹ Kayann Short, "Do-it-yourself feminism," *Women's Review of Books* 13, no. 4 (January 1996): 21.

replace Random House, the novels it published survive as narratives to ensure our survival.

Stake the Next Bonanza: Negotiating Feminism and Capitalism

Through these three histories of the WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters, I map an ecology of book publishing by lesbian-feminists during the 1970s. To provide a context for the environment in which these presses, and other lesbian-feminist presses, operated, I now explain economic structures in the field of publishing during the 1970s to deepen and elaborate the economic realities in which WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters operated.

From an economic perspective, book publishing always has been challenging. Book publishing depends on an initial capital investment. The first expense of book publishing is the acquisition of intellectual property, that is, manuscripts, usually with an advance to the author against royalties. In addition to acquiring intellectual property, book publishers must front the costs of editing the manuscript, both conceptual edits and copyedits, the layout and design of the book and cover, paper and materials for binding, and printing. After the capital investment to create a book, additional capital is needed to promote the book and to ship it to distributors, until recently primarily bookstores. Generally, publishers are paid only on the actual sales of the books, with unsold books fully returnable. Publishers ship books to booksellers on credit; booksellers make payments on books sold to publishers ninety to 180 days from receipt of the books. This investment and long delay of cash payment is only part of the challenge of publishing, however. Sales are a gamble. Strong selling books risk not having enough copies in the marketplace; if publishers are unable to have enough books to correspond with reader

demand, they lose sales. At the same time, printing too many copies of a book that sells poorly often means that the publisher never earns back the investment for the initial print run. Ultimately, publishing houses earn profits in three ways. First, they have strong sellers on their frontlist,²¹⁰ which earn enough money to subsidize other books on the list. Second, over time, often between five and twenty years, publishers develop a backlist of books that continue to sell and bring in a consistent revenue stream. Third, publishers sell rights, including those for paperback editions, book club editions, and foreign editions.²¹¹

The business model of publishing creates structural barriers against entry into the field for new publishing houses. WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc. all faced these challenges and negotiated them differently. WPC minimized initial capital investments through donated labor, the purchase of paper cheaply, and their homemade model of distribution: selling directly to readers through readings, other small events, and personal networks. Similarly, Diana negotiated these challenges through a profit-sharing arrangement with authors and by owning their own press and mastering printing through commercial work. Daughters negotiated the challenge through capital investment and benefited from an appetite at commercial presses to reprint feminist work.

Distribution of books often presents the greatest barrier to entry for new publishers. Feminist publishers, in addition to building their own distribution networks, also benefited from the concurrent development of a community of feminist booksellers and a community of readers, hungry for feminist and lesbian books. These two decades

²¹⁰ “Frontlist” is a term of art for new books published in the current publishing season.

²¹¹ I am grateful to my colleagues at The New Press for their generosity and good cheer in educating me about the realities of book publishing today. Their knowledge of the many challenges of book publishing and their innovative strategies as publishers committed to publishing books in the public interest continue to inspire me.

saw a proliferation of feminist print materials, including newsletters, magazines, literary journals, political journals, and feminist newspapers, as well as a proliferation of communities and spaces dedicated to feminism, including coffeehouses, consciousness-raising groups, and poetry reading series. These structures—booksellers, readers, and publishers—are co-constitutive in feminist communities throughout the 1970s and 1980s. WPC, Diana, and Daughters benefited from the growing audience for feminist books during the 1970s, and their work as publishers helped to create these audiences. For instance, June Arnold’s work in organizing the first Women In Print Conference in Omaha, NE, in 1976 helped to build a network that was vital for the publishers during the next decade.²¹² Feminist publishers and readers were part of a small, but growing, vibrant network; publishers reaped financial benefits from this growth; readers reaped personal and intellectual benefits from this growth. In spite of the co-constitutive relationship between readers, booksellers, and publishers, book publishing is, and remains, in many ways an economic gamble.

Feminists in the WLM were keenly aware of the structural barriers for feminist book publishers and of the challenges that feminist publishers faced in the field of publishing. To demystify the corporate aspects of publishing and help feminists enter the world of publishing, Celeste West and Valerie Wheat published *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* in 1978.²¹³ West and Wheat were librarians with a radical critique of libraries.

²¹² Trysh Travis discusses Arnold’s role in the conference in “Women In Print.”

²¹³ An electronic edition of *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* is available at the Lesbian Poetry Archive, www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org. In addition to West and Wheat’s book, Metis Press also published a do-it-yourself book for feminist publishers titled *A Book of One’s Own: Guide to Self-Publishing* in 1979 by Christine Leslie Johnson and Arny Christine Straayer. An electronic edition of *A Book of Own’s Own* also

They published *Booklegger Magazine* and operated Booklegger Press. *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* is both a polemic against conglomerate publishers, which West and Wheat saw emerging in the 1970s, and a do-it-yourself manual for feminist revolutionaries interested in publishing. Although outsiders to corporate publishing, West and Wheat's analysis and critique of corporate publishing is prescient. Their observations about continued consolidation of publishing into the hands of a few large corporations and the effects of increasing commercialization of booksellers were accurate at the time and continue to resonate within the field of publishing. In 2000, Andre Schiffrin, a former editor at Pantheon, the founder of The New Press, and a consummate insider in the publishing world,²¹⁴ offered an analysis of forty years of book publishing in *The Business of Books*. His analysis is surprisingly congruent with the critiques of West and Wheat from 1978.

While Wheat and West's book offers a political critique of publishing, it also offers a realistic financial picture of publishing in the late 1970s. With graphics and a textual description, West and Wheat use *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* itself as an example for the cost of publishing a single 7" x 10", 80-page volume. Total expenses to publish *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* were \$14,500; gross revenue, if 4,500 copies

is available at the Lesbian Poetry Archive. *A Book of One's Own* offers more direct advice and information on self-publishing and less analysis and critique of corporate publishing than West and Wheat's book. Both are referenced in a variety of locations by lesbian-feminist writers, publishers, and activists. In 1981, the Minority Press Group in the United Kingdom commissioned and published *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers, and Distributors* by Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester, and Agnes Pivot. This book does similar work to *The Passionate Perils of Publishing* and *A Book of One's Own* in a U.K. context.

²¹⁴ Schiffrin's father was one of the founders of Pantheon.

of the 5,000 print run sold,²¹⁵ was \$22,500.²¹⁶ The net revenue would give them \$8,000 to “stake the next bonanza” and “take another ride.” West and Wheat explain that they invested one-third of the expenses up front and then reinvested the remaining necessary capital from sales.²¹⁷ West and Wheat describe the expenses of book publishing in five categories: plant cost, printing, marketing, distribution, and overhead. Plant cost for them was \$3,500, which included \$2,500 for research, writing, and editing and \$1,000 for design, typesetting, and paste-up. Printing and binding was \$4,000. They devoted \$1,500 to marketing which included “mailing list rental, mailing piece costs, postage, ad space, free books for review & kisses, publicist labor costs.” Distribution was \$4,500. Booklegger Press, West and Wheat’s press, sold books primarily through mail order; hence, the breakdown for distribution was \$2,000 for postage and supplies and \$2,500 for order processing labor at \$3 per hour. Finally, West and Wheat attributed \$1,000 to overhead—“all ‘indirect’ operating costs pro-rated per book, such as rent, utilities, office supplies, accounts management, general maintenance & gardening.” The cost of creating each copy of the book was \$2.90; they sold the book for \$5.00. West and Wheat estimate break-even when 2,900 copies sold; the initial investment is recovered when 1,800 copies of the book have sold, but each sale incurs an additional expense for distribution. Sales of the remaining 2,100 copies bring the net revenue needed to invest in the next book.

²¹⁵ West and Wheat reserve 500 copies as “give-aways for reviews and passionate ‘patrons’ of Booklegger.”

²¹⁶ These numbers are, of course, in 1978 dollars. One dollar in 1978 is worth \$3.30 in 2010. The initial investment of \$14,500 by West and Wheat is the equivalent of \$47,913.89 in 2010 dollars. Source: <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>.

²¹⁷ In order to make this work financially, they must have printed in two or perhaps three smaller print runs.

Within West and Wheat's scenario for book publishing are a few critical items that lesbian-feminist publishers often missed in their cost projections. West and Wheat allocate \$2,500 for the creation of the manuscript—an expense that is often excluded from the publishing calculations of lesbian-feminist publishers.²¹⁸ Wheat and West also include payment for their labor in distributing books, another expense that often was not considered or compensated by lesbian feminist publishers. From West's and Wheat's description, book publishing has a good profit margin; in this scenario \$2.10 per book, or 42% of the sale, is profit. The challenge is that \$9,000 must be spent and then recovered prior to any profit. Publishing requires both initial and on-going capital investment with the risk of no return if the book does not sell well.²¹⁹ Of course, publishing requires less capital investment than building cars, for instance, or computers. Nevertheless, publishing was, and remains, a capital intensive business.

Book sales are uncertain and even, at times, capricious. West and Wheat's estimate of 2,900 copies sold as break-even seems like a modest sales quantity, but consider the sales numbers of some of the books at WPC, *Diana and Daughters*. The first printing of WPC's *Woman to Woman* was 1,000 copies, a much smaller print run than Wheat and West's model requires. *Woman to Woman* is comparable in the number of

²¹⁸ *Daughters* is the prominent exception to this; *Daughters* paid competitive advances to all of the authors that they published. Elana Dykewomon recalls that she lived “on welfare [to fund her creative work]. . . until I got an advance of \$1,000 for *Riverfinger Women*. (Dykewomon in *Everyday Mutinies*, 58). Funding the research and development of books is a critical element of publishing; I examine some of the ways that individual lesbian writers funded their work in a subsequent chapter.

²¹⁹ West and Wheat's estimate is ambitious. In reality, Andre Schiffrin reports that “the average profit of publishing houses through western Europe and the United States, during much of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, was in the range of 3 to 4 percent per annum, roughly the amount of interest paid by a saving bank” in *Words and Money* (New York: Verso, 2010), 1.

pages to *The Passionate Perils of Publishing*, but WPC sold it for \$1.50. Even with discounted paper and inflation between 1970 and 1978, *Woman to Woman* was significantly cheaper and thus had a smaller profit margin. WPC published 2,000 copies of its next book, *Edward the Dyke*; by 1978 the book had sold 6,000 copies. Again, however, the price of the book was modest; \$1.25 in 1971 and \$2.50 in 1978. While the expenses may have been less, given WPC's paper acquisition and printing expenses, the profit margin on *Edward the Dyke* was small. Diana Press estimated the final costs of the books more accurately. Initially, Diana priced poetry books at \$1.00, but increased prices as their publishing developed. In 1976, the highest price book was Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, which sold for \$8.00; average prices for books were between \$3 and \$6. While the pricing per unit may have been more accurate to reflect the capital investment, most Diana Press books sold between 600 and 1,000 copies in their first year. These modest sales mean that the net revenue to stake new book projects wasn't realized until the second, third or fourth year after the book was published. Daughters initially priced their books at \$3.35 each²²⁰, but had increased the price to \$4.00 by 1976. June Arnold reports that Daughters sold out all of their first print runs of books.²²¹ Even assuming some exaggeration of that number, Daughters as a publisher was the most financially solvent of these three presses. What allowed Daughters to thrive financially, however, in addition to the capital investment of its founders, is the success of *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Estimates of sales of the Daughters edition of *Rubyfruit Jungle* vary between 50,000 and 90,000 copies, though most accounts place it at about 70,000 copies. At \$4.00

²²⁰ In 2010, \$3.00 is the equivalent to \$11.36.

²²¹ Daughters, Inc. printed 3,000 copies as an initial print run.

per copy, 50,000 copies, even with a full bookstore discount of 40%, would have brought \$120,000 in revenue to Daughters. This revenue is, of course, exclusive of the sale of the book to Bantam for \$250,000.

Although Daughters was financially successful in their publishing and *Rubyfruit Jungle* became a backlist sensation, ultimately none of these presses developed as a sustainable publishing organization. The underpricing of books at the WPC, albeit for important political reasons, was part of its demise. Diana Press's revenue-sharing model enabled it to begin as a publisher, but the cash outlays this model required annually are part of the reasons for its financial failure. Daughters came the closest to building a lesbian-feminist publishing house that was sustainable within the economic model of publishing, though even Daughters never organized their publishing in ways that were congruent with successful publishing houses, including seasonal catalogues, regular publishing catalogues, and marketing and public promotion of titles.

Evaluating WPC, Diana, and Daughters only on their efficacy and survival in the marketplace of publishing is unfair, however, for a number of reasons. First, all of the women involved with these presses saw their impact as much greater than the world of publishing or even than the production of single books. Second, there is an argument to be made that publishing is rarely successful in capitalism; it is almost always a subsidized venture. Third, all of these presses were affected by changes that were unfolding in the marketplace, changes they couldn't control. Finally, the marketplace of publishing defines the field of publishing too narrowly. While the marketplace is one aspect of the field of publishing, there are other, equally important, areas within the publishing field, some of which were very successful for lesbian-feminist publishers.

While I believe that all of the women involved in publishing at the WPC, Diana, and Daughters took pride in their books as aesthetic objects, the real motivation for all of them was building the feminist movement. Whether the work was a “resource for the women’s movement,” as the WPC described it, or “building the real world” as Daughters, Inc. described it, the work of publishing was about creating social and political transformation. Evaluating their impact only based on sales or the economic survival of the press minimizes these visions and the centrality of these visions to the women publishers. What is interesting is how their visions were mediated by capitalism. All of the publishers actively negotiated the world of capitalism, the world of business, and the world of commodity production in different ways. With the exception perhaps of Parke Bowman, none of the women working at lesbian-feminist publishers would embrace the identity “capitalist” to describe their work, yet all of them engaged in capitalism. They worked within the system of capitalism even as they were envisioning a world that was feminist and, perhaps, post-capitalist. What is the significance of these negotiations with capitalism? First, flexible engagements with revolutionary ideologies (socialism, feminism, anarchy) and material realities (capitalism) model ways for lesbian-feminists to thrive. While many individual women retreated from movement work after the presses closed, other feminist publishers emulated the work of feminist publishers in the 1970s. Second, these negotiations demonstrate the ability to both resist and subvert capitalism while using the tools of capitalism to distribute ideas, theories, and philosophies. Although Audre Lorde stated definitively “The master’s tools will not dismantle the master’s house,” finding and using the tools of the master created new houses even as feminists waited for others to be dismantled. In the end, I don’t want to

valorize feminist visions behind the presses nor capitalist impulses. I do not want to argue that lesbian-feminist publishing is a capitalist enterprise; and I do not want to argue that it is divorced from capitalism or that it existed outside of the capitalist system. Rather I want to embrace the tensions between and among these propositions for lesbian-feminist publishers in the 1970s. They navigated utopian visions for revolutionary change with the need to support themselves on a daily, weekly, and annual basis with an income.

There is an argument to be made that publishing was never successful in capitalism; it was always a subsidized venture. Indeed, thinking about small publishers particularly of *belle lettristic* manuscripts, publishing always has been subsidized, if not the raw materials (paper, ink, binding), then the time of both publishers and writers. The publishing of Virginia and Leonard Woolf at Hogarth Press, Gertrude Stein's and Alice B. Toklas's publishing through Plain Editions, and Sylvia Beach's publishing through Shakespeare & Company all demonstrate the need for financial subsidies in book publishing. Through this lens, publishing has long operated as a hybrid industry, part profit-oriented, part philanthropic. In the 1970s, lesbian-feminists recognized this heritage of publishing and generally greeted women who could subsidize the work with praise.

Finally, WPC, Diana, and Daughters, in particular, and lesbian-feminist publishing, more generally, existed within a broader context of publishing which was changing and evolving in its ecology during these two decades and beyond. West and Wheat wrote, "The last few years have seen the rise of the 'chain bookstore.' Walden Book Company and B. Dalton (owned by huge department store chains Carter Hawley Hale and Dayton Hudson respective) are giants in this field. They are buying up

independent stores and building new ones in seemingly every shopping center. Like fast-food outlets, the chain bookstores are automated for fast, volume turnover of bestseller fare.²²² A similar situation is described by Kristen Hogan, not in the 1970s but in the 1990s as bookstore chains, Borders and Barnes & Noble, grew. The evolving ecology of publishing, changes in technology, changes in the availability of governmental support for literary and artistic work, all affect these publishers, supporting or constraining their work.

Perhaps where these presses were most influential was in the creation of a lesbian literary ecology. A book, a single book, or 5,000 copies of a book, can only work when it exists in a system in which people write books (a labor that far exceeds the \$2,500 fee that West and Wheat describe), people distribute books, and people read books. In many ways the WLM created an ecological environment in which book publishing could thrive during these two decades. The labor of groups of writers, like the Women Writes retreats organized by southern lesbians, feminist bookstores and Women in Distribution were vital parts of the ecology of the time.

Individual publishers and writers actively negotiate economic forces shaping women's lives and enact political ideologies through economic decisions and arrangements. By tracing these different types of economic arrangements for feminist presses and how women adapt to and negotiate the economic aspects of operating a feminist press, I demonstrate an active engagement with a variety of economic arrangements. I resist totalizing capitalism or socialism as two dichotomous visions for our society and instead explore how women negotiated political and social values within

²²² West and Wheat, *Passionate Perils*, 2.

a broader system of economic choices. I explore where they created viable alternatives (even if they were short-lived) and where they navigated difficult constraints and conditions. While it would be easy to critique the devastating effects of late capitalism on feminism and feminist activism through print culture, I resist that and rather examine where and how women worked within, outside, and around capitalism as a way to create new possibilities and new visions for women.

Ultimately, my purpose in this extensive review of the economics of publishing is to demonstrate how linked publishing is as an economic enterprise with the production of cultural work, both in the broad field and in the more particular field of my work, lesbian-feminist publishing. Understanding the imbrication of culture and economics changes how we understand cultural feminism in the WLM. Rather than as a site of activism denuded of economic and political analysis, as the Redstockings would have us believe, cultural feminism is a site of intense engagement with both politics and economics. For lesbian-feminist publishers, the textual reproduction of books was a form of activism that resonated on multiple levels: literary, cultural, social, economic, and political.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I narrated histories of three lesbian-feminist presses, Women's Press Collective, Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc., operating in the 1970s, to make two arguments. First, while cultural feminism is an important descriptor of their work, it is not sufficient. Other strands of feminism, including radical feminism, socialist feminism, and lesbian, or feminist, separatism, influenced all three. Second, I have mapped the field of publishing as a location important to their work, exploring how publishers negotiated the material realities of publishing as a capitalist enterprise.

These histories of feminist presses reinforce a recent strand of scholarship in women's studies that explores the WLM movement in geographic locations outside of major urban centers, particularly New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.²²³ Mapping the terrain of publishing and book distribution undermines a bicoastal bias of the Women's Liberation Movement in three significant ways. First, feminist presses and publishers are spread across the United States. In this chapter, the WPC operated in Oakland, CA, near San Francisco but a much more working-class community; Diana Press was located in Baltimore, MD, and Daughters, Inc. primarily based in Plainfield, VT during most of its publishing years. In subsequent chapters, I examine presses in other locations, including Chicago, IL, Durham, NC and Tallahassee, FL. Second, feminist and women's bookstores, experiencing tremendous growth in numbers during the 1970s and 1980s, also are located across the United States—and increasingly around the world. Junko R. Onosaka's recent book *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States*²²⁴ traces the development of women's bookstores from the 1970s through the 1990s, and Kristin Hogan's dissertation, *Reading at Feminist Bookstores*,²²⁵ positions feminist bookstores as a vital part of the feminist publish sphere as well as exploring the current state of the bookselling market and its impact on feminist

²²³ See for example Anne Valk's *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, DC* (2008), Anne Enke's *Find the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (2007), Judith Ezekiel's *Feminism in the Heartland* (2002), and Nancy Whittier's *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (1995).

²²⁴ Junko R. Onosaka, *Feminist Revolution in Literacy: Women's Bookstores in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²²⁵ Kristen Hogan, *Reading at Feminist Bookstores: Women's Literature, Women's Studies, and the Feminist Bookstore Network* (Austin: University of Texas dissertation, 2006).

booksellers. The existence of a distribution network that was decentralized and dispersed throughout the United States ensured that books published lesbian-feminist presses reached readers outside of their geographical area. Third, and most significant, is the mobility of books. Books as objects are designed to travel. The movement of books is simultaneously the movement of ideas. While early in the 1970s, distribution of books primarily happened one-on-one, person-to-person, and thus were more localized, as the WLM continued to grow and feminist distribution networks grew, books traveled from the geographic region of the publisher to locations around the United States. This traveling of books and ideas invites us to think about lesbian-feminism not as radiating from urban centers, but rather as radiating from books with multiple geographic identities - the location of the publisher, the location of the author, the location of the book sale, and the location of the reader. This multi-nodal geography changes how we think about ideas of feminism and lesbian-feminism traveling during the WLM.

Book publishing also challenges time in historical narratives. Books are “published” on a particular day, or in a particular month. Publishers designate publication dates to release books, but in reality book sales build slowly. The effect of books are only measured in long time frames. Books that “just appear” as popular are the result of good storytelling, writing, and editing combined with effective marketing and robust distribution to reach a community of readers. This process of popularizing a book requires months and years. Although the process can be accelerated and condensed to appear as though a book “just” becomes popular, in reality it is a long-term proposition. Publishers refer to this phenomenon as the long tail of books. Rita Mae Brown’s *Songs to a Handsome Woman*, for example, was, over time, the best-selling book of Diana Press,

but also the first book published by Diana Press. More time on the market means more sales for books to discover a new audience, year after year. Judy Grahn's "The Common Woman" poems changed history not simply because of their publication in 1971 from the WPC. There are multiple points of first contact with these poems: the bar where a mimeographed copy was shared, the first editions sold by Grahn and the WPC, the reprinting of the poems in dozens of lesbian-feminist journals and newspapers, the reprinting of the poems in *The Work of a Common Woman* and later in *love belongs to those who do the feeling*. Each impression, of a press, or of the eyes, writes a new history of encountering and experiencing the poems.

Finally, these histories of lesbian-feminist presses argue that it is important to reconsider the significance of cultural feminism as an important element of the WLM and as an on-going legacy of the WLM. Although cultural feminism has been accused of and imbricated with essentialism, a largely discarded theoretical position in the post-Butler world of feminist studies, and lesbian separatism enjoys primarily a position of mockery in contemporary feminist discourse, the legacies of cultural feminism and lesbian separatism are among the most enduring of the WLM. In part, this is because the organizations founded from cultural feminism and lesbian separatism developed funding strategies or business models to survive. While I have focused in this chapter on three publishing houses that all eventually closed, their books remain in circulation and continue to be reprinted. Since 1997, Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* has sold 36,619 copies, according to Bookscan, which reports about 80% of trade sales. Judy Grahn's new and selected poems were published in a new edition from Red Hen Press in 2008. Books from WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters have all been reprinted within the past

twenty years. Moreover, the field of cultural feminism, as I have defined it, encompasses some of the most venerable feminist institutions: the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, the National Womyn's Music Festival, bookstores like Charis Books and More in Atlanta, Georgia, and Room of One's Own in Madison, Wisconsin, the Mountain Moving Cafe in Chicago, which operated for thirty-one years between 1975 and 2005, journals such as *CALYX* and *Sinister Wisdom*, which continue to publish today, and numerous battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers. Something in the overlapping and co-constitutive ideological formations of cultural feminism and lesbian separatism creates institutions that last and have lasting impacts on feminism, surviving through multiple formations and reformations of feminism by activists from new and emerging generations.

In the next chapter, I examine Persephone Press, Long Haul Press, and Kitchen Table Press, feminist publishers working primarily during the 1980s. Again, I explore how different feminist theories and ideologies shape the work of these presses and in turn how the work published by these presses shape feminism during the 1980s and afterward.

/Interlude 2/ WinD: Distributing Lesbian-Feminist Culture

For publishers, distribution rivals the labor of editing, designing, proofreading, and producing a book or journal. Distributing a bound book—getting it into the hands of readers eager to pay for it and read it—is a specialized function. In Darnton’s model, distributors are “shippers” and include “agent, smuggler, entrepot keeper, wagoner, etc.” In the contemporary communications circuit, distributors are the link between publishers and retail booksellers. Early feminist publishers, like Diana Press, the WPC and Daughters, Inc., operated as both publishers and distributors. WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters, Inc. marketed their books through advertisements in lesbian and feminist periodicals, flyers, makeshift catalogues, and community readings. While publishers developed distribution strategies during the 1970s, feminist bookstores, the eventual engines for the sales of feminist books, grew up around them.

Prior to feminist bookstores, books by feminist publishers and writers were primarily sold hand-to-hand and through the mail. Mail-order sales of books is labor-intensive; publishers received the orders through the mail or on the telephone, then they pack and ship books directly to the purchaser. Direct to consumer distribution benefits small publishers; it connects them closely with readers. Publishers know immediately demand for their books and often receive immediate feedback from readers. Distribution, however, consumes resources. It requires time and money, of which small publishers never have enough. Thus, publishers need good distributors—people and businesses that thrive on marketing and promotion and that have solid relationships with bookstores and other retail outlets.

In late 1974, three women, each with experience marketing and distributing lesbian-feminist materials, wondered, was there a need for a distributor dedicated to distributing feminist and lesbian work? Could a feminist distributor function as an independent business? Helaine Harris, Cynthia Gair, and Lee Schwing saw the opportunity for a feminist distribution company and created Women in Distribution (WinD). The story of WinD mirrors the growth in feminist publishing during the late 1970s. More importantly, the story of WinD illuminates the ways that feminist businesses negotiated feminist principles within a capitalist economy, and WinD also demonstrates how feminist businesses experienced the increasing neoliberal economy in the United States and named it as a threat to feminism and lesbian-feminism.

WinD began modestly with a capital investment of \$1,200 from its founders.²²⁶ Like the WPC, Diana Press, and Daughters, WinD was a business, and it was grounded in the WLM. Gair and Harris were members of The Furies and founders of Olivia Records. On November 11, 1974, Harris, Gair, and Schwing launched WinD as a national distribution company in a letter to feminist colleagues and activists. They cited the “upsurge of woman produced and woman oriented products such as books, calendars, periodicals, records, and posters” as the reason for the company, and they recognized the desires of producers of these materials to “get into the hands and influence a great many women, women already in the movement and those not yet a part of it.”²²⁷ WinD’s intention was to aid producers of woman-oriented products with effective distribution.

²²⁶ Dear Sister Letter August 10, 1976, Folder “WinD,” File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives. In 2010 dollars, \$1,200 is the equivalent of \$4,808. Source: <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>.

In April 1975, WinD mailed its first “catalogue.” It was a small flyer, measuring 8.5” x 7”, with eleven books featured on the inside and a statement on the outside about WinD. The copy of the catalogue that I saw was postmarked April 21, 1975 and hand-addressed with red ink on the blue flyer. In the catalogue, WinD proclaimed, “We want to be the liaison between you, the retail outlet, and the small press and independent publisher.” They further noted, “The items in this preview catalog represent a wide range of personal/cultural/political viewpoints of women today.”²²⁸ The description of materials as “personal/cultural/political” demonstrates the currency of these three words to capture the burgeoning material production of feminism. The slashes in the descriptor reflects the multiplicity of feminist visions for material production and the inability of (patriarchal) language to neatly describe or categorize it.

Even though the initial offerings of WinD were small, the catalog had a range of materials, including periodicals: *Sojourner*, published in Boston, and *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, published in Washington, DC; books from feminist publishers: Sharon Isabell’s *Yesterday’s Lesson* (Women’s Press Collective), *Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement* (Diana Press), and *I’m Running Away from Home But I’m Not Allowed to Cross the Street: A Primer on the Women’s Movement* (Pittsburgh: KNOW, Inc.);²²⁹ books from independent publishers: two books from Times Change Press (an

²²⁷ Dear Friends letter from Harris, Gair, and Schwing, November 11, 1974, Folder “WinD,” File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

²²⁸ WinD flyer, Folder “Women Publishers and Presses,” Box 11, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Archive ca. 1972-1994, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²²⁹ KNOW, Inc. was a feminist publisher spearheaded by Anne Pride. Little has been written on KNOW but they were an important early WLM pamphleteer.

independent publisher specializing in radical/leftist books) and a book by alta from The Crossing Press (the first book in The Crossing Press feminist series); and a record by feminist singer Willie Tyson from Lima Bean Records. In spite of its modest presentation, the array of materials foreshadowed what was to come for WinD - a broad catalogue of interest to women throughout the United States. This first catalogue promised the second in September 1975 followed by a spring catalog in March 1976.

The September 1975 catalogue featured 29 books, records, posters, and postcards. A year later, in September 1976, WinD had 186 titles and over 200 accounts from “women’s centers, women’s bookstores, universities, libraries, and establishment bookstores across the country.”²³⁰ The growth of WinD mirrors the growth of feminist presses and independent feminist publishing by writers and artists during this period.

The business practices of WinD illustrate the ways that lesbian-feminists negotiated operating a feminist business within a capitalist context. In a letter to colleagues preparing to attend the first Women In Print Conference in Nebraska in August 1976, Gair and Harris²³¹ described their feminist commitments. “From working in Olivia Records we knew how to create a basic business structure and recognized the contradictions and problems involved in setting up a corporate structure with matriarchal/socialist goals.” I note their desire to set up a corporate structure with “matriarchal/socialist goals.” As in the initial WinD catalog, the slash indicates the way multiple ideologies were yoked together, expressing the excitement of the WLM at the time and the ability of feminists to embrace multiple theories. Matriarchal and socialist

²³⁰ Dear Sister Letter August 10, 1976, Folder “WinD,” File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

²³¹ Lee Schwing had dropped out of the company by this point.

overlap and diverge in the meanings they suggest; yet both commitments were important to Gair and Harris and to their audiences. The word matriarchal has multiple valences. In cultural feminism, matriarchal expresses a world controlled by women and deriving its values through mothers, matriarchs, rather than through fathers, patriarchs. Matriarchal also suggests a systemic alternative to patriarchy. Lesbian-feminists envisioned matriarchy as not simply a flip of patriarchy in which women, not men, controlled resources but rather as a different system, egalitarian and not oppressive. Through WinD, Gair and Harris were building a business, indeed a corporation, but with an alternate structure that expressed values congruent with the values of their constituents, both feminist publishers and feminist booksellers. In the letter, Gair and Harris explicate how they enact their matriarchal/socialist commitments. They write, “[I]n WinD we have been trying to develop a feminist business which is non-hierarchical, does not exploit workers, is actually worker-controlled and does not exploit the consumer.”²³² Gair and Harris articulate exactly what they mean by yoking matriarchal and socialist together. They want to create a business that is non-exploitive to workers and consumers, echoing the values of socialism, and that embraces feminist principles with an absence of hierarchy and self-determination.

These business practices were not confined to the internal operations of the company. In the letter, Gair and Harris outline what they want to discuss at the Women In Print (WIP) Conference. Gair and Harris acknowledge that the profit margins for WinD are small and that they need strategies to make their business more economically viable. Finding business solutions for WinD was not simply an internal problem; they present the

²³² WIP Letter, Box 13, Folder Women in Distribution, 1977-1981, Catherine Nicholson Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

situation to the feminist community as a challenge. At the WIP conference Gair and Harris, together with the community of feminists preparing to gather for the conference, want to talk about how their business can both work economically and support the work of others in the movement.

Gair and Harris frame their provocative idea to sustain WinD as a political action. They outline one solution to the challenges of growing WinD as cutting “down the effect of male competition.” Although feminists were invested in creating an alternate world that was feminist and female-centered, the daily realities of life at WinD meant that they operated “in direct competition with male distributors (who have access not only to establishment books, but also to many of the very same books that we distribute).” To eliminate this competition, Harris and Gair wanted feminist publishers to cease working with male-owned distributors and instead provide exclusive distribution rights to their books to WinD. They wrote, “If we are truly trying to set up a network through which feminists in print can support each other, and since feminist distribution companies are set up to distribute books by women to women then there is no need to distribute through male distribution organizations.”²³³ In short, Gair and Harris wanted publishers to sign exclusive distribution agreements with WinD to guarantee that WinD was the only sales channel for bookstores and retail outlets for publishers they represent.

To bolster their argument, Gair and Harris continue, “There are now feminist distribution companies which deal effectively with many of the problems of distribution and are working out the other problems.” Although I am not sure specifically what ‘other problems’ Gair and Harris reference, there are always issues between publishers and

²³³ Ibid.

distributors. Feminism and shared political commitments may mitigate some of these issues, but they don't eliminate them. Feminist publishers complained about WinD's distribution policies, the quality of shipping, and catalog representation, among other issues. WinD, on the other hand, had to deal with issues arising from missed publication dates, lack of stock, and publishers with unrealistic sales expectations, issues not too different from the tensions between all publishers and distributors. In addition, the sheer physical variety of materials published by feminist publishers must have created distribution challenges, particularly with storage and shipping. Although many of the materials published by feminist presses complied with book standards,²³⁴ some of the best selling books were unique in their size. Grahn's *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*, for instance, was 8 1/4 inches wide by 7 inches high. Moreover, the volume of staple-bound books without a perfect spine emblazoned with a title creates storage problems; staple-bound books don't sit upright on shelves easily and, without the title on the spine, they are difficult to identify when picking and packing for shipment. One solution to this myriad of challenges is mutual support within the feminist publishing community. Gair and Harris conclude their letter with the plea, "[W]e can only survive only if we are supported by feminist presses." In their appeal, Gair and Harris emphasize mutuality as crucial if the feminist publishing environment is to survive and thrive.

The request for exclusive distribution rights must have been hotly contested. For the next two years, Gair and Harris tried to convince Diana Press to sign an exclusive

²³⁴ Standard book sizes for hardcover books, paperback books, mass market paperback books, and children's books maximize the efficiencies in distribution for storage and shipping.

agreement. Reid and Czarnik refused.²³⁵ While there would have been benefits to WinD for such an agreement, primarily increased sales for WinD and new accounts as every bookseller would have had to order from WinD, the benefits to the publishers would have been minimal—and may have even meant a loss in sales. Commercial publishers secure exclusive distribution agreements because of their size and reach. Large distributors have aggressive sales forces, strong fulfillment practices, and good customer service. For small distributors, like WinD, the tension between securing exclusive distribution rights and having a distribution network large enough to support those rights was a business conundrum. WinD needed to grow to hire more people and expand their distribution, but, undercapitalized, growth was difficult.

How Gair and Harris made this request for exclusive distribution rights—through an open letter to WIP conference participants—is significant. First, it shows a method of thinking about and addressing problems in community contexts; Harris and Gair outlined the issues in a letter to all conference participants and then discussed it at the conference. Second, it demonstrates the currency of separatist practices in non-lesbian contexts. Separatism is a political practice that is not always exclusive to lesbians even though it is often described as lesbian separatism. For WinD, proposing a separatist business practice had both political and theoretical value but also important economic implications. Finally, this request demonstrates the interconnections between the burgeoning feminist businesses; women saw themselves not in antagonistic or competitive relationships but in relationships of solidarity and mutuality.

²³⁵ Letter from Cynthia Gair to Diana Press October 7, 1977, Folder “WinD,” File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

Even though exclusive distribution rights were rebuffed by Diana Press and other feminist presses, WinD experienced enormous growth during its four years of operation. In 1979, Harris and Gair wrote, “Each year between 1975 and 1978 our sales doubled. Our list of titles increased from 30 in 1975 to 600 in 1979. The number of bookstores and libraries that regularly order from us rose steadily from 25 in 1975 to 600 in 1979.”²³⁶ The sales data from Diana Press demonstrates the economic impact of WinD on small publishers. In 1975, WinD sold 1,711 books from Diana Press and paid Diana Press \$1,748. In 1976, the number increased modestly, in part because Diana Press published fewer new books; WinD sold 2,204 books from Diana Press and paid Diana \$1,971.74. In 1977, the number increased nearly four-fold. In 1977, WinD sold 8,089 books from Diana Press and paid them \$13,926. In 1978, the number slipped slightly with 6,619 books sold and a payment of \$12,950, still a strong performance. In 1977 and 1978, these are significant sales numbers - and significant revenue - for Diana Press. Strong numbers continued in the early part of 1979 (reports are available through March of 1979) with WinD selling 2,575 books from Diana Press and paying them \$5,416.²³⁷

In spite of the growth in sales both for individual publishers and to an ever-broadening group of retailers, WinD continued to lose money each year it operated. By the summer of 1979, Gair and Harris anticipated more losses as the business continued to grow. “The challenge for all distributors is that distribution works as a way to earn money only through high volume.” In distribution, like publishing, the margins are small. WinD

²³⁶ Dear Friends Letter July 1979, Box 13, Folder Women in Distribution, 1977-1981, Catherine Nicholson Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²³⁷ Multiple sources compiled from “WinD” folder, File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

purchased books on consignment at fifty percent of retail price. WinD sold the book at sixty percent of retail to bookstores and other retail outlets. The ten percent difference between purchase and sale price is the revenue retained by WinD. Gair and Harris explained, “[I]f we sell \$1,000 worth of books in a week we make a ‘profit’ of \$100. Over half of that \$100 will be spent on packing costs and most of the remainder will go for publicity—for catalogs, flyers, promotions, etc. That leaves little or no money for salaries, rent, and overhead.” In July 1979, Harris and Gair realized that the business was not viable. They wrote to the publishers, “we have decided that Women in Distribution must be dissolved.”²³⁸ They said, “Three main factors have influenced our decision. . . .the financial position of WinD; the activities of the small and women’s presses; and the activities of the major publishers.”²³⁹ The financial position of WinD was unsustainable. Even if WinD raised its distribution fee from 10 to 15% of retail sales, there wasn’t enough revenue to support the business. Moreover, the volume of books being sold wasn’t large enough, even if they expanded the company’s mission and distributed books from other, non-feminist small presses. The collapse of WinD into bankruptcy in August 1979 represented a significant financial, practical, and symbolic loss to feminist publishers.

In addition to the challenging business model of distribution, external economic, social, and political factors affected WinD and contributed to its demise. WinD demonstrates how the broader economic climate shapes the economic realities of feminist

²³⁸ Dear Friends Letter July 1979, Box 13, Folder Women in Distribution, 1977-1981, Catherine Nicholson Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²³⁹ Ibid.

businesses. In 1979, the United States was inching to a major recession with unemployment at 6% in August of 1979 and GDP showing only modest growth in 1979.²⁴⁰ WinD experienced early the effects of the slowing United States economy. In their letter, Gair and Harris wrote, “We have been experiencing extreme difficulties collecting from many of our bookstore accounts in the last six months. Bookstores that have been reliable in the past are now paying 90 to 120 days late. Some are not paying at all.”²⁴¹ Late payments of accounts receivable can have a crippling effect on small businesses and did on WinD. In addition, Gair and Harris write, “Several stores have gone out of business, leaving large due amounts unpaid.”²⁴² The loss of accounts, small feminist bookstores, not only created the problem of bad debt for WinD but also reduced their overall sales. Gair and Harris continue, “In the last three months, we have seen sales go down twice their usual summer rate of decrease. More bookstores are making returns, rather than pay for shipments.”²⁴³ Small businesses like WinD and their bookstore clients experience early the effects of relatively small changes in unemployment, for instance, or sluggish overall economic growth. These economic conditions can have immediate and sobering effects on small businesses, including feminist businesses. The slowing and sluggish United States economy combined with the lack of access to capital to weather difficult periods and leverage growth, which women widely understood as a challenge for

²⁴⁰ Source: <http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/rec1980.htm>.

²⁴¹ Dear Friends Letter July 1979, Box 13, Folder Women in Distribution, 1977-1981, Catherine Nicholson Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

feminist businesses, was the death knell of WinD. Ultimately, the cultural capital of shared feminist commitments, central to WinD's business model, was unable to compensate for the slowing United States economy.

In addition to the economy, changes in the publishing industry affected WinD. Gair and Harris note that increasingly trade and large corporate publishers publish titles of interest to feminists and lesbians. Gair and Harris wrote, "We feel this phenomenon is disastrous. . . for the growth of WIND and other alternative distributors and publishers."²⁴⁴ The adoption of feminist titles by trade publishers is a Janus-face phenomenon. For authors, trade publishers helped their work reach a larger public through robust distribution and presence in a wide range of non-specialist bookstores. For feminist publishers and bookstores, the adoption of feminist titles by trade publishers meant fewer books for feminist publishers, smaller sales margins, and increased competition for the books they published. This dynamic, the relationship between the small presses and the commercial presses, is one that is discussed and debated by women throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

There are a number of registers to the debate within feminist communities about the value of publishing with independent, feminist presses versus commercial presses. Gair and Harris felt that the phenomenon of feminists and lesbians publishing with trade publishers was disastrous "for freedom of speech and expression."²⁴⁵ Gair and Harris, like other feminist activists in lesbian print culture, believed that commercial publishers usurped lesbian-feminist ideas and exploited them for capitalist profit that benefited

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

patriarchy and did not contribute to the feminist revolution. Moreover, they feared the dynamics of the co-optation of the lesbian-feminist subculture. For Gair and Harris, the co-optation of feminist and lesbian-feminist work represented an erosion of freedom of speech and express.

The feminist communication circuit in the 1970s created a diverse and vibrant intellectual culture by networking a wide variety of publishers and bookstores. Although WinD did not succeed economically, WinD achieved extraordinary success in disseminating books and materials by feminists and lesbian-feminist broadly throughout the United States. While I emphasize the business and economic aspects of publishing to examine where and how publishing was successful and why as well as what that tells us about feminism, lesbian print culture is also a stake for freedom. Publishing and distribution are business and economic activities, but to publish and distribute books by lesbians is also a political activity, one that makes a stake for free speech and uncensored expression. Lesbian print culture contributes to a diverse intellectual, social, and political climate. When that is lost, as Gair and Harris note, it is at our own peril.

Chapter 2

Persephone, Long Haul, Kitchen Table Press

351 Boylston Street

The Arlington Street Church at 351 Boylston Street in Boston's Back Bay is your destination this evening. May 9, 1981. You walk with purpose, trying to exude more confidence than you have. You are nineteen, or thirty-nine, or fifty-nine. Just coming out. That is to say, just saying to others that you are, or might be, a lesbian. Lesbianism for you is mainly intellectual right now. That is, an idea, not a practice. You've loved many women, of course, but not well, you know, *loved* them. As you think about this, you realize that aren't exactly sure why you are going to this event. Yes, you have always been a reader, bookish even. But not a fan of poetry *per se*. You wonder if perhaps this is a mistake. Who will be there? What is a "Lesbian Poetry Reading?" You are even, perhaps, a little afraid of what you will do when you arrive at 351 Boylston Street. You pull your jacket tighter around you. It isn't cold, the mid-fifties. A spring day, for Boston.

You try to remember where you found the flyer—stuffed into a copy of *Gay Community News* that someone left at the bar? Or maybe someone in your reading group gave it to you last week. Yes, that is it. The feminist reading group. You were intrigued but quickly folded the flyer, stuffed it in your book, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, lest the group members think you were too interested in a lesbian reading. You see the church at the corner of Boylston and Arlington, but you are early, too early, so you turn to the right and walk up to the public gardens. The Arlington Street Church is a grand edifice. You see women walking to the church, study them carefully, curiously. After a

few minutes in the garden, which now smells fecund, promising that soon spring will arrive, you turn and walk back down Arlington Street to the church. More women are walking in. You do not know that the reading will include twelve readers, after opening remarks by Barbara Smith. You do not know that this reading celebrates the publication of *Lesbian Poetry* by Persephone Press. You do not know that inside the church are the readers: Elly Bulkin, Pat Parker, Cherríe Moraga, Jan Clausen, Marcie Hershman, Adrienne Rich, Paula Gunn Allen, Joan Larkin, Audre Lorde, Robin Becker, Michelle Cliff and Judy Grahn. You do not know that many of the poets will read not only their own poems from the anthology but also the poems of other poets not in attendance. You do not know any of this. You do not know that as you walk in the door, a smiling woman will greet you and press a printed program into your hand. You do not know that this will be a relief – something to read as you slide into a seat near the back of the hall. You will read the readers’ biographies obsessively and browse advertisements from local business and forthcoming books from Persephone Press. You do not know that there will be over 900 women at the event.²⁴⁶ You do not know any of this. Yet. Here, your hand on the door handle. Breathe in sharply. Pull open the door. Walk in. You hope to find something of yourself this evening.²⁴⁷

Introduction

The large audience gathered at the Arlington Street Church in May 1981 intimates the success of lesbian-feminist publishing in the early 1980s. Although by May 1981 all

²⁴⁶ Maida Tilchen, “Getting to Know Who We Are: The Lesbian Poetry Tradition, An Interview with Joan Larkin and Elly Bulkin,” *Gay Community News* (1 Aug 1981): 9-12.

²⁴⁷ The exhibit, “Lesbian Poetry Reading,” at the Lesbian Poetry Archive (www.lesbianpoetryarchive.org) contains source documents about this event.

of the presses from the first chapter—Diana Press, Women’s Press Collective, and Daughters, Inc.—stopped publishing or were moribund, new presses arose to reach readers, eager for lesbian-feminist books. A growing network of feminist bookstores, complemented by other feminist cultural activities such as women’s coffee houses, women’s centers on university campuses, and networks of grassroots activists, sold books to lesbian-feminists with increasing ease and frequency. By the early 1980s, when Persephone Press began publishing in earnest, first print runs routinely were 5,000 copies—and many of the books went into second and third printings. Lesbian-feminist presses in the 1980s demonstrate more business acumen and realism about publishing, a stark contrast to the idealism and blind faith of lesbian-feminist publishers during the 1970s. In this chapter, I consider three lesbian-feminist publishers in the 1980s that played a crucial role in lesbian-feminist identity elaborations: Persephone Press, Long Haul Press, and Kitchen Table Press. Lesbian-feminist identity elaborations—the exploration of the intersectional relationships between and among gender, sexuality, racial-ethnic formations, and religious affiliations—shaped political debate and political organizing in lesbian-feminist communities during the 1980s. Examining the identity elaborations of lesbian print culture, in particular through the three presses in this chapter, reveals the contributions that identity elaborations made to a body of theory about the complexities of identity. Rather than understanding identity as fixed, static, or essentialist, as subsequent critics have suggested, lesbian-feminists during the 1980s struggled with identity as a protean category, worthy of continued, intensive examination. Moreover, they believed that examinations and elaborations of identity were crucial to building viable and meaningful political interventions to address and eliminate a variety

of oppressive paradigms, including sexism, homophobia, racism, economic inequality, and imperialism.

Identity elaborations, a term I prefer to the more widely embraced “identity politics,” were a central concern of feminism in the 1980s. Diana Fuss is one of many feminist theorists who examine identity politics and the effects of identity politics on the WLM. In 1989, Fuss publishes her evaluation of “identity politics” during the WLM in *Essentially Speaking*; after its publication, *Essentially Speaking* becomes a crucial text for appraisals of identity politics. On balance, I agree with Fuss’s analysis in *Essentially Speaking*; I argue, however, that Fuss simplifies and flattens the intellectual and political engagements of lesbian-feminists with identity politics. The consequence of Fuss’s simplifications of lesbian-feminism, as well as those of subsequent critics, is that the original motives and intentions of lesbian-feminists—to grapple with the protean category of identity and resist simplistic thinking in doing so—are lost in current feminist historiography. Through the narratives of *Persephone*, *Long Haul*, and *Kitchen Table*, I nuance our understanding of identity politics with greater texture than Fuss and subsequent critics provide. By understanding the nuance and complexity with which lesbian-feminists did their work, we can resituate their work in its historical context and reappraise their activities and meanings.

Fuss describes “identity politics” as “the tendency to base one’s politics on a sense of personal identity—as gay, as Jewish, as Black, as female.”²⁴⁸ Fuss traces identity politics from the Combahee River Collective, who wrote in 1977, “We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our

²⁴⁸ Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 97.

own identity, as opposed to working on somebody else's oppression." In Fuss's genealogy, identity politics were elaborated by Cherríe Moraga and Barbara Smith. Fuss observes, "The link between identity and politics is causally and teleologically defined [by Smith and Moraga]; for practitioners of identity politics, identity necessarily determines a particular kind of politics."²⁴⁹ While I am sympathetic to Fuss's reading of identity politics and its elaborations, and I agree with her genealogy, I understand the nuances and implications of identity elaboration differently than Fuss and the many feminist critics who have continued Fuss's interrogation of identity politics.

Feminist engagements with racism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism in the late 1970s and early 1980s elaborate a deeper understanding of the relationships between and among politics and corporeal bodies. The textual evidence that Fuss provides supports a causal and teleological link between identity and politics, but Fuss focuses on a single statement amid a multitude of statements and voices thinking about these relationships. While Fuss's distillation is useful, particularly in understanding the broader adoption of "identity politics" as a legacy of the feminist movement of the 1980s and widely circulated outside of it, today the term does not capture the complexity of feminists' engagements with identity and with politics. Thus, I eschew the term identity politics and prefer the term identity elaborations. I map identity elaborations through lesbian-feminist publishing in the 1980s. Identity elaborations during the 1980s animated different performances of lesbian identity and racial-ethnic formations. Many of these identity elaborations emanated from books and the publishing practices of lesbian-feminist publishers.

²⁴⁹ Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 99.

Persephone Press operated from 1976 through 1983, though the bulk of their publishing happened from 1980 through 1983. Persephone Press is significant for a number of reasons. First, Persephone used community organizing as a central strategy to sell books. Second, the women of Persephone Press articulate a lesbian-feminist response to differential power between publishers and authors, particularly when questions of power intertwine with questions of race. Third, Persephone Press published books that distilled and extended various identity formations crucial to feminism in the 1980s.

Long Haul Press was a small press operated by Jan Clausen. Clausen operated Long Haul Press from her home in Brooklyn, NY. Unlike Persephone, Clausen published not to build a business but to share books and ideas within the lesbian-feminist communities. A poet herself, Clausen produced a small corpus of high-quality books that influenced lesbian-feminist thought. When the books she published needed a bigger audience, she released the rights to the authors to pursue other publishing agreements. While Clausen's publishing practices were different from those of the women of Persephone, her books, like the books of Persephone, articulated important developments in lesbian-feminist theory. The publication and circulation of the germinal text, *Yours In Struggle*, proved especially influential. Long Haul Press demonstrates the ways that lesbian writers and publishers generated lesbian-feminist theory through lived experiences, and Clausen's personal story demonstrates how identity elaborations personally affected feminists—and how identity elaborations changed during the 1980s.

Kitchen Table Press (KTP) had an extraordinary impact on feminism in the 1980s. During the WLM, KTP was the first press founded by and for women of color. KTP is revered in the literature as a model of empowerment for women of color within

the political and economic habitus of publishing. Rather than examining how KTP is exceptional among feminist presses, however, I situate KTP as an important publisher within the tradition of feminist publishing in the United States. As a result of the nearly hagiographic treatment of KTP in the existing scholarly literature, KTP becomes exceptional for publishing by women of color; in comparison, other lesbian-feminist publishers are positioned as monocultural (white). In fact, other lesbian-feminist publishers actively engaged in anti-racist publishing and multicultural publishing. KTP is, however, an important feminist, and lesbian-feminist, publisher. KTP's work was vital to identity elaborations, and KTP made important contributions not only to feminism but to the history of lesbian-feminist publishing.

Feminist politics of the 1980s focused keenly on identity elaboration. Lesbian publishers were crucial to this work through both the books that they published and through their publishing processes. By examining KTP, Long Haul, and Persephone, I trace how books contributed to feminist conversations about identity elaborations and racial formations in the 1980s.

Persephone Press

From 1976 through 1983, Persephone Press (hereafter Persephone) published fourteen books, beginning with Sally Gearheart's and Susan Rennie's *A Feminist Tarot*. When the press folded in May 1983, Persephone had three additional books planned, Barbara Smith's *Home Girls*, Alice Bloch's *The Law of Return* and Michelle Cliff's *Abeng*. Persephone's books were enormously influential to feminist identity formations and Women's Studies as an academic discipline throughout the 1980s. Early in its incarnation, the founders of Persephone echoed political analyses from Diana, Daughters,

and WPC about publishing and feminism. For instance, in a 1980 interview with *Equal Times*, Gloria Z. Greenfield and Pat McGloin said, “We are using publishing as a strategy for the building of a women’s revolution.”²⁵⁰ By the early 1980s, however, Persephone approached publishing differently than its predecessors. They leveraged over \$100,000 in loans to publish books, aggressively promoted and marketed their books, and eventually approached commercial publishers to acquire Persephone. In spite of their business savvy, Persephone did not survive as a publisher. Debt, combined with the emotional turmoil of intense political engagements, led to the end of Persephone. The rise and fall of Persephone as a lesbian-feminist publisher exemplifies lesbian-feminist principles, conversations, and motivating ideologies in the early 1980s; the legacy of Persephone lies in the way its books prompted new conversations and contributed to new identity formations in feminism in the 1980s.

Persephone began as Pomegranate Productions, a project of three women: Pat McGloin, Gloria Z. Greenfield, and Marianne Rubenstein.²⁵¹ In April 1976, Pomegranate Productions produced a conference on women’s spirituality. Titled “Through the Looking Glass: A Gynergetic Experience,” the conference brought together feminists like Sally Gearheart and Z. Budapest to discuss spirituality as a feminist issue. Reactions to the

²⁵⁰ Marilyn Weller, “Women’s Own Media,” *Equal Times* 5, no. 98 (October 13-26, 1980).

²⁵¹ Carol Cain was a member of Pomegranate Productions initially, but left the group during the summer of 1976 (Cynthia Rich, “Persephone Press,” *Sinister Wisdom* 13 (1980), 81).

conference were split. Some women raved about the connections being made between feminism and spirituality; others bemoaned it as the end of feminism.²⁵²

Writing for *off our backs*, Hope Landrine and Joan Rosenburger describe the conference as split between “spiritualists” and “politicalists.” They describe the “spiritualist camp” as “women who more or less felt that women could do nothing to effect change in the system of patriarchy,” whereas the “politicalist camp” consisted of “women who felt we could effect change in the system of patriarchy.” These different attitudes toward change resulted in different political practices. For the “spiritualists,” according to Landrine and Rosenburger, “the future of the movement should be in the direction of withdrawal to worship the Goddess, practice magic, return to the Female Principle, reject anything associated with patriarchy, and cultivate psychic powers”; for the “politicalists,” “the modus operandi of the movement should be one of economic bonding on the part of all women and, then, direct political action.” Landrine and Rosenburger mourn the fact that “the political right-on sisters” were a smaller contingent “and thus had less control over the conference.”²⁵³ Landrine and Rosenburger describe the conference attendees within a binary; I suspect that conference attendees extended along a larger continuum. Nevertheless, Landrine and Rosenburger’s description of the

²⁵² Samn Stockwell recalls attending a conference on women’s spirituality in Boston (most likely this conference, but Stockwell could not be certain) with Patty Bowman. After the conference, Patty said, “Well, this is the end of the women’s movement, sister, because there will be no one to fight on the front line if people are sprinkling corn meal on the front sidewalk.” Bowman’s colorful assessment of the conference reflects one of many views of the conference.

²⁵³ Hope Landrine and Joan Rosenburger, “Through the Looking Glass: A Conference of Myopics,” *off our backs* 6, no. 5 (June 30, 1976): 12.

two different mindsets among feminists at the conference reflects how they experienced the event and how feminist histories portray this time period.

In 1976, the WLM had been in full force since 1968, especially on the east and west coasts, from where most conference attendees hailed. The WLM was fueled by rage and outrage about women's treatment; this type of energy is difficult to sustain. As a result, for some WLM activists, by 1976 the initial exuberance of the WLM waned. To address this waning energy, new models of engagement, beyond consciousness-raising and direct political action, began to emerge; these models enabled some women to enact feminist beliefs and commitments. Landrine and Rosenburger portray the different analyses of activists as either positivist or defeatist; both are reasonable responses to and analyses of patriarchy. Different analyses about the root causes of sexism and patriarchy prompt different solutions, including feminist spirituality, lesbian separatism, political reform, and cultural production. Rather than polarizing any of the analyses or solutions as positive/negative or productive/destructive, I am interested in how the Pommies (as friends of the women behind Pomegranate Productions called them) built the business Persephone from this moment of competing ideologies.

Landrine and Rosenburger describe the conflict as between "spiritualists" and "politicalists"; Echols stages the conflict between radical feminism and cultural feminism. In reality, feminists had multiple, variously conflicting and overlapping analyses of sexism and patriarchy, and all of these analyses inspired important feminist work. In the mid-1970s, the Pommies navigate conflicting ideologies about the feminist revolution to create Persephone. Persephone began with a conference that expressed one set of feminist concerns focused on spirituality, but by the early 1980s, through book

publishing, Persephone had produced a new set of identities and ideologies reflecting contemporary feminist concerns.

Pomegranate Productions entered book publishing in conjunction with the conference. At the conference, it distributed Sally Gearheart's and Susan Rennie's *A Feminist Tarot*. Gearheart and Rennie self-published *A Feminist Tarot* under the press name Pandora's Boox. *A Feminist Tarot* was an off-the-grid book with no ISBN to make it recognizable to the book trade. Gearheart and Rennie printed 300 copies of *A Feminist Tarot* for the conference; they gave the Pommies exclusive distribution for the book. Pomegranate Productions retained 40% of sales revenue to fund speakers' travel to the Boston conference; they paid Gearheart and Rennie 60% of the revenue.

A Feminist Tarot was an extraordinary success; the initial printing sold out at the conference. In June 1976, the Pommies reprinted 1,000 copies of the book, paying \$337 for typesetting and \$655 for printing and binding.²⁵⁴ They advertised and promoted *A Feminist Tarot* and quickly sold all 1,000 copies of the second printing by March 1977. In January 1977, Greenfield wrote to Gearheart and Rennie about the success of this venture and asked if Pomegranate Productions could formally be the publisher of the book—not simply act as printing coordinator and distributor.

As publishers, the Pommies wanted to make *A Feminist Tarot*, “a bit slicker in appearance” with “a semi-gloss cover” and a “perfectly-bound” spine. About these potential aesthetic improvements to the book, Greenfield wrote, “The reading of Tarot is

²⁵⁴ Carton 5, Folder “Feminist Tarot Production Costs,” Persephone Press, Schlesinger, Radcliffe College.

often a ritual, and its nice to have aesthetic incorporated into the ritual.”²⁵⁵ For the Pommies, the physical appearance of the book was important; Greenfield connects the aesthetics of the book object—how it looks and feels to readers—with its function as a ritual tool demonstrating the importance of the material object to readers and to her as a publisher. Gearheart and Rennie agreed to let the newly renamed Persephone Press publish *A Feminist Tarot*. In June 1977, Persephone published the second edition of *A Feminist Tarot*, printing 3,000 copies. By November 1978, all of those copies has sold; they ordered 5,000 copies in the second printing of the second edition. This printing lasted them until March of 1981, when they ordered the third printing of the second edition, this time with over 7,500 copies. In total, Persephone printed 16,800 copies of *A Feminist Tarot* and sold them all.

In the late 1970s, Persephone Press acted as the distributor for Elana Dykewomon’s book *They Will Know Me By My Teeth*, published by Megaera Press. In 1980, Dykewomon earned \$152.25 in royalties from Persephone Press for the sale of 87 copies during the first quarter of 1980.²⁵⁶ In May 1980, Greenfield wrote to Dykewomon that the distribution “has never been profitable for us—it costs more for us to include it in our brochures and to put it in a jiffy bag than we make in sales.”²⁵⁷ Greenfield confirmed this to Dykewomon, saying that the reason that Persephone distributed *Teeth* is “because

²⁵⁵ Greenfield correspondence. I note here the importance of aesthetics to the Pommies in 1977; this is a topic I discuss in depth in chapter 6.

²⁵⁶ Letter to Elana Dykewomon, April 7, 1980, Outgoing Correspondence Jan-June 1980, Box 2, Persephone Press, Schlesinger, Radcliffe College.

²⁵⁷ Letter to Elana Dykewomon, May 5, 1980, Outgoing Correspondence Jan-June 1980, Box 2, Persephone Press, Schlesinger, Radcliffe College.

who else will do it if we don't, especially with WIND gone."²⁵⁸ The distribution arrangement was contentious at times, particularly because Dykewomon as a lesbian separatist wanted her book "to be sold to and shared with women only."²⁵⁹ In 1980, Persephone said that they could not guarantee that the book would only be distributed to women as Dykewomon wished. This reality, combined with previous conflicts about the amount of money that Persephone paid Dykewomon and questions about how aggressively they marketed the book, led to Dykewomon's withdrawing from the distribution agreement.

Many of the small feminist publishers offered distribution services to other publishers and to individual women who had independently published books, particularly after 1979 when Women In Distribution declared bankruptcy. Although there were multiple book distribution companies in the United States at the time, feminist publishers had closer relationships to feminist bookstores, the primary sales engines of feminist books. This reality made distribution agreements with feminist publishers desirable for small and individual publishers. For feminist publishers, distributing books was not an economic windfall, as the relationship and financial arrangements between Dykewomon and Persephone demonstrates. Rather, distribution was done with a spirit of feminist sisterhood. The ideal of building alternate feminist institutions was central to many feminist economic activities in the 1970s and 1980s. Even for Bowman and Davis, with their vision of outdoing Random House, publishing was not a way to amass personal

²⁵⁸ Letter to Elana Dykewomon, May 5, 1980, Outgoing Correspondence Jan-June 1980, Box 2, Persephone Press, Schlesinger, Radcliffe College.

²⁵⁹ Teeth Flyer, Folder "Women Publishers and Presses," Box 11, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Archive ca. 1972-1994, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

wealth but to contribute to the feminist revolution. For feminist publishers the nexus between feminist organizing—what publishing was and is—and amassing economic power provided a strategy to facilitate a feminist revolution. It was a fraught strategy, however, and difficult to implement for small publishers like Persephone.

In January 1977, Persephone undertook its second book, *The Fourteenth Witch*, by Shelley Blue.²⁶⁰ Combining poetry and photography, *The Fourteenth Witch* was expensive to produce because of the more involved layout and design of the book. Persephone printed a small run of 1,000 copies, which eventually sold out. Although the second book wasn't a runaway success like *A Feminist Tarot*, *The Fourteenth Witch* brought a new woman to the collective publishing project: Deborah Snow, a photographer living in Sonoma and co-creator of *The Fourteenth Witch*, joined Persephone in 1978.²⁶¹ Snow became Greenfield's lover.

In July of 1978 at an editorial meeting, the women of Persephone—Greenfield, McGloin, Snow, and Rubenstein—articulated their vision for Persephone. They wrote, “We are a group of lesbians who realize that we can't have our works published by the patriarchy. We recognize the need to control our own thought. . . . We recognize that only lesbian sensibility can transform the decadent state of society.” This assertion marks the turn of Persephone from publishing books about “various aspects of women's spirituality,” as Joan and Chesman described the press in 1978, to being a consciously

²⁶⁰ The Pommies describe this in some accounts as their first book as they didn't secure rights to publish the Persephone Press edition of *A Feminist Tarot* until June 1977.

²⁶¹ Rubenstein stopped working with the Pommies in early 1977; Rubenstein and Greenfield were lovers and appear to have broken up around this same time.

lesbian publisher.²⁶² The women of Persephone noted that the audience for their books was “feminist women,” and that, through publishing, they sought “to provoke women to think and reclaim their lives” and to be “pioneering, inciteful, and insightful.” The Pommies concluded that their image and purpose is “to be the Provocative Lesbian Publishing House.”²⁶³ For the Pommies, books with a lesbian sensibility appealed to feminist women and would be a catalyst for greater feminist consciousness.

For their third book, Persephone returned to their best-selling author Sally Gearheart. In February 1979, Persephone published Gearheart’s series of linked short stories *The Wanderground - Stories from the Hill Women*. Like *A Feminist Tarot*, *The Wanderground* was another success. Persephone paid for an east coast tour for Gearheart to promote *The Wanderground*; Gearheart’s personal appearances supported the rapid sale of the book. Persephone sold translation rights to *The Wanderground* in Germany and Denmark, and licensed a Braille edition of the book.²⁶⁴

These first three books from Persephone, *A Feminist Tarot*, *The Fourteenth Witch*, and *The Wanderground*, express an emerging feminist formation of cultural feminism, with a focus on spiritual and matriarchal practices. While all three books are concerned with feminist spirituality, each book expresses cultural feminism differently. *The Wanderground*, in particular, became an important text to lesbian separatists. Gearheart’s stories about the Hill women narrate a future world occupied only by women after an apocalyptic event caused by patriarchal oppression and conflict. *The*

²⁶² Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 159.

²⁶³ Persephone Press Editorial Meeting July 23, 1978, folder “Meeting Notes 1979-1982,” Carton 6, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁶⁴ *Feminist Bookstore News* 4, no 3 (October 1980), 14.

Wanderground is a unique blend of utopian and dystopian fantasies that resonated powerfully with lesbian separatists' desires to build a world apart from patriarchy. All three of these books appealed to lesbians. *The Wanderground* and its appeal to lesbian separatists crystallized Persephone's focus as a lesbian publishing house.

Bolstered by the success of the first few books, Persephone and its three principles, Greenfield, McGloin, and Snowe, began learning more about publishing, including "taking courses in layout, design, and in all the important areas of financial accounting and marketing," acquiring new books, and securing loans to publish those books.²⁶⁵ In the earliest years of Persephone Press, the money to publish books came from the three founders and their families. Gloria Greenfield recalled in a 1980 interview, "Persephone for two years was a project that we paid for by housecleaning, by typing, by teaching, and by doing whatever we could to raise money."²⁶⁶ In the fall of 1979, the principles began paying themselves salaries and working full-time for Persephone.

A series of personal loans and a bank loan from the Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union (totaling \$100,000) supported the full-time labor of Greenfield, McGloin, and Snowe and enabled the expansion of Persephone. Greenfield and McGloin also had a knack for publicity. *Ms. Magazine* named Greenfield one of "80 Women to Watch in the 80s" in their January edition. In the *Ms.* article, Persephone was described as "a lesbian-feminist publishing house producing innovative material to foster lesbian sensibility and new ways of thinking." Moreover, Greenfield's goal for the new decade, according to *Ms.*, was "for women to view feminist presses not as an alternative but as

²⁶⁵ *Equal Times* 5, no 98 (Oct 13-26, 1980).

²⁶⁶ *Sinister Wisdom* 13 (1980), 82.

their most logical option.”²⁶⁷ Greenfield’s statement echoes the earlier assertions of Daughter’s Bowman and Arnold and the on-going debate among lesbian-feminist writers about whether to publish with small lesbian-feminist presses or with commercial presses.²⁶⁸

Persephone published four new titles in 1980: a reprint of Matilda Joslyn Gage’s *Woman, Church and State*, Michelle Cliff’s *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me To Despise*, Nancy Toder’s *Choices*, and an anthology edited by Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, *The Coming Out Stories*. Of these titles *The Coming Out Stories* was the runaway success.

Published in the spring of 1980, *The Coming Out Stories* was both an economic engine for Persephone Press and a public relations success. The forty-one personal narratives of *The Coming Out Stories* provided voice and visibility to lesbian experience. *The Coming Out Stories* corresponded with a similar anthology, *The Lesbian Path*, edited by Margaret Cruikshank.²⁶⁹ The two anthologies share some contributors; for instance, Cruikshank is included in *The Coming Out Stories*, and Judith McDaniel and Minnie Bruce Pratt are contributors to both anthologies. Although both anthologies were published in 1980, *The Coming Out Stories* circulated more broadly, thanks in part to the promotion and dogged determination of the women of Persephone. *The Coming Out Stories* sold out its first printing of 5,000 copies within six weeks.²⁷⁰ Persephone Press

²⁶⁷ *Ms. Magazine*, January 1980.

²⁶⁸ Lesbian writers debated the political implications of publishing extensively; see for example Arnold in *Quest*, Clausen in *Sinister Wisdom*, and Hodges in *Margins*.

²⁶⁹ Margaret Cruikshank, *The Lesbian Path* (Monterey, CA: Angel Press, 1980).

ordered a second print run of 10,000 copies, and by September 1980, Persephone had sold 8,000 copies of the book and sales continued briskly. *The Lesbian Path*, published by Angel Press, a publishing house owned by a heterosexual man, struggled to reach its audience. Grier's Naiad Press took over distribution in April 1981, but despite the similarities between the books, or perhaps because of the similarities between the books, *The Lesbian Path* never sold as well as *The Coming Out Stories*. For Grier, the experiences of these two books in the marketplace demonstrated the importance of lesbian-feminist publishers to lesbian books.²⁷¹ Together these two anthologies reflect the transition of personal narratives about lesbian lives from a psychoanalytic to a political focus. Writers in both anthologies define the past as a time when lesbianism was shaped by mental health professionals; in contrast, the present, in both of these anthologies, defines lesbian lives through a political, and distinctly feminist, consciousness.

In the summer of 1980, internal conflict marred the operations of Persephone. Persephone Press was a partnership of Greenfield, McGloin, and Snow; the three planned to incorporate the business formally. In the spring of 1980, the relationship between Greenfield and Snow came to an end; Snow began dating another woman, Mildred Gibson, an attorney with significant financial resources. In July of 1980, Greenfield and McGloin incorporated Persephone as a partnership without Snow—and without her knowledge. When Snow learned about the incorporation and her exclusion, she was enraged. Snow demanded \$20,000 from Persephone as payment for her share of the

²⁷⁰ “Persephone Sells Above Industry Norm” *Media Report to Women*, (September 1980): 5.

²⁷¹ Letter from Barbara Grier, April 27, 1981, Box 68, Folder “1981-1985, Folder 1 of 2,” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

business. Snow arrived at \$20,000 by speculating the value of the sale of the rights to a mass market edition for either *The Wanderground* or *The Coming Out Stories*.

Persephone's contracts precluded the sales of rights to "male publishing houses," but Snow approached at least two authors, Michelle Cliff and Cherríe Moraga, about terminating that part of the contract while Greenfield and McGloin were at a publishing conference in Copenhagen.²⁷² This bitter split led Snow to file a costly lawsuit, suing for her portion of the business. Greenfield and McGloin contested the lawsuit, demonstrating that the debts of Persephone far exceeded any perceived value. Eventually, Greenfield and McGloin paid \$4,000 to Snow in December 1981 to resolve the law suit.²⁷³ In the course of the dispute, Greenfield and McGloin spent nearly \$10,000 on legal fees; these fees plus the payment to Snow were the equivalent of publishing an additional book, or reprinting the books that they needed, badly, in the marketplace.²⁷⁴ Although the lawsuit was never publicly reported in the feminist press, it took valuable time, energy, and money from the operations of Persephone.

In spite of the lawsuit, the period between the fall of 1980 and the spring of 1982 was productive for Persephone. Each year Persephone published a series of important books, and at least one of them was a break-out success. In addition, Persephone adopted a variety of marketing strategies for selling books. Persephone initiated a book club to help support the press with a "lifetime membership" for \$500 and "autographed copies of

²⁷² Folder "Snow Litigation," Carton 6, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁷³ Folder "Evidence of Settlement," Carton 6, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

all Persephone books.²⁷⁵ Persephone conceptualized, planned, and promoted book launches as large, celebratory community events. They produced events for *Lesbian Poetry*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Nice Jewish Girls*, which each drew hundreds of attendees in the Boston area. In addition, Persephone paid for author tours; for instance, Michelle Cliff toured North Carolina, Houston, TX, Washington, DC, and Baltimore, MD in February and March of 1981. Persephone used books as a platform to promote lesbian authors and eventually to secure lesbian presence on television. Persephone's promotional activities simultaneously supported their mission and vision of realizing social change through books and ensured the strong sale of their books

In 1981, Persephone published four new titles: three anthologies—*Lesbian Fiction*, *Lesbian Poetry*, and *This Bridge Called My Back*—and a non-fiction book by Alice Bloch, *Lifetime Guarantee: A Journey through Loss and Survival*. From this list, *This Bridge Called My Back* was the runaway success, although all of the books were strong sellers. In 1982, Persephone published Evelyn Torton Beck's *Nice Jewish Girls*, Irena Klepfisz's *The Keeper of Accounts*, and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Persephone published only one book in 1983, Alice Bloch's *The Law of Return*.

The commercial success of books like *The Coming Out Stories* and *This Bridge Called My Back* created financial and business problems for Persephone. In order to reprint the books to keep them in the distribution system, Persephone had to borrow more money continuously. Revenue from sales, therefore, repaid investors—both individuals

²⁷⁵ *Equal Times* 5, no 98 (Oct 13-26, 1980). Ironically as Persephone was initiating their book clubs, the major book clubs in the United States were experiencing a decrease in their members. See Rubin and Radway.

and institutions like the local feminist credit union. There was little cash to put back into the business to pay for future books—or reprints of successful books.

By the middle of 1982, Persephone Press was having significant financial difficulties. In August of 1982, Greenfield summarized the effects of the economic recession, which gripped the United States, on Persephone in a letter to Elly Bulkin as two-fold. First, “with the declining economy, booksellers have not been paying,” and second, “printers have not been extending the usual credit line that they normally do.” Greenfield wrote that the printers “have been squeezing us dry to pay up front for reprints and new editions.”²⁷⁶ As a small business, Persephone encountered early the severe effects of the recession in the United States. The Press responded quickly to the situation. During the summer of 1982, Greenfield and McGloin did not pay themselves; instead, they took loans from their mothers to cover their living expenses. They decided not to “publish any new titles after the six forthcoming ones, for at least one year, so that we will not jeopardize the backlist.”²⁷⁷ Through the *Feminist Bookstore News* (FBN), Persephone asked feminist bookstores to order books directly so that Persephone could benefit from higher margins on the books, even though that involved additional time and labor for Greenfield and McGloin in fulfilling those orders. FBN described Persephone Press as “in the midst of that classic cash-flow problem that shows up in the midst of successful growth,” and explained how direct orders helped publishers. Through direct

²⁷⁶ Letter to Elly Bulkin August 27, 1982, Bound Outgoing Correspondence 1982, Carton 3, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

orders, Persephone gets “the full 60% (of the cover price of the book),” and they “get paid in 30 days which helps with paying the printers bills. A lot!”²⁷⁸

In addition to the financial pressures, Greenfield experienced burnout from the intensive schedule of running a publishing operation and from the increasing conflicts she encountered working in the community of lesbian-feminist writers. In December of 1982, when Persephone was in a precarious financial situation, Greenfield wrote to Elana Dykewomon about her increasing dissatisfaction with Persephone Press and the United States feminist movement.

I hate being in the United States, and I hate the American feminist movement, and I can't stand the trapped feeling that I have in Persephone any more. By the way none of this is for public broadcast—I'm assuming I am talking to you as you talk to me, as friends with respect for confidentiality. Anyway, I wanted to kill myself this past summer, thinking that I would have to stay in Persephone for the rest of my life, working with prima donna authors (of all classes and colors), and have to deal with the stress and madness, and then I realized that I didn't have to kill myself to get out—that I could walk out. So I've got a prison term of a couple more years here and then I split.

Greenfield's plan was to leave Persephone Press and go to live in Israel. As Greenfield explained to Dykewomon,

So, why Israel? Because I want to save my life. . . . Because I love it there. Have you been there? I love the deserts, I love the spirit in the air. Listen, I'd rather be there than here, and it is going to get alot worse here, and if I had a choice of being with Jewish assholes or goyishe assholes, I'd pick the Jewish assholes. And besides, Israeli women are beautiful to look at (I'm a self-admitted pig), and besides I want to live there because I can dream there and feel comfortable. I hate it here. I don't really want to die. . . I'm tired, Elana. I need to heal myself.²⁷⁹

This personal letter demonstrates the state of mind of Greenfield, confiding to a long-time friend. The interpersonal challenges of operating a publishing company in the lesbian

²⁷⁸ *Feminist Bookstore News* 6, no. 2 (September 1982): 6.

²⁷⁹ Letter to Elana Dykewomon December 1982, Bound Outgoing Correspondence 1982, Carton 3, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

feminist community, which Greenfield alludes to as her dealings with “prima donna authors” and “stress and madness,” cannot be underestimated. Lesbian-feminists scrutinized lesbian-feminist business practices in relationship to evolving ethics and ideals with zeal and at times ferocity.

Persephone’s financial difficulties were due primarily to the debt that the company was carrying, but the United States recession was a significant factor as well. Both of these could have been weathered, but a third financial roadblock came in early 1983. The IRS wrote to Persephone Press demanding past due payroll taxes. Persephone had failed to pay payroll taxes to the IRS since the beginning of staff positions in 1979. In 1983, the amount due was over \$15,000.²⁸⁰ The combination of these three factors—large debt payments, a recessionary economy, and debt to the IRS—meant that Persephone was without cash.

Greenfield and McGloin spent the early months of 1983 trying to save Persephone. They approached new investors; they asked authors to appear at benefits for Persephone; they encouraged bookstores to continue directly purchasing from Persephone. Ultimately, they could not secure enough money. They approached other publishers, including Alyson, The Crossing Press, and Beacon Press, but no one wanted to purchase the entire company.²⁸¹ In April 1983, Greenfield and McGloin began to liquidate the company’s assets including “the Xerox machine, conference table, and

²⁸⁰ Letter to Pat McGloin February 1983, Bound Outgoing Correspondence 1983, Carton 3, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁸¹ Various outgoing correspondence 1983, Carton 3, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

typewriters.”²⁸² By May 23, 1983, they transferred the company to bankruptcy receivership. In June 1983, Greenfield and McGloin sold Persephone to Beacon for \$15,000. The agreement between Beacon Press and Persephone stipulated that Beacon acquired rights to all of the books, but a number of the authors negotiated, often through lawyers, for the return of their rights and then sold their books to other publishers. A handful of the books went to Alyson Press, a Boston-based gay and lesbian publisher founded by Sasha Alyson; Barbara Smith brought *This Bridge Called My Back* and her forthcoming book *Home Girls* to Kitchen Table Press. In 1984, Beacon Press published Grahn’s book, *Another Mother Tongue*, which had been under contract with Persephone Press, to great acclaim.²⁸³

In immediate appraisals of Persephone Press, McGloin and Greenfield state that their feminist principles were the reason for their failure. Speaking to Jill Clark of *Gay Community News*, McGloin and Greenfield said “they felt ‘constantly conflicted’ about whether to operate Persephone in accordance with [publishing] industry standards and be financial healthy, or to do what they thought they as lesbian feminists should do, even when it seemed to be financially unwise.”²⁸⁴ Greenfield and McGloin maintained that their losses in 1981 and 1982 “were ‘due solely to our royalty structure,’ referring to the

²⁸² Molly Lovelock, “Persephone Press: Why Did It Die?,” *Sojourners* 9, no. 1 (September 1983): 4, 18.

²⁸³ Grahn won the Stonewall Book Award in 1985 for *Another Mother Tongue* from the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT) of the American Library Association.

²⁸⁴ Jill Clark, “Persephone Press Folds, Some Titles Purchased,” *Gay Community News* 11, no. 4 (August 5, 1983), 1.

fact that Persephone paid its authors over twice the royalties that other publishers pay.”²⁸⁵

While the royalty structure was generous by trade standards, the contracts stipulated that Persephone Press recouped their printing and publishing expenses first and then paid authors. Naiad Press used a similar structure, as did Diana Press. Naiad Press made this model financially sustainable, so Greenfield and McGloin’s claims of high royalties as a reason for their financial difficulties are not entirely accurate.

McGloin and Greenfield also cited their promotional efforts on behalf of each book as a financial challenge for the press and another departure from publishing industry standards. Speaking to Molly Lovelock of *Sojourners*, they said, “Should we not have funded large consciousness-raising events such as the *Nice Jewish Girls* and *This Bridge Called My Back* readings, which lost approximately \$3,000 each? These questions—and the very fact that we are asking them—disturb us. But they are important for all of us to consider.”²⁸⁶ The large public events that Persephone organized on behalf of its books did lose money, as McGloin and Greenfield note, but they also contributed to overall sales and visibility for the books. This is one of the areas of publishing where the feminist principles of McGloin and Greenfield—the commitment to spread the word about books as a part of their agenda for feminist social change—are in conflict with publishing industry standards.²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, in light of the overall debts and liabilities of Persephone, losing \$3,000 per event for a handful of events is a small amount of money and not directly responsible for the failure of Persephone.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Lovelock, “Persephone Press,” 18.

²⁸⁷ Commercial publishers invest in promotion and author travel only for books and authors with sales figures that far exceed those of small, lesbian-feminist publishers.

Ultimately, the failure of Persephone press was due to being overleveraged with debt and making common small business mistakes—including not paying the IRS for payroll taxes. The confluence of financial difficulties was more than Greenfield and McGloin could manage. Moreover, by early 1983, both were tired and burnt out from operating the press and responding to the many challenges of running a small business. In addition, Persephone, like all of the lesbian-feminist presses, operated with intense scrutiny from lesbian-feminist communities. Attention from lesbian-feminists was vital for the press to reach its target audience, but it also resulted in pressure for greater transparency and responsiveness to many ideological viewpoints, which at times conflicted with one another and with the business of publishing. In spite of Persephone's demise, its impact was extraordinary.

Persephone Press and Identity Elaborations

Books published by Persephone played crucial roles in feminist identity elaborations in the 1980s. Collectively, the books by women of color published by Persephone shape a dialogue about anti-racism and publishing. Persephone's effect on different identity elaborations can be understood best through the books that it published—and through the citation of these books in scholarly and popular work during the last thirty years. Two stories provide additional information about the stakes of identity elaboration in the early 1980s. These connected stories illuminate how individuals as writers and publishers produced and experienced the contours of identity elaborations in the early 1980s.

Through the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* (hereafter *This Bridge*), in particular, Persephone played a central role in articulating woman of color feminism

and the discursive formation woman of color. Woman of color feminism is a vibrant strand of feminism during the 1980s, elaborated through lesbian print culture. Exploring the dynamic engagement of race and sex in the lives of women of color, woman of color feminism transformed the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1980s with new issues and forms of political engagement as well as profound theoretical engagements. The discursive formation, woman of color, united African-American women, Asian-American women, Native American women, and Latina women as a common group, distinguished from white women. This discursive formation was a crucial dimension of anti-racist discourse and politics.

While *This Bridge* itself is the work of the editors and the individual authors, the women of Persephone played an important role in the book: producing it as a high quality trade paperback, promoting the book to readers, and distributing it to booksellers. Moreover, Persephone was not simply a publisher with little investment in the content of the book. To the contrary, racism and the effects of racism on feminist publishing were central concerns for the women of Persephone. In an interview with *Equal Times*, Greenfield and McGloin said, "One of the gaps. . . is the absence of published writings of Third World feminists."²⁸⁸ The overall catalogue of Persephone books demonstrates a commitment to publishing women of color authors; of the fifteen books published by Persephone, four (26.6%) are written or edited by women of color. In addition to their publishing, the women of Persephone engaged in a dynamic dialogue with Persephone authors about how to build an anti-racist politic within the press and within the larger lesbian-feminist movement.

²⁸⁸ *Equal Times* 5, no 98 (Oct 13-26, 1980).

Persephone also played a key role in articulating the identity, Jewish lesbian, through the publication of *Nice Jewish Girls* (hereafter *NJG*). The publication of *NJG* in April 1982 highlights multiple discussions about anti-Semitism in the WLM; Beck, the editor of *NJG*, and Greenfield were important voices in many of these discussions. Both of these stories about the elaboration of women of color identities and Jewish lesbian identities connect through the principal actors—women, lesbians, activists, authors, and publishers. All shared a commitment to developing lesbian-feminism as an ideological and political position and expressing it through publishing. These stories illuminate the significance of identity elaborations in the 1980s and the role of books in this work.

Much has been written about *This Bridge* and its effects on feminist identity formations during the 1980s.²⁸⁹ *This Bridge* can be described as nothing short of iconic. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge* gave voice to a range of women of color writers and activists; *This Bridge* made connections between and among women of color and explicated the effects of the racism and sexism on women's lives. Gloria Greenfield met Cherríe Moraga while publishing *The Coming Out Stories*. Adrienne Rich wrote the introduction to *The Coming Out Stories* and recommended Moraga to Greenfield as a contributor when the collection was nearing completion.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ See for example, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, edited by Cherríe Moraga (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990) and the introduction to *This Bridge We Call Home*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁹⁰ Gloria Z. Greenfield Letter to Cherríe Moraga Lawrence, October 25, 1979, Outgoing Correspondence 1976-1979 (bound), Carton 2, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger.

The Coming Out Stories includes Moraga's piece, "La Güera."²⁹¹ Moraga and Anzaldúa approached Persephone to publish the collection they imagined; the collection became *This Bridge*.

Persephone released *This Bridge* on May 28, 1981; three days later the publishers brought it to the NWSA Conference in Storrs, CT.²⁹² Persephone organized a large gala reading and celebration for the release of *This Bridge* on June 5, 1981 in Boston, MA.²⁹³ While the editors were critical of Persephone—wanting them to do more promotion and publicity—Persephone did an excellent job publishing the book by standards of both feminist presses and commercial presses. The first print run of 5,000 copies quickly sold out; in August 1981, Persephone printed an additional 10,000 copies of the book. Persephone ordered 5,000 more copies in a third printing of the book in July 1982.²⁹⁴ On March 31, 1983, as Persephone was folding, Persephone had sold 17,915 copies of *This Bridge*; Persephone paid \$15,138.93 in royalties to the editors.

While the history of *This Bridge* is exceptional in feminist publishing writ large, *This Bridge* is not an exceptional book for Persephone; that is, *This Bridge* is one of a number of anthologies that Persephone published and one of a number of books written

²⁹¹ Adrienne Rich was an important facilitator and connector in lesbian-feminist publishing communities during the 1970s and 1980s; in addition to her own work as a poet and essayist, Rich edited *Sinister Wisdom* with her partner Michelle Cliff from 1981 through 1983.

²⁹² Chela Sandoval writes about the conference in "Feminism and Racism" in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), which explores some of the dynamics of race within the conference.

²⁹³ Letter to *The Coming Out Story* Contributors, Folder "Correspondence 1981-1985 (folder 1 of 2)," Box 68, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Duke.

²⁹⁴ Folder "This Bridge Production Costs," Carton 5, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger.

women of color. Although they did not formally articulate it in public materials, Persephone's publishers had a strong personal and political commitment to publishing work by women of color by the early 1980s.

In a letter to Sally Gearheart, Greenfield describes an on-going conflict with Sarah Hoagland about race. Greenfield writes that she and McGloin had been in a "year long argument with her on her anthology on women and violence." According to Greenfield, Hoagland believes that "it is not her responsibility if black women are too lazy to submit articles for anthologies." Greenfield tells Gearheart, "We believe she is a racist pig." Greenfield continues that at Persephone they "insist" that their anthologies be "well representative of the lesbian community." Hoagland apparently described McGloin and Greenfield as "white honkies interested in quotas."²⁹⁵ The discussion about racism in publishing was particularly apt because another issue discussed by Greenfield with Gearheart is the possible adaptation of *The Wanderground* into a movie. Gearheart wanted the film to be cast with all women of color. Greenfield objected rigorously, noting, "You can't take white culture, white concerns, and white personalities and put colored skin on them. To do so is more than offensive—it is exploiting the anti-racist movement."²⁹⁶ Greenfield's blunt remarks to Gearheart about her book and about Hoagland demonstrate how Greenfield prioritized anti-racism in her work with Persephone.

McGloin also shared concerns about anti-racism in feminist publishing and the WLM. In a letter to Judith McDaniel and Maureen Brady, publishers of *Spinsters Ink*, on

²⁹⁵ June 1981 letter to Sally Gearheart, Outgoing Correspondence May-August 1981, Carton 2, Persephone Press, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

June 26, 1981, Pat McGloin wrote about a visit with Susan Wood-Thompson and Betty Byrd, who were working on the 1981 Women in Print Conference. McGloin wrote that one of the concerns she had about the meeting is that it “will be all white, and I think there has to be a consciousness about why that is, and what our responsibilities are to change that.”²⁹⁷ The 1981 Women in Print conference was not all white, in part because it included a broader group of women than just publishers and because the conference organizers initiated a dedicated fundraising campaign to support the travel expenses of women of color.

Persephone responded institutionally to position itself as an anti-racist ally; Greenfield and McGloin personally spoke out as anti-racist allies. Additional material publishing practices further illuminate the individual and institutional anti-racist commitments. McGloin and Greenfield hired other women of color to edit books by women of color. For *Zami*, they hired Smith and Moraga to edit the manuscript and provide editorial feedback to Lorde; they also hired Michelle Cliff as the copy editor for the final version of the manuscript. By engaging women of color in the process of creating books, McGloin and Greenfield endeavored to minimize the power differentials between them as publishers and women of color as authors.

Persephone adopted editorial guidelines written by Elly Bulkin for reviewing works by white women. In this undated document, Persephone defined the press as “a lesbian-feminist publishing house which intends to have an impact on society. We see our books as organizing tools for social change, and seek strongly woman-identified work

²⁹⁷ Outgoing Correspondence January - April 1981, Carton 2, Persephone Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

with the potential to both confront oppressive (i.e., sexist, homophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, classist) structures, and to move people to action.” The guidelines continue, “Persephone is committed to challenging racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, classism and ageism; therefore, we will not accept a manuscript which perpetuates these social structures.” This preamble is followed by “guidelines, developed by Elly Bulkin” for reviewing works by white women. What follows are a series of questions in five different categories—representation, audience, language, critical attitudes/assumptions, and sources. Questions include:

- To what extent are works included by women of color who represent different racial and cultural backgrounds?
- Are women of color represented by work dealing with race and racism as well as topics not primarily focused on race (feminist theory and criticism; overviews of contemporary poetry or novels by women)?
- Does the writer make any assumptions about the race of her audience and, if so, what implications does that have for women of color?
- Does she use terms connecting “black” or “darkness” to evil and negativity and “white” to goodness and innocence?
- Does she give equal value to the work of women of color and white women?
- Does she consider the implication of her subject for women of color?
- Does she show an awareness of work done in her field by women of color (including that published by Third World presses and periodicals) and include that in her bibliography?

It is difficult to say when and for how long these guidelines were used in reviewing work for Persephone Press, but these guidelines express the ideals of Greenfield and McGloin as anti-racist allies.

While books from Persephone are crucial to the articulation of different racial formations within feminism, and Greenfield and McGloin worked to be anti-racist allies, they had difficult relationships with women of color authors. Their perceived power as publishers contributed to tensions with women of color authors. In one incident, Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga, who were lovers at the time, confronted Greenfield and

McGloin about racism in a letter. In August 1981, McGloin and Greenfield were on vacation in Long Island; Smith and Moraga gave a contact telephone number for them to Rima Shore and Gloria Anzaldúa. Greenfield and McGloin were angry about the interruptions to their vacation. They were curt with Shore; they hung up on Anzaldúa. Greenfield and McGloin wrote about their anger to Smith and Moraga. Smith and Moraga responded:

The worst aspect of this whole mess is its racial ramifications. Whatever your intent, when a white woman is unjustifiably mean to a woman of color, it shows incredible insensitivity and unawareness of a whole history and dynamic of white people being in dominant positions over Third World people and using that domination to excuse individual cruelty. It is not enough to go on record publishing the works of Third World women. People don't become anti-racist overnight, but it involves a process of constant self-examination and weighing how even familiar behavior becomes unacceptable when the reality of racial power is a factor. In other words, hanging up on a white woman/author might be impolite, but it would be only that. The white woman would not have to even wonder if it was also motivated by negative racial feelings and be even more deeply hurt by having to ask this question. We're talking here about an unjustifiable reaction and not the righteous anger that can occur between any two human beings.

As Smith and Moraga state in the letter, attention to racism was not only an institutional concern; it was a personal concern, deeply tied to personal interactions and individual behaviors. The letter from Smith and Moraga continued with other concerns that they had about Persephone Press, including their decision not to publish a collection of poetry by Hattie Gossett, which Gossett placed with South End Press; Smith and Moraga felt it would get "so much less than the visibility it deserves" at South End. Smith and Moraga continue in the letter that Greenfield and McGloin

hold the purse strings. That's a fact. . . . We can't change the fact that you have the resources and financial power, that if shared, are indeed beneficial to us. (And it is to your credit that you have worked to achieve them.) What we want you to know is that the only way the actual material and racial differences between us become non-oppressive is when good judgment and respect for authors, as essential to the

production of books, is part of the bargain. These are the only conditions we can work under.

They end the letter affirming their “great faith” in “Persephone’s political commitment and our waiting to have a successful working relationship in the future.”²⁹⁸ This letter illuminates the ways that feminists thought about race and power within institutions and, just as significantly, within interpersonal relationships. While I am sure this was a stinging letter to receive for Greenfield and McGloin at the time, and a time-consuming and draining letter for Smith and Moraga to write, it demonstrates the thoughtful ways that feminists communicated with one another—and the ways that they understood societal power structures affecting interpersonal relationships.

In January 1982, less than a year after Persephone published *This Bridge* and six months after this letter from Smith and Moraga, the conflict between women of color authors and editors and Greenfield and McGloin became so profound that there was a facilitated conflict resolution meeting between the Persephone publishers and a group of women of color authors. Before I discuss this meeting, however, I turn to the second story, about anti-Semitism.

Like questions about anti-racism, questions about anti-Semitism were deeply personal. Persephone Press published *Nice Jewish Girls* in the spring of 1982. This book sold rapidly; by the fall of 1982, 8,000 copies sold. The process of assembling the book was a collaborative process between Evelyn Torton Beck as editor and Gloria Greenfield as publisher. This collaboration was not without conflict between the two—particularly about the quality of contributions and about individual contributors. Nevertheless, when

²⁹⁸ Folder Smith, Barbara, Carton 4, Persephone Press, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

the book was published, it coalesced the identity of Jewish lesbian as a standpoint with political, social, and spiritual meanings. Reviews, both inside and outside of the lesbian-feminist community, recognized the significance of *NJG*.

Nice Jewish Girls emerged from a broader discussion about anti-Semitism in the WLM. Greenfield herself was increasingly sensitive to anti-Semitism in the WLM. Two prominent incidents of anti-Semitism, particularly in the feminist press, happened in late 1981. First, in the November issue of *FBN*, *FBN* editor Carol Seajay made light of hearing that the bookstore Old Wives' Tales, where she worked in San Francisco, CA, was anti-Semitic because it didn't have particular books available. In addition to this, in the same issue, Celeste West, the author of the humorous column "Hotterline," under the pseudonym "Medea Matters," wrote that at the WIP conference she "learned that feminist publishing is controlled by JEWISH-WORKING-CLASS-LESBIANS and the 4-H." West's attempt at humor failed. The next issue of *FBN*, dated February 1982, contained a sampling of outraged letters to Seajay about the two comments. *FBN* printed letters from Sisterhood Bookstore in Los Angeles, CA, Lammas in Washington, DC, Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich, then editors of *Sinister Wisdom*, Pat McGloin, Maureen Brady of Spinsters Ink, and Nancy Bereano and Elaine Gill, both of The Crossing Press. This public controversy highlighted the ease with which anti-Semitic comments were made and the power of women in the community to speak out against them.

In a similar register, the December 23, 1981, issue of *Gay Community News* (GCN) contained a review by Amy Hoffman of Noretta Koertge's novel, *Who Was that Masked Woman?* Hoffman wrote:

Almost all the characters in this book are flat and incoherent, but this is particularly true of anyone who is not a midwestern WASP. The most disturbing

and offensive aspect of this book is its racism. Koertge is not malicious, but she is unforgivably ignorant. Tretona approaches anyone who is different from her with the most clichéd of liberal stereotypes and Koertge doesn't seem to make any judgements about this.

GCN received a number of letters to the editor about the review, with a range of responses. The letter from Koertge herself—a defense of the novel—concludes with this sentence, “The coffee-shop energy we might spend in trying to decide whether there is a tiny speck of racism in my little novel could be much better employed in fighting the economic and political institutions which really oppress people.”²⁹⁹ While Koertge’s novel is rife with racist stereotypes, for McGloin—and presumably Greenfield—it was also anti-Semitic. On January 20, 1982, Pat McGloin wrote to *GCN* about the novel, “The characterization of Jews in *Who Was That Masked Woman* propagates stereotypes of Jews as wealthy and sexually voracious. . . . This overwhelming concern with money on the part of the Jewish characters (and only the Jewish characters) propagates the image of the ‘greedy Jew’ whose focus is to ‘make it.’”³⁰⁰ McGloin also enumerates a number of racial characterizations in the novel as racist. These two situations demonstrate how the women involved with Persephone were learning to read and explain anti-Semitism and racism in feminist novels to a broad feminist audience. These incidents function as a form of consciousness raising, not only for McGloin and Greenfield, but for many of the women in their social, political, and publishing circles.

One crucial incident synthesized McGloin’s and Greenfield’s concerns about anti-Semitism within the WLM: a manuscript from Jan Clausen. In October 1980, Jan

²⁹⁹ *Gay Community News* 9, no. 26 (January 23, 1982), 4.

³⁰⁰ Letter to *GCN*, Outgoing Correspondence 1982, Carton 3, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

Clausen queried Persephone Press about her novel manuscript *Sinking, Stealing*. *Sinking, Stealing* is the story of Josie and Ericka. Josie is a non-Jewish lesbian whose Jewish lover, Rhea, dies suddenly in a car accident; Ericka is Rhea's daughter, who has lived with Josie as a co-parent for most of her life. After Rhea's death, Ericka's father has sole custody; he decides to move his family and Ericka from Brooklyn to Cleveland, OH, severing the relationship between Josie and Ericka. Josie and Ericka, without any legal rights to support their familial relationship, clandestinely leave Brooklyn and travel around the United States searching for a way to preserve their relationship. *Sinking, Stealing* explores the legal precariousness of lesbian families during the 1980s as well as how differences of class and religion shaped intimate and familial relationships. The women of Persephone Press, including Greenfield and McGloin, liked the initial material and offered Clausen a contract for the novel, which was finalized in October 1981. Clausen submitted the manuscript to Persephone in November 1981. In December 1981, in an eleven-page memo, written by Pat McGloin and circulated to Maureen Brady, Elly Bulkin, Michelle Cliff, Hattie Gossett, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Adrienne Rich, Cynthia Rich, and Barbara Smith, McGloin outlined the concerns of Persephone Press about *Sinking, Stealing*. McGloin begins,

Through the persona of Daniel Fein, Jan Clausen has created a despicable character, ostensibly to address issues of male privilege, father privilege, and class privilege. The act of a gentile (not to mention a white gentile from a privileged class) choosing a Jewish man to symbolize these privileges is anti-Semitic. Jews have been the scapegoats for the evils of capitalism and imperialism throughout history.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Open Letter, Carton 3, Outgoing Correspondence 1981, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

The memo continues with ten pages of quotations from the manuscript and a discussion about how both Jews and gentiles are portrayed in Clausen's novel manuscript. This memo is passionately argued—and a withering attack on Clausen. Persephone circulated this statement because “in the past week, various lesbian-feminist writers have condemned Persephone's judgement of *Sinking, Stealing*, accusing us of ‘stifling’ the creativity of the writer or being ‘insensitive’ to emotional needs of the writer.”³⁰² McGloin refutes this characterization; she states that Persephone stands behind its judgment of Clausen's novel and that the publishers hope that “these comments will not only assist Jan Clausen in her necessary consciousness-raising, but will also help both writers and readers in developing a sensitivity to anti-Semitism in lesbian literature.”³⁰³ In January 1982, Clausen and Persephone Press officially terminated the book contract. A revised version of the novel was published by The Crossing Press in 1985.

Defining anti-Semitism in lesbian literature is an important outcome of this incident—and the ones previously discussed. In her introduction to NJG, Beck analyzes Clausen's earlier short story collection, *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Lover*, as an example of the perniciousness of anti-Semitism in feminist literature.³⁰⁴ While this conflict was, justifiably, deeply painful for Clausen and her partner and fellow Persephone author, Elly Bulkin, a Jew, it voiced concerns about anti-Semitism within the WLM and particularly in lesbian-feminist literature. This incident with Clausen's novel was known only to a small but influential group of lesbian-feminist authors and publishers, but it defines a

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ “Why Is This Book Different from All Other Books? By Evelyn Torton Beck, *Nice Jewish Girls* (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1982), xxvi.

climate and a method of conflict management for these lesbian feminists. Close textual analysis was an important strategy for lesbian-feminists to identify, articulate, and analyze the material conditions of women's lives. Like consciousness-raising groups, but with written texts instead of spoken texts, lesbian-feminists understood this type of analysis as central to consciousness-raising, as McGloin indicates in her letter. While the method of a letter, shared with many people, may not be the most caring strategy to address anti-Semitism (or any type of oppression), for this group of lesbian-feminists, the written word was an important site of activism.

The conflict over Clausen's manuscript informed a broader discussion about conflict between publishers and authors, and particularly conflict between women of color authors and Persephone. Barbara Smith initiated a conflict resolution session between the authors, primarily women of color, and the Persephone publishers. On January 30, 1982, Gloria Anzaldúa, Elly Bulkin, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, Gloria Greenfield, and Pat McGloin met in New York City.³⁰⁵ Linda Powell joined them as a facilitator. The group met to talk about "authors-publishers relations with special attention to the following issues: feminist structures for dealing with conflict; structures for dealing with differences related to our various identities; white publishers and 3rd world writers establishing viable working relations."³⁰⁶ A part of the concerns that the authors brought to the table was the manner in which Persephone Press dealt with the situation with Clausen's book, in particular the contract termination. Although this

³⁰⁵ Letter from Barbara Smith January 7, 1982, Folder "Barbara Smith," Carton 4, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

³⁰⁶ Letter from Barbara Smith January 22, 1982, Folder "Barbara Smith," Carton 4, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

conflict ostensibly was between the two white publishers at Persephone and a white author, as the conflict unfolded it took on racial overtones.

The women of color published by Persephone, particularly Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, and Barbara Smith, expressed concern about the termination of Clausen's contract—fearing that they might be treated similarly. Except for Lorde, who was teaching at CUNY-Staten Island, for all of the authors, royalty payments from books were their primary income source. Moreover, as Smith and Moraga articulated in their earlier letter, they were concerned about the power dynamics between them as authors of color and Greenfield and McGloin as white publishers.³⁰⁷

These power dynamics and the conflicts they engender are standard in relationships between authors and publishers—disagreements about promotion, attention that books get (or do not get) in reviews, availability of books in bookstores—but the racial dichotomy of white publishers and women of color authors amplified the conflicts and made them even more vital to these activists, all of whom were acutely committed to their personal and political agenda to address, interrupt, and end institutionalized racism. Lorde, Smith, Moraga, and Anzaldúa were discussing already the formation of Kitchen Table Press when this meeting happened; the meeting certainly highlighted the need for a press that women of color would control entirely.

Conflicts within Persephone about racism and anti-Semitism reverberated on multiple levels. They shaped what Persephone published and how they published. Directly or indirectly, they translated into the books that Persephone published. The books that Persephone published, through their wide circulation, influenced how many

³⁰⁷ Minutes January 30, 1982 Meeting NYC, Folder "Barbara Smith," Carton 4, Persephone Press Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

feminists and lesbian-feminists thought about racism, anti-Semitism, and lesbianism. Through both their publishing and their political lives as publishers, Greenfield and McGloin shaped lesbian-feminism as an ideology and subject position concerned with anti-racism.

Conclusion

Persephone Press operated for eight years, though it published most intensively between 1980 and 1983. The history of Persephone helps us to understand a number of things about the history of feminism. First, Persephone maps the changing contours of radical and cultural feminism. The project began at a time when radical feminism was remaking itself into different expressions of feminism. The women of Persephone respond to the evolution of radical feminism first with books that expressed feminist spirituality and cultural feminism. Then, Persephone published books that articulate different identity formations, particularly elaborations of lesbian feminism and woman of color feminism. These books helped to articulate the forms and effects of anti-Semitism, homophobia, and racism on women's lives.

Identity elaborations are significant throughout the 1980s, not as a corrective to feminist practices of the 1970s, but as a productive expansion of the theory and practices of feminism during the 1970s. The political insight of building theory through personal experience extends through the identity elaborations of the 1980s. The ideas of consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s are re-expressed through books, often anthologies, published in the 1980s. Rather than either a corrective to 1970s feminist practices or the final death throes of feminism, identity elaborations are a conscious

engagement of feminists to re-imagine and re-make the world to be more just, more equitable, more truthful.

Another significant part of the story of Persephone is the sale of Persephone's assets to a commercial publishing house. This disposition of Persephone in 1983 is at odds with the earlier rhetoric and convictions of Greenfield and McGloin; they fiercely resisted the co-optation of lesbian-feminist work by commercial (heterosexual) publishers. At the same time, given the financial pressures that they faced, it was critical for them to sell at least a portion of the business to address their financial issues. Is the sale of Persephone to Beacon a sign of the success of Persephone? Yes and no. Is the sale of Persephone to Beacon an example of lesbian-feminists selling out to commercial interests? Yes and no. The sale of Persephone to Beacon is never fully realized—not all Persephone books are transferred to Beacon, and Persephone does not become an imprint of Beacon as imagined at one point in the negotiations. In spite of these facts, the intention of the sale contract that Greenfield and McGloin negotiated and signed is to relinquish control of all aspects of Persephone to Beacon, a commercial publishing entity. I use the word commercial with care, however; Beacon is a non-profit publisher, owned and operated by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Beacon is a progressive publisher, allied then and now with feminism. Through the lens of lesbian-feminist publishers in 1983, however, the sale to Beacon is a form of selling out. Lesbian-feminist control of the books was or would have been lost; this fact is part of the reason that so many authors took the rights to their work from Persephone and brought the material to other publishers, negotiating their own contracts and terms for subsequent publication. From a historical perspective, however, the sale to Beacon demonstrates the significance

of Persephone's titles and the market at the time for lesbian-feminist literature. The willingness of Beacon to purchase Persephone demonstrates the success of Persephone: to create a bold market and demonstrate the demand for lesbian-feminist books. Ultimately, Greenfield and McGloin made the decision to sell to Beacon not for strategic political or philosophical reasons, but because of the economic necessity to raise cash to pay creditors. In some ways, the sale of Persephone to Beacon demonstrates the economic viability of lesbian-feminist print culture in the early 1980s, an achievement for all of the women who labored to publish and create a market for lesbian-feminist books; in other ways, the sale of Persephone is the final collapse of a company that tried to build a business based on lesbian-feminist principles and ultimately could not sustain it.

Persephone mobilized identity elaborations and published political and theoretical work. The books by Persephone enabled and extended identity elaborations during the 1980s. When reflecting on the closing of Persephone, its founders articulated the idea of an on-going lesbian-feminist publishing environment. In an interview with Molly Lovelock after Persephone closed, Greenfield and McGloin said, "We hope that the gap will be filled by existing feminist publishers, and that new houses will be formed, just as Persephone followed Diana Press."³⁰⁸ A continuing genealogy of lesbian-feminist publishing is significant. The historical narrative of lesbian-feminist presses is not smooth; it is one with many stops and starts, hiccups and sputters; there are more stories of challenges due to lack of money and lack of experience than there are successes. Yet, lesbian-feminist presses persist; lesbian print culture endures. As Greenfield and McGloin note, women look to the past to identify dreams and aspirations for their future.

³⁰⁸ Molly Lovelock, "Persephone Press: Why Did It Die?," *Sojourners* 9, no. 1 (September 1983): 18.

They looked to Diana Press and Daughters, Inc. to articulate their vision and define the work at Persephone; they hoped others would do the same. The press that follows Persephone, that continues its legacy, is Kitchen Table Press. Although the founders already had organized Kitchen Table Press (KTP) when Persephone collapsed, the collapse of Persephone enabled the growth of KTP through the acquisition of two key titles—*This Bridge Called My Back* and *Home Girls*.

Two Postscripts

It is easy for me to idolize the work of lesbian-feminist publishers—and it is an impulse that I resist in telling these stories. Sometimes, the antidote is in the archive—as is the case with the opening narrative about the lesbian poetry reading. The idea of a lesbian poetry reading attracting over eight hundred people enchants me; I have spent many long hours thinking about how glorious the evening must have been for all involved. In my mind, everything about the evening was perfect. An audio tape of the event reveals that it was not. At the end of the evening, Gloria Greenfield spoke from the stage.

During the second part of the poetry reading, a heterosexual couple came in and ripped off the cash proceeds from the film showing. [The event organizers were collecting money for a lesbian-feminist documentary.] So I am asking all of us to dig deeper into our pockets and to donate to that. Also Persephone Press will be giving five cartons of *Woman, Church and State* to New Words [the feminist bookstore in Boston] and all of the cash and proceeds from those sales will go into the benefit. All of the money will go to the defense fund. Please give money as you go out.

Cash was stolen from other lesbian-feminists the night of the Lesbian Poetry Reading. Greenfield's announcement from the podium came under fire in subsequent weeks in the feminist newspaper *Sojourner*; a few attendees wrote to the newspaper to complain that Greenfield identified the thieves as heterosexual; they believed that this perpetrated

oppressive politics. This story captures some of the politics of the time. Persephone modeled good feminist citizenship by collecting money for an allied project; Persephone demonstrated their support for the local feminist bookstore, and they modeled open and transparent communication when money was stolen. The women who wrote letters to *Sojourner* furthered the dialogue through public critique aimed at consciousness-raising and critical reflection. This period of lesbian-feminist activism was a time of vibrant dialogue; anything and at times seemingly everything was a site for debate and analysis as well as a potential building-block for change.

The second post-script is about Greenfield herself. Today, Gloria Greenfield is married to a man and produces documentary films; her most significant documentary to date is *The Case for Israel*, a pro-Zionist film narrated by Alan Dershowitz. In a statement for the Jewish Women's Archive from the mid-2000s, Greenfield recounts the experience with Clausen's manuscript in the early 1980s. She writes:

The completed manuscript that we received months later turned out to be a novel about a stereotypical Jewish capitalist landlord who was destroying peoples' lives by gentrifying Park Slope. Within an hour of reviewing the contract, we notified this white, gentile author that her book contract was cancelled on the grounds of its anti-Semitic stereotyping. The next day we were beckoned to a meeting in New York to meet with several of our prominent women-of-color authors to discuss the cancellation of Clausen's contract.

In this reminiscence, Greenfield compresses the timeline of these events significantly. In fact, the incident unfolded over a number of weeks, from early November 1981 through late January 1982. Greenfield summarizes the meeting:

I began the conversation with the question, "Persephone Press cancelled the contract for an anti-Semitic novel written by a white Christian woman. Why are we here?" Their collective response was "She is a friend of women of color, so if you hurt her, you hurt us." In this very brief dialogue between Persephone Press and the leading Hispanic and Black lesbian-feminist writers, poets, and theoreticians, it became very clear that at worst, anti-Semitism was considered

acceptable, and at best anti-Semitism was considered insignificant. I had devoted many years of my life to the radical feminist movement, and at this moment I realized that I no longer wanted to contribute my life's energy to it, nor did I want to remain a part of it.

Greenfield characterizes the dialogue as brief; in fact, it was lengthy. It was a sustained engagement among a group of women. While I do not doubt that in retrospect Greenfield experienced fellow activists dismissing and minimizing anti-Semitism, from the archival materials I have reviewed, Greenfield's statement is too definitive. There was simultaneously a deep concern with anti-Semitism as well as racism. To characterize one or the other as insignificant is misleading. In her brief memoir, Greenfield concludes that she has "not diminished my feminist consciousness" but integrated "the prioritization of my Jewish identity."³⁰⁹ Greenfield's clarity about the meeting in retrospect is striking; the conversation was not as direct at the time. In spite of these inaccuracies in Greenfield's account, her narration is important. It captures her response as an individual and as an activist in these events.

Greenfield's statement mirrors the definitively held passions of women about feminism and lesbian-feminism during the years of my study. She presents herself as certain in her beliefs and immediate in her actions; she leads the reader to understand and nod with sympathy about her commitment to do Jewish identity work instead of radical feminist work. Moreover, Greenfield echoes the feminist narrative of a click—a moment when truth is realized. This epistemic formation emanates from another earlier moment in feminist print culture—the first issue of *Ms. Magazine* in which women recounted the click in their consciousness when they became a feminist.³¹⁰ I think that Greenfield does

³⁰⁹ http://jwa.org/feminism/_html/JWA101.htm (accessed 1 April 2012).

this unwittingly in her rhetoric, but these rhetorical flourishes have been adopted in narrating stories about our lives. I call attention to both the narrative and the style of narration because, while I appreciate the activist work that it does, it undermines our understanding of the past as messy, uncertain, tentative, and emergent. Greenfield's presentation of the history of Clausen's manuscript with Persephone is how some authors and activists want us to view lesbian-feminism: as an ideology that drew clear lines with moral opprobrium, as a political formation that could not contain multiple and competing identity elaborations, as a theoretical framework that prioritized in a hierarchy different kinds of oppression, as a movement that demanded that women choose what was significant, what to prioritize. While some people certainly experienced lesbian-feminism this way, particularly in retrospective narrations, in the moment it was not. In the moment, it was uncertain, fluid, and reaching for inclusivity. It was people, primarily women, who thought deeply, felt passionately, wrote thoughtfully, beautifully, polemically, and who wanted to create a better world for their daughters and their sons. They made mistakes along the way; people were hurt, deeply; there were political successes and failures; there were existential and epistemological crises. Through it all, though, there was humor, caring, compassion, love, and a belief that things could be better for all of us in the future.

Long Haul Press

The story of the Brooklyn-based Long Haul Press is the story of one woman, Jan Clausen, and her circle of friends in Brooklyn, NY. Long Haul Press authors were all

³¹⁰ See the first issue of *Ms. Magazine* and Mary Thom's *Inside Ms.: 25 Years of the Magazine and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998) and Amy Erdman Farrell's *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina press, 1998).

friends, colleagues, or family of Clausen. All of the books were produced at The Print Center. In total, Clausen published six books between 1979 and 1987 under the imprint Long Haul Press. The creation and distribution of books from Long Haul Press was a community project among the writers and Clausen as publisher and writer herself. The first two books Jan Clausen published through Long Haul Press were her own. In 1979, she published her second book of poetry, *Waking at the Bottom of the Dark*, and in 1982 she published a chapbook length essay, *A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism*, which analyzes poetry and feminism. Subsequently, Clausen published two other poetry collections: in 1983, Dorothy Allison's *The Women Who Hate Me* and in 1986 Judith McDaniel's *Metamorphosis, and Other Poems of Recovery*. The final book Clausen published, *Twentieth Century Pioneer* (1987) by Shannon Edna Wright, is by her grandmother and is a personal narrative that describes "for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren a vanished way of life on a farm in a wooded area of northern Minnesota."³¹¹ *Twentieth Century Pioneer* is a series of vignettes edited by Clausen.

The sixth book published by Long Haul Press was *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*. This book with three essays, one each authored by Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, has a significant life, traveling far outside the small press into both its first edition from Long Haul Press and in its second 1988 edition from Firebrand Books. *Yours In Struggle* makes Long Haul Press different from other small publishers and more like Persephone Press and Kitchen Table Press because of its wide circulation and adoption as a course text in Women's Studies. As a textual artifact for thinking about feminist identity formations in

³¹¹ Wright, *Twentieth Century Pioneer*, 7.

the 1980s, *Yours In Struggle* explores some of the central questions of identity during the 1980s and also hints textually at larger questions of identity formation and identity transgression. I explicate these identity formations and transgressions by reading *Yours In Struggle* and its publishing history in concert with two memoirs: Elly Bulkin's *Enter Password: Recovery* and Jan Clausen's *Apples and Oranges*. Thus, this discussion of Long Haul Press focuses on *Yours In Struggle* and the personal relationship between Clausen as publisher of Long Haul Press and Bulkin as a writer and Clausen's lover.

Elly Bulkin began contemplating writing about her Jewish identity when Gloria Greenfield asked her to contribute an essay to *New Jewish Girls*. Bulkin didn't contribute to that collection—the timeline was too short for her comfort—but the seed was planted.³¹² The germ of writing about Jewish identity took root after a painful experience; it bloomed into Bulkin's essay, "Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism," in *Yours In Struggle*. The rejection of Clausen's manuscript by Persephone and the memo that Greenfield and McGloin circulated about anti-Semitism in Clausen's novel was painful both for Clausen and her lover. The critique was repeated in the introduction by Evelyn Torton Beck in *Nice Jewish Girls*. Beck wrote, "Anti-Semitism may also thoughtlessly be perpetuated even when Jews are more fully integrated into the body of a literary text and not simply objectified as peripheral 'others.' This occurs whenever portrayals of Jews, though plentiful, are limited to negative characteristics. For example, while there are quite a number of Jewish characters in Jan Clausen's short story collection *Mother, Daughter, Sister, Lover*, not one of them has any positive

³¹² Personal communication with Jan Clausen, July 19, 2012.

attributes.”³¹³ Beck continues providing an example from one of the stories in which the Jewish characters are “stereotypically rich and crude” while the lesbian, “poor and ‘politically correct’ in her values” is “only ‘part Jewish.’”³¹⁴ In another story, Beck argues that Jewish experience is “trivialized” in a depiction of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This was a harsh critique of Clausen’s work; while Beck is careful to frame her analysis in literary and political terms, the effects of her words and the circulation of the letter were painful for both Clausen and Bulkin, who had been intimate partners and collaborators since 1975. Clausen writes about the “climate in which the politics of a range of identities—sexual, racial, ethnic—were being pursued in ways that increasingly made my corner of dykedom feel like demolition derby.”³¹⁵ Bulkin describes the experience as “like having trash dumped all over the lawn, words scrawled on the walls—the 3 a.m. act, not of the Klan or some local kids, but of the neighbors who for years had been dropping by for coffee.”³¹⁶ Beck’s critique of Clausen’s work began a period in their lives, which both Clausen and Bulkin refer to as “the cloud.” This cloud extended from 1981 until 1986. Bulkin wrote her essay for *Yours In Struggle* between August 1982 and May 1984; it was published in the fall of 1984. The emotional content of Bulkin and Clausen’s lives during “the cloud” was not limited to the pain caused by accusations of anti-Semitism; during this period, Bulkin was also dealing with memories of child sexual abuse and a deep depression. For Bulkin, writing the essay, “Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism,” was a way “to clarify; to argue for

³¹³ Beck, *Nice Jewish Girls*, xxvi.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 156.

³¹⁶ Bulkin, *Password*, 15.

complexity; perhaps more than anything, to affirm my intention not to crawl under a rock and be heard from no more.”³¹⁷

The circulation of *Yours In Struggle*, with support from the Astraea Foundation,³¹⁸ ensured that Bulkin was heard. *Yours In Struggle* became a feminist best seller. The initial print run sold out, and the book was reissued by Firebrand Press in 1988. It was a staple in feminist classrooms, articulating a method for thinking about multiple axes of oppression and for talking about responsible actions for people in positions of power. When Long Haul Press published *Yours In Struggle* in the fall of 1984, feminist authors and activists were articulating an intersectional analysis of identity in a variety of print locations. Four earlier, significant anthologies—*All the Women are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1982), *Home Girls* (1983), *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), and *Nice Jewish Girls* (1981)—all extend an argument within feminism about intersectional identity. Intersectional identities, intersectional analyses, and intersectionality are phrases that describe the interactions of multiple identity categories within individual bodies. Intersectional identities and intersectional analyses also link the embodiment of individual identities with collective identities—women of color, African-American women, Jewish women, working class women, and so on. While the particular word intersectional emerges later in scholarly discourse³¹⁹, a

³¹⁷ Bulkin, *Password*, 16.

³¹⁸ The Astraea Foundation was founded in 1977; Astraea made a grant of \$700 to Long Haul Press in the spring of 1984 (Astraea Foundation Newsletter, courtesy of Astraea Foundation).

³¹⁹ See Dill, Hill-Collins, Crenshaw, and Dill and Zambrana.

central project of feminism in the early 1980s was elaboration of these intersectional relationships.

Yours In Struggle as a text presents some of the complexities of early feminist thought about intersectionality and provides an excellent example of identity elaborations in the middle of the 1980s. *Yours In Struggle* began with Bulkin's essay in response to her experience with "the cloud." Bulkin and Barbara Smith decided to do a joint publication when the National Women's Studies Association invited both of them to be on a plenary panel on racism and anti-Semitism at the 1983 conference. Minnie Bruce Pratt was also on that panel. Together the three of them completed *Yours In Struggle*. Pratt, Smith, and Bulkin acknowledge in the introduction the separate authorship of each essay, saying "each of us speaks only for herself," and that they "do not necessarily agree with each other." For the three of them with, in their words, "very different identities and backgrounds—white Christian-raised Southerner, Afro-American, Ashkenazi Jew," the book "indicates concrete possibilities for coalition work." Within their elaboration of identities in the preface to the book are the multiple axes that each see as crucial to identity, not only race, ethnicity, and religion but also regional location. The book itself is a physical manifestation of what coalitions could be and how they might work.

Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," opens the collection. In it, Pratt ruminates on her personal experiences with racism and anti-Semitism in her life, including her family's ownership of slaves and the invisibility of Jewish people in her southern town. Pratt struggles to find a standpoint as a white Christian-raised Southerner to address and eventually oppose racism and anti-Semitism. Through writing, reading, and activism, she discovers a way to strip away "layer after layer of my false identity,

notions of skin, blood, heart based in racism and anti-Semitism.” To “regain” her “self-respect” and “to keep from feeling completely naked and ashamed of who it is I am,” Pratt examines “what I have carried with me from my culture that could help me in the process.”³²⁰ Pratt unearths a history of resistance and hope that connects her to the “history, people, and place”³²¹ and provides a foundation for her to act in opposition to racism and anti-Semitism. The process that Pratt narrates in her essay is one of identity elaboration for people whose identities link them to some aspects of power and privilege, like being white and raised Christian, even as in other parts of their identity they may be marginalized, like being lesbian. Pratt’s essay offered an intersectional identity analysis and elaboration for feminists that served as a theoretical model for a variety of women. It was not limited to particular identity categories; that is, it was not limited to non-dominant racial-ethnic people in the United States (African-Americans, Latinos/as, Jews), but rather was a way of thinking that could be adapted by all people who wished to examine power and privilege.

Pratt concludes her essay with reflections on the political environment of the United States in the early 1980s including increasing globalization in which “the economic foundation of this country is resting on the backs of women of color here, and in Third World countries”³²² and the shaping of foreign policy in the Reagan administration “by evangelical Christian beliefs that hold the U.S. has a divine calling to “protect the free world” from godless, evil, “perverted” communism.”³²³ For Pratt,

³²⁰ Pratt, *Yours in Struggle*, 43.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 44.

³²² *Ibid*, 54.

articulating her own privilege and responsibility and naming the larger economic and political forces shaping women's lives is at the root of feminism and of her feminist identity elaborations.

Barbara Smith's essay, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Relationships between Black and Jewish Women," makes similar moves to articulate embodied standpoints to address racism and anti-Semitism. Smith addresses Jewish women and African-American women in separate sections to "cover what I need to say to Black women and what I need to say to Jewish women" even as she acknowledges that "this essay would be read in its entirety by both Black and Jewish women, as well as by individuals from a variety of other backgrounds."³²⁴ In this way, Smith animates through the text a variety of conversations both spoken directly and "overheard." By addressing multiple groups separately and simultaneously, Smith demonstrates, through the construction of the text itself, the possibilities of coalition that Bernice Johnson Reagon had suggested in her essay, "Coalition Politics."³²⁵ For Smith, coalition work is the foundation for addressing issues of racism and anti-Semitism; she writes "to encourage better understanding between us and to support the possibility of coalition work."³²⁶ Smith recognizes the expediency of labeling and dismissing people: "All of us resort to

³²³ Ibid, 55.

³²⁴ Smith, *Yours in Struggle*, 69.

³²⁵ Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics," *Home Girls*, edited by Barbara Smith (Brooklyn, NY: Kitchen Table Press, 1983). I note here that Smith's essay was also first delivered as a speech, as was Reagon's "Coalition Politics." Katie King's work explores how feminists valued a variety of textual and verbal constructions (Chapter 3, "The Politics of the Oral and the Written" in *Theory in Its Feminist Travels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³²⁶ Smith, *Yours in Struggle*, 85.

this tactic when the impact of our different histories, cultures, classes, and skins backs us up against the wall and we do not have the courage or desire to examine what, if anything, of value lies between us.”³²⁷ Smith acknowledges the fractiousness of identity elaborations by feminists. I do not mean to minimize or dismiss the conflict and pain that particular identity elaborations caused for individual feminists and communities of feminists; rather, I wish to explicate the productive work that identity elaborations did and try, as Smith does in her essay to create a space that is “both” “and.”

Bulkin’s essay is the longest of all the essays in *Yours In Struggle*. It is divided into nine sections. Each section layers different elements of complexity to the questions Bulkin struggles to write about in the text, primarily questions about relationships between Blacks and Jews individually and collectively as well as the relationship between Israel and Palestine, a flashpoint for Jewish identity formation. Bulkin situates the relationship between Israel and Palestine as crucial for Jewish feminists to interrogate as a method for thinking about oppression in personal as well as structural terms.³²⁸ Bulkin concludes her essay with a series of questions for discussion in small groups, harkening back to the roots of consciousness-raising in the WLM. Deeply concerned with multiple standpoints through which feminism can view both anti-Semitism and racism, Bulkin elaborates how feminists counter racism and anti-Semitism in particular activist formations. In the end, Bulkin articulates a nuanced, situated standpoint for perceiving anti-Semitism and racism as a Jewish feminist. Bulkin concludes, “I resist the temptation to end with a closing burst of optimism, a reference to sisterhood, unity, or revolution. I

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ I am indebted to Jan Clausen and our on-going conversations for sharpening my thinking about Long Haul Press and *Yours in Struggle*.

am neither a visionary nor an optimist. I have sat in too many meetings and been in too many groups to be either. But I do believe in the absolute necessity of fighting anti-Semitism and racism and in the possibility of political change. And I do know that there is much work to be done.”³²⁹ In this conclusion, Bulkin acknowledges the end of the type of exuberant feminist sisterhood that we encounter in early writings from the WLM,³³⁰ Bulkin echoes Bonnie Thornton Dill’s prescription from 1983 for the “abandonment of the concept of sisterhood as a global construct based on unexamined assumptions about our similarities.” *Yours in Struggle* works to examine questions of difference in a political and strategic way as Dill suggests. The production of *Yours In Struggle* as both an intellectual product and as a physical artifact responds to Dill’s challenge for “a more pluralistic approach that recognizes and accepts the objective differences between women.”³³¹ In each essay, Bulkin, Smith, and Pratt explore new articulations of feminist identity with greater complexity and attention to both the embodied and lived conditions of women.

Bulkin’s, Smith’s, and Pratt’s production of identity in *Yours in Struggle* demonstrates exactly the type of dynamic tension in identity politics that Fuss explores in *Essentially Speaking*. Fuss argues that in the intellectual milieu of identity politics “all representations of identity” are “simultaneously possible and impossible.”³³² Indeed, this

³²⁹ Bulkin, *Yours in Struggle*, 193.

³³⁰ Clausen notes that Bulkin’s work was “always skeptical and temperamentally opposed to exactly this kind of oversimplifying exuberance.

³³¹ Bonnie Thornton Dill, “Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood,” *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 146.

³³² Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 102.

was the case for the authors of *Yours in Struggle*—and for many other lesbian-feminists in the early 1980s—who were producing new identities through their writing and publishing work. The possibilities of imagining new identities, new coalitions, and new political actions fueled the creative work of lesbian-feminists, even as the impossibilities discouraged and disheartened them. Fuss asserts that “such a view of identity as unstable and potentially disruptive, as alien and incoherent, could in the end produce a more mature identity politics by militating against the tendency to erase differences and inconsistencies in the production of stable political subjects.”³³³ The view of identity as unstable, disruptive, alien and incoherent is exactly the type of identity elaboration that Pratt, Smith, and Bulkin articulate in *Yours In Struggle*, even as they each make moves that stabilize identity for political and strategic purposes. The genesis of the book for Bulkin is a disruptive and unstable experience; the publication of the book itself by the three women in collaboration with Clausen as publisher is meant to disrupt ideas about identity, politics and coalitions for the readers of the book. Lesbian-feminists grappled with the epistemological challenges that Fuss identifies in her work even as they continued to produce new writing, new books, and new methods of political engagement.

As the charges of anti-Semitism against Clausen began to recede into memory, another conflict about identity emerged. This time the conflict arose not among other members of their close-knit feminist community but between Bulkin and Clausen. To state it plainly, Clausen had an affair. With a man. Bulkin “raged—about men, about roles, about women who could pass as straight.” In her memoir, she continues in a poetic vein, “About betrayal./In our home./After twelve years.//And we had been dykes

³³³ Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 104.

together.”³³⁴ For Bulkin, the end of the relationship is filled with rage and betrayal. Clausen experiences similar emotions, though with a different valence. In her memoir, Clausen riffs the Judy Grahn poem, “Carol, in the park, chewing on straws” from her series “The Common Woman Poem.” Grahn writes, “She has taken a woman lover/whatever shall we do”; Clausen riffs, “She has taken a male lover, whatever shall we do.”³³⁵ While Clausen recollects the experience with some levity, the consequences of her break-up were significant. She and Bulkin “used to joke about being card-carrying dykes”³³⁶ and together “helped make all of these rules”³³⁷ about what it means to be lesbian and feminist. Now she experienced herself as “exiled from the Garden of Dykedom.”³³⁸ In the end, the dozen-year partnership of Clausen and Bulkin, both intimate and in publishing and writing, ended. For both women, the question of identity is at the center of the end of their relationship. Though the end of Clausen and Bulkin’s intimate relationship operates in a different register than the questions of identity elaborations in *Yours in Struggle*, the central questions are similar. Bulkin asks in her memoir, “Who’s a lesbian? Who a bisexual? . . . What is the relationship between sex and lesbian identity? Who speaks for (and represents) the lesbian communities? And who decides?”³³⁹ These questions, with different variables, are the same questions addressed in *Yours In Struggle*. The answers lie in the elaboration of identities and in new identity

³³⁴ Bulkin, *Password*, 62.

³³⁵ Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 10.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid., 12.

³³⁸ Ibid., 10.

³³⁹ Bulkin, *Password*, 67.

formations, articulated through changing political and life circumstances. In Fuss's words, this work is disruptive and alien; I would add it is also vitalizing and invigorating for communities and for publishing.

Reflecting on the aftermath of her break-up, Clausen indicts the lesbian community of poets and writers in Brooklyn for shunning her. Her story of transgressing lesbian identity and the responses of other lesbian-feminists was widely publicized in "My Interesting Condition," an article that ran in *Out/Look* in 1990. The timing and circumstances of the public unraveling of Clausen and Bulkin's relationship dovetails with changing identity elaborations and changing sites of publishing about these identity elaborations in the late 1980s. For Clausen, publishing began as a way to engage in dialogue within "the new feminist world of multi-issue activism all mixed up with ideas and books."³⁴⁰ By 1990, when she published the article in *Out/Look*, elaborations on the identity of lesbian-feminist waned; power and potency emerged from different identity formations: lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer. Clausen's personal publishing history traces these changes from lesbian-feminist presses with national distribution to a new, glossy, national gay and lesbian magazine. With the emergence of new types of identity elaborations, particularly a co-gendered gay and lesbian movement and the complexities of "queer" and "bisexual," new publishing vehicles emerged as sites for these identity elaborations.

I trace these very personal and at times painful stories not as a way to engage in gossip about authors whom, frankly, I revere, but rather as a mechanism to think about identity elaborations and how imbricated they are with lesbian print culture. Elaborating

³⁴⁰ Clausen, "My Interesting Condition," *Out/Look* 7 (Winter 1990): 12.

identities is done through print—through stories, essays, poems, and other printed artifacts. As identities transform and mutate over time, people respond to these identity elaborations with new publishing vehicles. Rather than seeing debates about identity as a dead end for feminist politics, I embrace them as representing a keen engagement of feminism in a broader vision of social justice. The identity elaborations of feminism throughout the 1980s offer new political engagements for lesbian-feminists in issues of social justice, including Central American solidarity work, anti-nuclear work, the Middle East, and AIDS. These moments of identity elaboration in the 1980s also generate new publishing ventures to support the creations of writers and artists engaged in new articulations of identity formations.

Kitchen Table Press

Kitchen Table Women of Color Press (hereafter KTP) was the first publisher owned and operated by, for and about women of color. Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith discussed the concept for KTP in 1980; Smith convened the first meeting to discuss KTP in the fall of 1980 and announced the formation of KTP at the second Women in Print conference in Washington, DC, in the fall of 1981. KTP began publishing in 1983 and published consistently until 1992. From 1993 until 1997, a transition team tried to reinvigorate KTP, but ultimately the press closed in 1997.

In this section, I narrate a history of KTP from a variety of sources, primarily published accounts of KTP, but also some archival material and oral history interviews. I trace the history of KTP by reviewing the books and materials that KTP published to examine how these books fueled feminist activist formations and feminist identity categories. One of the key distinctions of KTP from other lesbian-feminist presses

emphasized in the existing literature is that it is the only publisher owned and operated by women of color. In addition, three characteristics distinguish KTP from other lesbian-feminist presses: KTP published an array of print objects; book distribution is central to the operation of KTP; and KTP functioned as a resource and clearinghouse for feminists of color. These practices of the press shape the business structure and economic operations of KTP, and they shape how KTP operated as a social change agent. These practices also illuminate further the significance of KTP as a publisher by, for, and about women of color.

In addition to examining the material practices of KTP, I discuss the interventions of KTP into feminist formations in the 1980s and early 1990s. Like Persephone Press and Long Haul Press, KTP played a critical role in identity elaborations; KTP both consolidates and elaborates woman of color as an identity category and woman of color feminism as a feminist formation. KTP also plays a crucial role in defining an emerging form of feminist activism and women's studies scholarship: transnational feminism.

In 1980, Audre Lorde said to Barbara Smith, "We really need to do something about publishing." In this statement, Lorde asserts the need to engage in publishing as a site for activism and social transformation. This conversation prompted Barbara Smith to organize a meeting at her home in Roxbury, MA, on Halloween weekend in 1980 "when Audre and other women from New York were in town to do a Black women's poetry reading."³⁴¹ That weekend, Lorde, Smith, and others discussed what became Kitchen Table Women of Color Press.

³⁴¹ Barbara Smith, "A Press of Our Own: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press," in *Communications at the Crossroads: The Gender Gap Connection* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1989), 202-207.

The first description of KTP was a single sentence, “Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press is the only publisher in North America committed to publishing and distributing the writing of Third World Women of all racial/cultural heritages, sexualities, and classes.”³⁴² This mission statement highlights three key aspects of the press: publishing *and* distribution, commitment to the constituency of Third World Women, and a commitment to exploring the intersections of race, sexuality, and class. Smith reflects, “On the most basic level, Kitchen Table Press began because of our need for autonomy, our need to determine independently both the content and conditions of our works, and to control the words and images that are produced about us.”³⁴³ This assertion of autonomy is a central tenet of KTP. One way that KTP articulated the values of autonomy and control is in the first edition of *This Bridge* published by KTP. In the front matter to the book is the following statement: “The following, then is the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, conceived of and produced entirely by women of color.” This statement locates power and autonomy as emanating from the object of the book itself. It alludes to the history of wrenching the book away from Persephone, following its closure, and into the hands of women of color as publishers. While women of color conceived and played a role in the production of the first edition of *This Bridge*, the ownership of Persephone by two white women made its production not exclusively a project of women of color. In the second edition of *This Bridge*, KTP asserts the value of controlling all aspects of production. This value—controlling all aspects of production—emerges from both feminism and black liberation. Both ideologies included a strong strain of separatism as a

³⁴² Ibid., 202 and printed materials from KTP.

³⁴³ Ibid., 202.

strategy to strengthen autonomy through withdrawal from white hegemonic culture. The desire of KTP to control all aspects of production, as evidenced by the front matter of *This Bridge*, expresses these values.

Smith continues, “As feminist and lesbian of color writers, we knew that we had no options for getting published, except at the mercy or whim of others, whether in the context of alternative or commercial publishing, since both are white-dominated.”³⁴⁴

While other lesbian-feminist writers worked to create a division between lesbian-feminist presses and commercial presses, Smith unites the two as both dominated by white people. Smith’s statement is true; as owners and operators of publishing houses, white people dominated lesbian-feminist publishing. Smith’s statement, however, implies that lesbian-feminist presses were monocultural. I refute this characterization. Yes, the principals of many lesbian-feminist presses were white women, but Smith’s homogenizing appellations flatten the output of lesbian-feminist presses. Lesbian-feminist presses published many important books by women of color. In addition, women of color participated prominently in feminist cooperative or collective presses, including the Women’s Press Collective. Women of color also published their own books through independent imprints, particularly SDiane Bogus, who operated WIM Books, LindaJean Brown, Stephania Byrd, and doris davenport.³⁴⁵ Smith’s statement that alternative publishers are dominated by white people had extraordinary political value in 1989 and throughout the life of KTP; it highlighted the important work of KTP and drew attention

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 202.

³⁴⁵ Becky Birtha highlighted these authors in “Celebrating Themselves: Four Self-Published Black Lesbian Authors” published in *off our backs* 15, no. 7 (June 31, 1985): 22.

to the power of publishing, one of Lorde's intentions in instigating the press. Through retrospective appraisals of lesbian-feminist publishing, however, we need greater nuance to appraise lesbian-feminist publishing and to explore the ecosystem of writers and publishers with attention to race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Originally a collective and based in Boston, Massachusetts, the collective formally launched KTP at the second Women in Print Conference, held in Washington, DC, from October 1st through 4th, 1981. In the spirit of WIP, the announcement of KTP's birth was an opportunity for others in feminist publishing to lend support to the new operation and for women of color authors to learn about a new vehicle for publishing. There were significantly more African-American women and women of color at the second WIP conference than the first conference. Of the over 250 attendees at WIP conference, about 10% of them were African-American.³⁴⁶ The conscious attention to racial-ethnic diversity in organizing the conference was one of the achievements of the second WIP conference; it represented a commitment within WIP—and the feminist movement more broadly—to attend to questions of racial-ethnic diversity. At the conference, Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, and Hattie Gossett, three of the founders of KTP, facilitated a workshop titled, "Third World Feminist Publishing: Prospects and Problems." In this workshop, Moraga, Smith, and Gossett outlined the necessity for creating KTP: "the suppression by establishment and leftist presses and the difficulties with feminist presses" which *oob* described as "ironed out with considerable struggle and

³⁴⁶ Fran Moira, "Women in Print: Overview," *off our backs* 11, no. 11 (December 31, 1981): 2.

dependent on the intercession of supportive white feminists.”³⁴⁷ Some of the conflicts I discussed previously between McGloin and Greenfield of Persephone Press and women of color authors had not occurred yet when this conference happened; thus, as I have suggested, the stories that I tell are part of a broader narrative of conflict and struggle around the issues of race within the lesbian-feminist presses.

In late 1981, Smith and Moraga, who were lovers and members of the KTP collective, moved to New York City “because that’s where the real energy for the press seemed to be.”³⁴⁸ KTP lists seven members in the collective as of November 1982: Sonia Alvarez, Myrna Bain, Brenda Joyce, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Mariana Romo-Carmona, and Barbara Smith. In 1983, KTP published its first catalogue. The catalogue included books they had published or were planning to publish as well as books they were distributing. Cheryl Clark’s self-published book, *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women*, was the first book KTP distributed. Using the Iowa City Women’s Press as a printer, Clark published the first edition of *Narratives* on December 1st, 1982. The self-published edition quickly sold out; KTP published the second edition of *Narratives* under the KTP imprint.³⁴⁹ The first book KTP published, in March 1983, was *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*. The KTP catalogue describes *Cuentos* as “the first collection of short fiction by Latinas written from a feminist-political perspective which includes work by women from the U.S. and Latin America, both in English and Spanish.” At the time, KTP

³⁴⁷ Fran Moira, “Racism and Classism in Feminist Periodicals, Bookstores, Publishing Organizations, *off our backs* 11, no. 11 (December 31, 1982): 10.

³⁴⁸ Barbara Smith, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, May 7, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 79.

³⁴⁹ The second edition had 2-3 additional poems (Interview with Cheryl Clarke).

was also thinking about a book “focusing on the situation of women of color in prison.”³⁵⁰

From the beginning KTP envisioned its role as both a publisher *and* distributor of books by women of color. In the spring 1983 catalogue, KTP included ten other books: two book by Fay Chiang (published by Sunbury Press), the Persephone Press edition of *This Bridge* as well as *Zami* and *Home Girls* from Persephone, two books written by Barbara Smith, *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave* (The Feminist Press) and *Toward a Black Feminist Criticism* (a pamphlet from Out & Out Books), Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* (Spinsters Ink, 1980), and *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography* (Naiad Press, 1981).³⁵¹

While book distribution created problems for Persephone, for KTP, distributing books expanded its offerings and helped KTP to achieve part of its mission: greater visibility for women of color authors. By distributing books, KTP brought books together in a single catalogue for readers and book buyers, resulting in greater visibility for the books, for the authors, and for KTP as a publisher and distributor.

Securing start-up capital for KTP was an issue. Other feminist presses relied on personal wealth, money raised from family members, commercial businesses, or fortuitous financial situations, like the distribution of *A Feminist Tarot*. Audre Lorde “donated substantial earnings from her readings” to KTP to help KTP start.³⁵² KTP also raised money with a fundraising letter. In their initial fundraising efforts, KTP used the

³⁵⁰ File 1, Cheryl Clarke Papers, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library..

³⁵¹ Nicholson Archives, folder KTP, Duke University.

³⁵² Alexis DeVeaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 277.

Working Women’s Institute as a fiduciary agent to secure tax-deductible contributions from the community. The collective wrote that the “anticipated costs for producing and distributing 5,000 copies of *Cuentos* is \$15,000.” The collective notes in their letter, “Unlike some other successful alternative publishers, no member of our collective brings to Kitchen Table personal wealth that would keep Kitchen Table functioning. As women of color the resources that we do rely upon are our minds, our bodies, our commitment, and our dreams of a global communication network that will connect women of color everywhere.”³⁵³ The Collective situates their work as both akin to other alternative publishers but different from those publishers by virtue of being only for women of color. This letter highlights the economic disparity between the alternative publishers (presumed white) and KTP as a women of color press. By soliciting funding through a community-based appeal, KTP actually expands the audience for their books and the constituency of KTP. They are not simply a publisher producing commodities for the market-place, but a community, exemplified in the first person plural, building a global communications network to “connect women of color everywhere.” This rhetoric echoes earlier calls for universal sisterhood from the WLM but focuses on women of color.

While women of color are foregrounded in the fundraising appeal and in other printed material from KTP, I understand the use of the first person plural—in relationship to women of color—as not an exclusive rhetorical strategy but as a subtly inclusive one. KTP is by, for, and about women of color, but the books are not only sold to women of color or to women for that matter. The public presentation of KTP is as a separatist publisher, but the distribution and organizing, while focused on women of color, includes

³⁵³ Fundraising Letter November 20, 1982, Folder “Kitchen Table Press,” Cheryl Clarke Papers, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.

white women and men, particularly men of color. The marketing and promotion strategies for the objects produced by KTP extend into feminist communities, lesbian communities, and communities of color. Thus the “our” is a community that is simultaneously delimited and open. The referent, women of color, is clear, but the “our” invites allies to join as well.

In 1983, KTP encountered what was a nightmare situation for Smith and some other members of the collective: Persephone closed. The downward spiral of Persephone from January through June of 1983, culminating with filing bankruptcy, meant that books were not being shipped to bookstores and other distribution sites. The uncertainty of bankruptcy and the assigning of contract rights to Beacon Press meant that many others, including Smith and Lorde, had to sue in order to regain rights to their work. During this period, which lasted between twelve and eighteen months, it was difficult for women to acquire copies of *This Bridge*, and the planned publication of *Home Girls* was delayed. The end of Persephone, however, was an incredible opportunity for KTP. It brought two crucial titles to KTP: *This Bridge* and *Home Girls*. After the legal issues with Persephone were resolved, KTP sold the stock of *This Bridge* from Persephone. KTP did the first printing of *Home Girls*. These two books are the best-selling books for KTP. In 1986, *FBN* reported that KTP went back to press for a fifth printing of *This Bridge*, bringing a total of 35,000 copies into the marketplace; *Home Girls* went back to press for a total of 17,500 copies in the marketplace. These two books and their strong sales brought crucial revenue to the press.

KTP expanded through 1984 and 1985. In the spring of 1984, Smith and Moraga approached activist Betty Powell about taking on “some kind of coordinating function”

for KTP. Powell “had spent 19 years in educational and public service work; done political organizing in the gay and feminist communities for ten years, and used her experience in fundraising as a founding member of the Astraea Foundation.” Powell joined KTP officially in September 1984 as “the first and only full-time paid staff member.”³⁵⁴

When Powell joined KTP as a paid staff member, the collective structure was breaking down. Smith continued to be integral to KTP as a volunteer, but to build KTP as an institution, KTP hired additional staff people. Powell hired Lynn Kagawa to work on distribution—including automating the billing system for bookstores. KTP began as a volunteer collective, but the material conditions of the lives of collective members changed by the mid-1980s. Members had less time and energy to dedicate to volunteer activities, necessitating hiring paid staff. While one part of this reality was the increasing stature and income of some members of the collective, particularly Audre Lorde, there were larger economic shifts afoot as well. During the mid-1980s, the U.S. economy continued to shift from an industrial economy to an information and service economy. Increased work hours to satisfy basic living needs characterized this period. In addition, a series of recessions and increasing globalization made workers more economically insecure. Limited time and increased economic insecurity limited the amount of time for voluntary projects. These larger economic dynamics affected KTP and other lesbian-feminist publishing projects.

³⁵⁴ Tricia Lootens, “Third National Women in Print Conference,” *off our backs* 15, no. 8 (September 30, 1985): 8.

With paid staff and a growing publishing program, KTP expanded its outreach at conferences to both sell books and do political outreach. Powell and Smith described this part of their work as “not only discovering, but creating an audience: an audience of people of color, they stressed, not just of lesbians or women of color.”³⁵⁵ In many ways, more than a publisher, Smith, in particular viewed KTP as a platform for political organizing—a way to meet people and change consciousness. She noted that “at many conferences, the press’s book table also becomes a political gathering point.”³⁵⁶ That same year, as a part of their outreach and organizing strategy, KTP published a large catalogue. Smith and Powell report that 40,000 copies of the catalogue were in circulation.³⁵⁷ The robustness of the catalogue was made possible by the commitment to not only publish work but also distribute it.

In 1985, KTP initiated the pamphlet series and published five pamphlets in 1985 and 1986. These pamphlets, in addition to presenting an essay by a prominent writer, also included a resource listing of organization and publications; they were individually “shrink wrapped with a wearable button reflecting the pamphlet’s theme.”³⁵⁸ The five pamphlets demonstrate the multiple political commitments of KTP. The first pamphlet was a reprint of “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” with the subtitle “Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties” and a new foreword by Barbara Smith. It included a button with the slogan: BLACK FEMINISM LIVES! The second

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ *FBN* 8, no. 6 (June/July 1986): 33.

pamphlet contained two essays: Audre Lorde's "Apartheid U.S.A." and Merle Woo's "Our Common Enemy, Our Common Cause: Freedom Organizing in the Eighties." This pamphlet made connections between South African apartheid and North American racism and included the button: NO TO APARTHEID, NO TO RACISM. The third pamphlet was another essay by Audre Lorde, "I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing Across Sexualities"; it included a button with the universal NO symbol slashed across HOMOPHOBIA. The fourth pamphlet was by Barbara Omolade: "It's a Family Affair: The Real Lives of Black Single Mothers," with a button that said: "Black Single Mothers: We Are Family." The final pamphlet was by Angela Y. Davis, "Violence Against Women and the Ongoing Challenge to Racism," with a button that said "Fight Racism, Fight Rape." Taken as a whole, this pamphlet series was an innovative publishing project, bringing short and incisive texts to people at a low cost (the pamphlets ranged in price from \$2.95 to \$3.50) and pairing them with a visible political statement through the button. This pamphlet series, with its combination of text and physical symbol of activism, represents an important innovation of KTP: the mass production and circulation of booklets as tools for organizing and activism. They also demonstrate the intellectual foundations of KTP: promoting an intersectional analysis of people's lives on multiple axes of oppression.

During 1985, KTP also incorporated as a non-profit organization to be "eligible for both grants and a special bulk mailing permit." Smith noted that nonprofit status was controversial among some lesbian-feminist publishers, who worried about "government interference" in their operations. For Smith, incorporating as a non-profit was an economic question. At a 1985 WIP workshop, Smith said, "White women have large

amounts of disposable income; people leave them money, write them checks.”³⁵⁹ KTP, operated by women of color with less access to disposable income, could not afford to exclude the possibility of finding grant money.

In 1985, at the third Women in Print Conference in Oakland, CA, Smith told participants in a workshop on the status of KTP that in the spring of 1983, “Persephone Press decided to go out of business—and the emphasis is on ‘decided.’”³⁶⁰ Smith presents an alternate narrative to the end of Persephone with the suggestion that Greenfield and McGloin *chose* to walk away from Persephone; she also intimates that their choice was aided, in part, because they were walking away from women of color authors who have less value than white authors. Smith continued to note that “at the time Persephone had four or five books by women of color either in print or accepted for publication,” and without KTP, “*Home Girls* might never had existed, and *Bridge* might have been a memory.”³⁶¹ Smith acknowledges that she “made a decision not to talk about it” because “our movement loves the gossip level, even though we pretend not to.”³⁶² Smith’s assertion that Persephone decided to go out of business has merit. Yes, the financial situation at Persephone was grave, but Greenfield and McGloin were also burned out. There is a valid argument that the concatenation of economic and personal problems caused McGloin and Greenfield to decide to close the business. Whether Persephone closed in a failure that could not be prevented by the principals or because the principals

³⁵⁹ “Third National Women in Print Conference” by Tricia Lootens, *off our backs* 15, no. 8, (September 30, 1985): 8.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*

decided to close Persephone, the end of Persephone had negative consequences on a handful of books by women of color—books that were at the time extraordinarily significant and whose significance would only continue to grow. I view the situation as creating a unique opportunity for KTP to flourish, though I appreciate Smith’s lingering anger and resentment about the end of Persephone.

Again the nexus between the personal and the structural creates a potent dynamic. Feminist analyses make connections between the personal and the political, or structural, and these analyses make situations like the collapse of Persephone fraught with meaning. In reporting on the workshop at the third WIP conference for *off our backs*, Lootens reflects that “the Persephone story seemed to me to hit home: if women of colors’ gains were precarious where Persephone was concerned, they looked equally precarious at the conference; and although Smith didn’t explicitly draw the connection, I felt it was in the air.”³⁶³ The third WIP conference in 1985 did not have the same high level of participation from women of color as the second one did in 1981. In 1981, women at the WIP conference celebrated the gains in access for women of color to the conference and the strides of the movement in building a multicultural community; by 1985, these gains had eroded as feminist and lesbian-feminist publishing faced new challenges in the political and economic climate in the United States under the Reagan administration.

Unbeknownst to Smith, her statements about deciding—or not—to go out of business were prescient: in 1986 and 1987, KTP encountered difficulty. Reflecting on the period in 1998, Smith wrote, “the Press shifted quickly from being a ‘collective’ of women who did at least some of the necessary work voluntarily to being an organization

³⁶³ Ibid.

in which everyone (except for me) got paid for their time. . . .the attempt to maintain several paid staff positions, as well as other negative forces, led by 1986 to the Press's crisis."³⁶⁴ Smith intervened in the KTP crisis and prevented the failure of KTP. In 1987, she moved KTP from Brooklyn to her new home in Albany, NY. When she moved the bank account to a local Albany bank, "we had less than three dollars in the bank and tens of thousands of dollars in debt, owed mostly to our printer." Amazingly, in a great act of devotion and tenacity, Smith, with a new friend in Albany, Lucretia Diggs, saved KTP, kept it solvent and continuing to publish.

In Albany, four people worked with KTP on a regular basis, including Smith, Diggs, and an array of more temporary workers, including one white Jewish woman.³⁶⁵ KTP had offices at the Albany Urban League/NAACP building, building an important alliance between the feminist press and these two historic civil rights organizations. The years between 1987 and 1993 were productive for KTP. KTP published six original titles between 1987 and 1993: *A Comrade is as Precious as a Rice Seedling* by Mila D. Aguilar in 1987; Mitsuye Yamada's *Desert Run: Poems and Stories* and Hisaye Yamamoto's *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* in 1988; Gloria T. Hull's *Healing Heart: Poems 1973-1988* in 1989; Audre Lorde's *Need: A Chorale for Black Woman Voices* in 1990; and Mitsuye Yamada's *Camp Notes and Other Poems* in 1992. Yamada's book was the last book published by KTP.

KTP published fifteen books and pamphlets during the fifteen years of its operation. One of the distinguishing characteristics of KTP is the variety of printed

³⁶⁴ Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 197-198.

³⁶⁵ Smith, *Truth*, 200-201.

materials that the press published. In addition to traditional trade books and the influential pamphlet series, in 1991, KTP “printed a poster in protest against the U.S. Senate’s disregard for Anita Hill’s testimony at the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings in 1991.”³⁶⁶ The poster included “the signatures of 1603 supporters inside a woman’s silhouette.” This type of publishing—beyond the bounds of traditional publishers—demonstrates the activist intent of KTP as well as the flexibility of the press to respond to emergent activist needs. 1983 was the most productive publishing year; KTP reissued *Narratives* under its imprint and published *Cuentos*. In addition, KTP reissued *This Bridge* and published *Home Girls*, both of which it acquired after Persephone closed. Textual accretions—the list of KTP titles extending over a decade, the designation of women of color, in both the press’s name and in its mission statement—make meaning. From the initial collective, which included women with a variety of racial-ethnic heritages, to the books published by KTP, KTP unified women of color under that designation.

One way of understanding KTP is as a publisher that consolidated the identity formation, women of color, and the feminist formation, women of color feminism. KTP’s publishing practices and their rhetoric supports this interpretation of KTP. At the same time, KTP also continued the practice of identity elaboration. The books and materials published by KTP reflect a continuing evolution of women of color as an identity formation—extending it to be inclusive of women from a variety of racial-ethnic backgrounds and persistently concerned with questions of class and sexual orientation.

³⁶⁶ Kayann Short, “Coming to the Table: The Differential Politics of This Bridge Called My Back” in *Eroticism and Containment Notes from the Flood Plain*, Caro Siegel and Ann Kibbey, editors (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 12.

KTP also extends the identity formation of women of color; initially, the term describes a U.S.-based identity formation, while the term, Third World Women, described women of color in locations outside of North America and Western Europe. These two terms, women of color and Third World Women, overlapped and converged, however, in their practical applications. Through its publishing practices, KTP extended the term women of color internationally.

Kate Rushin animates this tension between identity consolidation and elaboration in her poem, "The Bridge Poem." The metaphor of women of color as a bridge originates in the publication of *This Bridge* and in Rushin's poem in particular. Like the productive and dynamic tension between identity consolidation and elaboration for KTP, the bridge metaphor in which women of color connect different worlds is fraught with multiple meanings, both within Rushin's poem and as an extended metaphor for women of color. On one hand, KTP, in particular, and women of color, more broadly, are a bridge between two worlds. KTP bridged worlds between white lesbian-feminist publishers and women of color, and, more broadly, worlds between white feminists and feminists of color. Yet, the bridge metaphor suggests a binary relationship, a physical and metaphoric linking of two things. In fact, KTP envisioned and worked to create multiple worlds and multiple relationships among these worlds. The topography envisioned by KTP through its publishing was not binary. Through publishing, KTP encouraged men of color to read about women of color and lesbians of color. KTP created opportunities for women in the United States to learn about the lives of women in other countries. KTP extended worlds through their publishing, not by building bridges but by elaborating multiple identities and multiple connections between and among identity groups. In this way, the bridge that

both *This Bridge* suggests and that Donna Kate Rushin constructs in her poem, “The Bridge Poem,” is about multiple constituencies and multiple worlds.

Rushin’s poem bears out that vision powerfully. Rushin begins:

I’ve had enough
I’m sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody

In the third stanza of “The Bridge Poem,” Rushin enumerates the many people she “bridges:” members of her family, white feminists, Black church folks, ex-hippies, Black separatists, artists and her friends’ parents. The act of bridging for Rushin is not an act of bridging within a binary. She is engaged with multiple people in a large community—and she rejects the role of being a bridge. As if bridging between and among these people were not enough, Rushin exclaims, “Then/I’ve got to explain myself/To everybody.” From this description of her experience, Rushin moves to refusal. She explains that she is “sick of it,” sick “of filling in your gaps.” Rushin exhorts readers of the poem to “Find another connection to the rest of the world/Find something else to make you legitimate/Find some other way to be political and hip.” One strategy that feminists could use to “find another connection” was reading the books published by KTP. The act of publishing books empowers women of color as authors, publishers, and readers. It also reduces their burden to educate others by providing a less invasive educational tool to learn about the lives and experiences of women of color for white feminists, men of color, and other interested readers.

If KTP embraced its role as a bridge in service to its vision of creating multiple worlds, at the end of “The Bridge Poem,” Rushin rejects using her body as a bridge. Rushin asserts that “The bridge I must be/Is the bridge to my own power” and

I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful

For Rushin, usefulness for women of color comes after finding their “true selves.” Part of the quest of *This Bridge* is the articulation of what the writers’ experienced as their true selves in order to be of use to themselves and to a broader liberatory movement. As much as *This Bridge* and “The Bridge Poem” embrace the metaphor of a bridge to build a new world, they also decline the role of a bridge for individual women of color. This dynamic tension between how organizations could operate in making new worlds through coalition work and how individual bodies were situated, often forced to do bridging work to the exclusion of their own self interest—of discovering their “true selves”—demonstrates a significant epistemic rupture in feminism during the 1980s. While many feminist theorists and historians argue that the WLM collapsed amid discussions about ‘identity politics’ and an embrace of essentialism, this epistemic rupture between the theoretical work that women envisioned to heal the experiences of sexism, racism, homophobia and other sources of oppression and the lived realities of oppressed people contributed more to the decline of energy for feminist activism than current feminist scholarship suggests.

Through books, KTP as an institution was useful; KTP created the possibilities for multiplicitous identities within lesbian-feminist worlds. KTP reflected differential feminism as articulated by Sandoval. Short describes the work of *This Bridge* as “differential movement between ‘naming specific differences’ (identity politics) and ‘crossing over’ (coalition politics)” and argues that this epistemology “forms the structure

of *This Bridge*.”³⁶⁷ This is true, but *This Bridge*, in particular, and publishing by KTP, in general, challenges binary epistemologies—a structure Short unwittingly embraces. Through both the objects that KTP published and its material practices as a publisher—production, distribution, marketing, promotion—KTP animated systems of thinking about feminist identities and feminist formations that expanded the meanings of feminism and resisted existing binaries.

In addition to creating multiplicitous worlds, KTP also enabled feminism to extend internationally. In 1985, Smith noted that “The publication of Mila Aguilar’s *A Comrade is as Precious as a Rice Seedling* has helped move the press more into a public anti-imperialist stance.” Publishing the book, “not only meant taking direction in circulating petitions for Aguilar’s release from prison in the Philippines, it meant moving into a new culture, a new community.”³⁶⁸ Publishing books helped KTP to extend its politics to anti-imperialism and new international consciousness, just as reading books by KTP helped feminists to think in these new directions.

Short argues that “the anthology format of many of Kitchen Table’s books is another political publishing choice” because it promotes the writing of “as many women of color as possible.” I agree, but I also think that the presence of multiple genres and writers writing across multiple genres is a hallmark of the WLM and feminist publishing writ large. Even more important than publishing iconic anthologies, KTP’s contributions demonstrate the flexibility to publish multiple types of print material to meet different political and economic needs for feminism.

Conclusion

³⁶⁷ Short, “Coming to the Table,” 27.

³⁶⁸ Lootens, “Third National Women in Print Conference,” 8.

In interviews after KTP folded, Smith reflects on KTP as a failure. Her commitment to Lorde was to build an institution—something that would last for women of color. The operations of all of the presses in this study ended by 1989. A few lesbian-feminist presses survived during the 1990s, notably Naiad Press and Firebrand Books. Some feminist presses continue today, including The Feminist Press, Cleis and Spinsters Ink/Aunt Lute, but the landscape for lesbian publishing and feminist publishing are radically different today than they were during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, none of the lesbian-feminist presses have survived to 2012 with the strength and vibrancy they had in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s.

There are many reasons that small lesbian-feminist presses fail or choose to end their operations. Burnout of the principals is common, as is simply the desire of women to pursue other activist engagements. The economics of running a small publishing house are daunting in the best economic environment. In an economic environment characterized by recessions and multinational capitalism, in which publishers and media in general were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large, multi-national corporations, the survival of small publishing houses without financial subventions is nearly impossible. The concatenation of many factors allowed feminist presses to prosper in the 1970s and 1980s. These factors include the proliferation of feminist bookstores, the growth of identifiable communities to sell books to, and the visibility of invested communities of readers for lesbian-feminist books. The changing political, economic, and social environments led them to fold during those decades and in subsequent decades.

One vibrant legacy of lesbian-feminist publishers during the 1980s is the printed conversations about identity elaborations. Persephone Press, Long Haul Press, and

Kitchen Table Press all contributed to these conversations through their publishing practices and through the advocacy and activism of their principals.

I don't want to create the sense of a lost world of Lesbos, but I do want to acknowledge the broad cultural habitus that emerged between 1969 and 1989 as having a substantial formative effect on lesbian-feminist publishing. Smith's sense of KTP's failure to create an institution is not accurate. Elaborations of radical feminism, cultural feminism, and lesbian-feminism as an epistemological project resist the very structures of building institutions. That is, projects directed to vanguard thinking often find themselves bound necessarily by time. Institutions by their very nature have particular investments in the status quo, even when they want to change aspects of the status quo. This is not to suggest that there isn't a need to have a woman of color press, or lesbian-feminist presses, but that the lives of such presses are often necessarily limited in time.

/Interlude 3/Women In Print Conferences

Between 1976 and 1985, feminist publishers organized three Women in Print Conferences. These conferences provided a focus of community and activism for women involved in printing and publishing and animate some of the challenges and issues that lesbian-feminists faced during these years.

June Arnold hatched the idea for a gathering of women involved in printing and publishing. The conference was planned by Arnold, Charlotte Bunch of *Quest Magazine*, Coletta Reid of Diana Press, and Nancy Stockwell of *Plexus*. The conference ran a full week from August 29, 1976 through September 5th at a Campfire Girls' camp in Omaha, NE. The organized selected Omaha because it is in the middle of the country, equidistant for women on both coasts to drive. 132 women attended the conference representing eighty “newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, printing companies, bookstores, and distribution services.”³⁶⁹ The eight days of the gathering was intense and enormously generative for different lesbian-feminist projects around the country.

In 1981, a group of Washington, DC-based activists organized the Second National Women in Print Conference. The organizing committee included women from the off our backs collective, Mary Farmer of Lammas bookstore, and two self-publishers based in Washington, DC, Betty Bird and Susan Wood-Thompson. This conference was larger—attended by over 250 women representing an array of feminist print culture projects—and featured a wide range of programing, including nearly sixty workshops and several caucuses.

³⁶⁹ Janis Kelly, “Conference of Women in Print,” *off our backs* 6, no. 8, (November 30, 1976): 2.

What distinguished the Second National Women in Print Conference, according to both newspaper reports after the conference and participants memories, is the inclusion of women of color. The conference organizers raised money separately to provide scholarships for women of color and working class and poor women to attend the conference. The organizers' commitment to inclusion by reducing economic barriers affected both attendance at the conference as well as the types of conversations and debates that conference attendees had. In addition, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press launched at the second Women in Print Conference, with many attendees committing to support the press in a variety of ways.³⁷⁰

The Third National Women in Print Conference was held from May 29 until June 1, 1985, at the University of California, Berkeley. Over 200 feminists attended. Organized by a "small, ad hoc group of women in the San Francisco Bay area," the conference had a "deliberate" focus on the "nuts-and-bolts" of publishing. Although the conference was held in the midst of powerful debates about pornography, conversations about these issues were subdued at the conference. A report about the conference in *off our backs* notes that women attended from two prosex periodicals, *On Our Backs* and *Outrageous Women*, as well as women from feminist bookstores who refused to carry these periodicals, but no direct confrontations happened at the conference.³⁷¹

The great drama of the conference centered around Barbara Grier and Naiad Press. To promote the book *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*, Grier sold excerpts from the

³⁷⁰ Fran Moira, "Women in Print: Overview," *off our backs* 11, no. 11 (December 31, 1981): 2.

³⁷¹ Tricia Lootens, "Third National Women in Print Conference," *off our backs* 15, no. 8 (September 30, 1985): 8.

book to *Forum*, a subsidiary of *Penthouse*. Grier sold the stories without consultation with the editors of *Lesbian Nuns* or the authors of the individual stories, creating a furor among the contributors to the book and the larger lesbian-feminist community. At the Women in Print conference, the organizers devoted a session, “hastily arranged and heavily attended,” to the “ethical and legal issues” with Naiad Press.³⁷² This workshop session did not lay to rest all of the concerns that women around the country had about Grier and *Lesbian Nuns*, but, through the testimony of other authors and publishers in similar situations to Grier’s, the session contextualized Grier’s actions in the broader lesbian-feminist publishing community. Still, issues about *Lesbian Nuns* and Barbara Grier brewed throughout the summer of 1985.

After 1985, there were no more Women in Print Conferences. Lesbian-feminist publishing continued, of course, but women never recreated the dedicated communal space of a conference. The next conference where lesbian-feminist authors, publishers, and other literary activists gathered was not a space exclusively organized by and for women. Out/Write, a conference for lesbian and gay authors, began in 1990. Out/Write reflects the different identity formation of gay and lesbian, but it continues the political spirit and commitment to community that June Arnold expressed when she organized the first Women in Print conference in 1976.

³⁷² Ibid.

Chapter 3

Small Lesbian-Feminist Presses

That Woman On My Mind

The bell on the front door rings for the last time today. The whack of the deadbolt, secured by your co-worker, tells you the official workday is over. For a moment, the print shop is silent, only a quiet hum from fluorescent lights. Stacked by the back door, boxes of finished jobs are ready for morning deliveries. Beneath the counter by the cash register are boxes of new stock delivered late this afternoon. You'll need to put them up before you leave tonight so that customers can navigate the shop in the morning. You will do that task while the machines churn through their second shift: printing the chapbook for your small press. Your boss knows you are staying late to use the equipment. He grunted his assent with the caveat, *Don't tell me more. Clean up. Don't let me or others see it.* Fine. You retrieve the big box from near the typesetter. In it is all you need for the next few hours: Alix Dobkin's album, *Lavender Jane Loves Women*, the film for printing, the thick, creamy paper you ordered especially for this job. With the album on the turn table and Dobkin crooning, *The woman in your life will do what you must do to comfort you and calm you down . . . because the woman in your life is you. . . .*, you fire up the machine. Even though it's only been off thirty minutes, it needs time to warm up.

Carefully, you place the film over the large drums. You'll print eight pages at a time of the forty-four pages for the book. There is enough stock to print 525 or 530 copies, though a couple dozen will be soiled in the process. You hope for 500 good copies on this first run. Tonight, the interior pages. It would be great to do the cover with

the heavy, gray-flecked, linen stock, but it will be printed in purple, and you don't know if you'll have the energy to clean the machine, reload it with purple ink, then run the job. You don't want to make any mistakes. This is important. A job of love and passion. It isn't like the school lunch menus or the grocery store inserts for the Sunday newspaper. This is a book for lesbians. Poems about love and life. Poems to nurture the revolution. You take out the black ink. It is thick and viscous. It becomes thinner as the machine heats it preparing to roll it on the page.

While you print, you sing along with Alix, but then you start to compose your own song from the rhythms of evening work. You hum first with Alix, then add these words,

Running this old printing press
with a woman on my mind
it jammed up tight eight times today
and I think this might make nine
there's paper in the rollers
and solution down my sleeve
I just got here but I think it's time to leave.³⁷³

You delight in this improvised chorus and then begin to add verses:

I just got to work today
after seeing her last night
since I arrived, everything's gone wrong
and nothing's gone right.

Ha! A good rhyme there. Suddenly the press seizes. There's paper flying everywhere.

Maybe you'll add that as the next line. You attend to the press, pulling out the jammed paper, taking out pages that have been creased, then carefully reload everything and

³⁷³ These lyrics are by Cris South, a printer and one of the women of Night Heron Press. The complete song lyrics are from the Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Box 57, folder "Cris South 1978-1979, 1982-1986," Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. At the bottom, South typed, "Dedicated to Minnie Bruce" and then in handwritten text wrote, "I love you! Chuckle—Cris."

begin printing again. Alix is still singing, but you begin a new verse remembering last night:

We went out to dinner
and we talked endlessly
then went back home and we made love
'til it was nearly three.
I got up at six AM
did not get here til nine
how can I run this printing press
with that woman on my mind?

There is poetry in printing. The “endless reams of paper,”

the press is out of ink
blanket wash has all run out
and the belts are out of sync
the masters all are tearing
oh, today is not so kind,

You fiddle more with the machine. Coaxing it to finish the job. Hours pass. It is dark outside. At last, the final pages are stacking on the finisher. You think, it looks good! You are excited to show it off. Tomorrow night, you'll print the covers. Then, it will be ready to be trimmed and collated over the weekend. That will be a good afternoon of work, even with three or four sets of hands to help. You move the boxes from the front to the paper storage area, composing the final verse for your song. Maybe you'll call it “The Printer's Blues.”

Life is hard when you have to work
to earn your daily bread
I don't make those decisions
I just go where I am led.
When it gets the best of me
and my day gets out of line
I just run this printing press
and keep that woman on my mind.

Maybe you'll just title it, "Running This Old Printing Press." You scribble your song down on paper. Tomorrow you will type it up and give it to the one you love—that woman on your mind. You tidy up the shop a bit more. Turn off the lights. Leave out the back door. It is late, but you still have a few hours to spend with that woman on your mind.

Introduction

Larger lesbian-feminist presses like the Women's Press Collective, Diana Press, Daughters, Inc., Persephone Press, and Kitchen Table Press expose new histories about lesbianism-feminism and feminist ideological formations in the 1970s and 1980s; smaller presses tell stories as well. Small presses demonstrate that lesbian-feminist publishing was not a bicoastal phenomenon; they illuminate the roots and alliances of lesbian-feminism with gay liberation in the early years and later with the gay, lesbian, and bisexual movement. Most importantly, small presses demonstrate the close relationship between lesbian-feminist writers and readers during the WLM. By examining the material histories of four small lesbian-feminist presses—Womanpress, Violet Press, Out & Out Books, and Night Heron Press—I consider how publishing and community building are co-constitutive for lesbian-feminists. For my purposes, community building refers to a variety of activities of lesbian feminists that define and articulate lesbian-feminists as a community to be organized and activated for political, social, and intellectual purposes. By exploring community building as co-constitutive with publishing for both publishers and authors, I rethink reader reception as an element of the literary habitus.

Reader reception refers to a specific type of literary critical theory that examines how readers encounter, receive, and interpret texts. Wolfgang Iser argues for literary texts that force “the reader into a new critical awareness of his or her customary codes and expectations,”³⁷⁴ while Stanley Fish argues that texts are no ‘objective’ work of literature, but rather written by the reader through the process of reading, or experiencing the text.³⁷⁵ Hans Robert Jauss sees the history of literature as “a dialogue between work and audience” with “opposition between its aesthetic and its historical aspects” both of which are “continually mediated.”³⁷⁶ The reception of lesbian-feminist texts demonstrates all of these theoretical approaches, though I am most interested in exploring how reader reception is shaped through a co-constitutive process mediated by lesbian-feminist publishers’ community building. Through the small lesbian-feminist presses, I explore how readers not only respond to the texts that are published, but also shape future publishing through their responses. Rather than seeing reader reception as solely a receptive relationship, I explore the dynamic engagements between and among

³⁷⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 79. As Eagleton notes, Barthes’s theory of reader reception in *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975) departs sharply from Iser. While Iser’s formulation of reader reception is most useful to me, Barthes’s work would illuminate a different set of lesbian poetry, such as work by Gertrude Stein, Lynn Lonidier, Nicole Brossard, Betsy Warland, and Daphne Marlatt.

³⁷⁵ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980). Fish’s work has been used effectively by feminists in examining communities of women readers, specifically Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Jacqueline Bobo’s *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

³⁷⁶ Robert Jauss, “Literary History As a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota, 1982), 19.

readers, artists, and publishers, and the print culture artifacts that these engagements generate.

For my purposes, small presses refer to publishers that published fewer than a dozen books and were operated by women as an avocational activity. That is, for these lesbian publishers publishing was not the primary vocation or means of economic support. I make this distinction retrospectively and out of convenience to narrate the stories; it is not a distinction made by women at the time or widely discussed in their frameworks about publishing. In fact, many of the women involved in lesbian-feminist publishing, either book publishing or journal publishing, identified primarily as writers or artists, regardless of their means of economic support.

Lesbian-feminist small press publishing exploded during the 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s—and beyond. In 1978, Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman published the *Guide to Women's Publishing*.³⁷⁷ This compendium of publishers of both periodicals and books as well as all-woman print shops captures the breadth of publishing activities in 1978. Chesman and Joan declare in their introduction, “At the same time that feminist presses (books and magazines) were bursting into being, women’s print shops were getting off the ground, and women’s bookstores began springing up all over the country. The intensity of Feminism as a Movement, even with inadequate distribution methods spread through the ‘printed word.’”³⁷⁸ These statements from Chesman and Joan capture the intensity of the production of feminist print culture during the 1970s. Their

³⁷⁷ *Guide to Women's Publishing* was published by Dustbooks. Dustbooks was founded by Len Fulton to publish the *Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. Fulton was an ally and advocate of small press publishing of women’s writing.

³⁷⁸ Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman, *Guide to Women's Publishing* (Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 1978), 3.

assessment of the field focuses primarily on the proliferation of small presses and on a variety of business and community networks that supported the creation, distribution, and reception of feminist print culture. Joan, the primary compiler of information about the presses, divides feminist presses into two groups in her overview: presses that have published four or more titles and presses that have published one to three titles. Joan identifies a total of forty-seven presses that have published four or more books and twenty-six presses that have published between one and three books. Of these seventy-three presses, many published work by lesbians and more than a dozen were dedicated entirely to publishing work by lesbians.³⁷⁹

Feminist and lesbian-feminist publishing during the 1970s and 1980s addressed an array of topics. Poetry, of course, was a popular and important publishing category for lesbian-feminists, including all of the five small presses that I profile; each press published important poetry titles. While my selection of presses is in some ways representative of the publishing activity of the time, the selection is by no means comprehensive. Between 1969 and 1989, many poets, inspired by the energy of the WLM for sharing work, published their work through an independent imprint. Some notable poets who published independently include Wendy Stevens, who published *I am Not a*

³⁷⁹ I include the following presses in my count of publishers dedicated to publishing work by lesbians: Daughters, Inc., Diana Press, Druid Heights Books, Naiad Press, Out & Out Books, Persephone Press, Violet Press, Womanpress, Women's Press Collective, Amazon Press, Metis Press, and New Woman Press. The relationship between lesbianism and lesbian-feminism is porous, however, as I have discussed previously. Hence distinctions like the one I make here always are contested. For instance, Out & Out Books only published work by lesbians, with only one exception. Moreover, many presses that published a range of feminist work were operated by lesbians even if the published work wasn't primarily or exclusively lesbian. I provide these distinctions about lesbian publishing in an effort to further clarify the activities within lesbian print culture while acknowledging that the appellations of lesbian and lesbian-feminist are overlapping and malleable through the time period - as they continue to be today.

Careful Poet herself from her Washington, DC, home; Chocolate Waters, a member of the *Big Mama Rag* collective in Denver, Colorado, who published *To the Man Reporter from the Denver Post* (1975), *Take Me Like a Photograph* (1977), and *Charting New Waters* (1980); Susan Wood-Thompson, who published her first and only book of poetry *Crazy Quilt* under the imprint Crown Books; Elsa Gidlow, who published her work through Druid Height Press;³⁸⁰ Tee Corinne, who published through Pearlchild Press between 1984 and 2003; Susan Sherman, who published through Two & Two Press; and Irena Klepfisz, who reprinted her first collection under the imprint Piecework Press.³⁸¹

Feminist publishing, however, wasn't limited to poetry. In 1975, with the imprint Down There Press, Joani Blank published *The Playbook: For Women/About Sex*. By 1978, she had sold about 6,000 copies of the book.³⁸² Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove published *Turned-On Women's Songbook*, a collection of songs written by Jean Mountaingrove, through an imprint, New Woman Press. In 1970, Helen Garvy published a forty-eight-page book, *How to Fix Your Bicycle*. By 1978, she reported to Chesman and Joan that 100,000 copies of the book were sold and that she published a second book, *I Built Myself a House*, with her imprint Shire Press.³⁸³ The variety of topics that feminists addressed during the 1970s demonstrates the expansiveness of the vision of feminism for women in the WLM. The ability to remake the world, or at least fix a bicycle, build a

³⁸⁰ Gidlow also published with Diana Press.

³⁸¹ Bibliographies of these presses and poets and many others, including Shameless Hussy Press, Mulch Press, Motherroot Press, and ManRoot Press are available at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org.

³⁸² Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 129.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 205.

house, and have a pleasurable orgasm, were all within reach through the revolution of the WLM, and these visions were shared through publishing.

To get their words, ideas, and arguments out, feminists and lesbian-feminists developed a variety of publishing vehicles, ranging from larger publishing houses intent on taking on the New York-based industry to small letter-press production studios and self-named imprints for a single book or the books of a collection of friends and colleagues. The variety of lesbian and feminist publishing during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrates the significance of empowerment as both ideology and action in the WLM. Lesbian-feminist publishing animated feminist ideas of empowerment; by publishing either independently or collaboratively with other writers, artists, and printing tradeswomen, lesbian writers and artists took control of the means of production and used it in service to their art.

In retrospect, we might ask, is this feminist publishing activity self-publishing? Is it vanity publishing? One way to answer both of those questions is yes, but I use the labels self-publishing and vanity publishing cautiously. In spite of the long history of author-controlled publishing, there is a stigma associated with self-publication. In academic circles, self-publishing suggests that the work is of lesser quality because it is not peer-reviewed. Yet, we see, for example, in the Women's Press Collective that manuscripts were intensely peer reviewed—by peers in the collective and by other feminists. Thus, while we may describe the publishing of Judy Grahn or Pat Parker as self-publishing, because they were both intensely and personally involved in the publishing process, their manuscripts were also peer-reviewed and peer edited. In this way, the moniker self-published is not accurate. Moreover, publishing outside of

academia operates with a different type of peer review than academic scholarship: sales of books to individuals and libraries. This aspect of publishing may be called more accurately market review, or market success. By this measure, the publishing activities of lesbian-feminists achieved different levels of success based on the project and on the overall economic viability of the press. While I cautiously embrace the label of “self-publishing” for many of these publishing projects, for Grahn, Parker, and other feminist publishers, the work of creating the books was neither vanity nor self-serving, it was an act of taking power, an act of empowerment for the writers. Lesbian-feminist publishers understood their work not as self-publishing but rather as engaging in an activity to strike at the heart of patriarchy and capitalism: producing books oneself.

By attending to the material production of books during the Women In Print Movement, I illuminate the lives of lesbians during the 1970s and 1980s and the enactments and meanings of their feminist commitments; I also highlight their belief in the immediacy of a feminist revolution and explore the ruptures within feminism as well as the sutures feminists sought to sew through their work. Publishing books has never been easy. There are conflicts. Difficult moments. These conflicts are characterized sometimes by historians and feminist theorists as intractable ideological differences; certainly sometimes they were, though I tend to see them as important elaborations of and negotiations between feminist theory and practice. Moreover, interwoven with these ideological conflicts and the broader historical conditions in which women lived, are interpersonal conflicts. I gesture to some of these conflicts—should gay men and lesbians work together?, how can lesbians build inclusive environments?, are twelve-step recovery programs legitimate?, what does lesbian mean?—always trying to hold on to a truth that

both political and personal forces shape our lives and our work. To that end, here are four narrative histories of small lesbian-feminist presses—Womanpress, Violet Press, Out & Out Books, and Night Heron Press. Close the door. The light from the handmade light table will provide the warm glow you need while you listen to the hum and whir of the press operating smoothly, for now, in the background.

Violet Press

“It was a moment when we reenvisioned all of society and imagined a culture of our own.”—Fran Winant

On the first anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion, June 28, 1970, Fran Winant marched on the streets of New York with friends and comrades from the Gay Liberation Front. Ten thousand people marched in the first Christopher Street Liberation Day “with our banners and our smiles.”³⁸⁴ Peter Hujar preserved a moment from that day in an iconic photograph with Winant front and center and more than a dozen sisters and brothers around her, smiling laughing, arms raised, marching.³⁸⁵ Hujar’s photograph would later be printed as a poster emblazoned with the words, “COME OUT!! JOIN THE SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF THE GAY LIBERATION FRONT.” In 1980, Winant includes an image of the poster on the third page of the second edition of her chapbook *Looking at Women*. In 1970, though, Fran Winant was twenty-six years old,³⁸⁶ a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and deeply involved in the GLF in 1969 and 1970.

Through the GLF, Winant worked with other women to organize GLF’s first all-women’s

³⁸⁴ Winant, “Christopher St. Liberation Day, June 28, 1970,” *Looking at Women*, 42.

³⁸⁵ Hujar became prominent as a black and white fine arts photographer. Hujar died from complications of AIDS in 1987; he was the long-time companion of artist David Wojnarowicz.

³⁸⁶ Winant was born on October 28, 1943.

dance on April 3, 1970. Women of the GLF felt that the co-gendered dances “had a male sensibility” and they wanted instead, “light, space, and bare breasts.”³⁸⁷ Later that year, some of the lesbians in the GLF broke with the organization and formed RadicaLesbians.³⁸⁸ Winant reflected in 2010, “I reluctantly went with them. I felt GLF might ultimately be destroyed by groups splitting off, but I understood that as women we needed to explore our own identities and bond with as well as challenge the women's liberation movement.”³⁸⁹ In 1970, in New York City, the WLM and gay liberation were intertwined in both constructive and conflictual ways; lesbian activists and writers like Winant personally invested in the vibrancy of a variety of activist formations.

Amid the excitement and emergence of these new political organizations, Winant founded Violet Press and published its first title, her chapbook, *Looking at Women* (1971). The interior pages were typed on a typewriter; the cover art, title page, advertisement for “A Gay Womans Anthology,” and back cover were drawn by hand by Winant. Winant “took it [the typed pages and cover] to a woman I knew in the printing field” who “helped me to get it printed in a pamphlet style with a stapled binding.”³⁹⁰ The book was priced at \$.50. Winant reflected, “I wanted my book to be in the price range of every woman who wanted it. I didn’t think of the high cost of postage, stationary, my

³⁸⁷ Ellen Shumsky, presentation given at the CLAGS conference, *In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbian Lives in the 1970s*, October 2010.

³⁸⁸ RadicaLesbians, a collective of Lois Hart, Rita Mae Brown, Barbara XX, Artemis March, Ellen Shumsky, and Flavia Rando, authored “Woman-Identified Woman,” Ellen Shumsky, CLAGS conference, October 2010.

³⁸⁹ Fran Winant at the CLAGS conference, *In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbian Lives in the 1970s*, October 2010.

³⁹⁰ Fran Winant, “Lesbian Publishing Lesbians: My Life and Times with Violet Press,” *Margins* 23 (August 1975): 62.

labor—mailing books and doing publicity, which was, of course, unpaid, and which took many hours away from my writing.” As in the Women’s Press Collective, the exuberance of bringing books into print masked the economic realities of publishing.

During the 1970s, Violet Press published five titles: three by Winant, *Looking at Women* (1971), *Dyke Jacket: Poems and Songs* (1975), a perfect-bound book with a glossy cover, and *Goddess of Lesbian Dreams* (1980), also perfect-bound; one anthology, *We Are All Lesbians* (1973), edited by Winant; and another collection of poetry, *To Lesbians Everywhere* (1976) by Judy Greenspan. Although I characterize Winant’s books as poetry, many of her collections include not only poems, but also songs, printed with full musical scores. Through Violet Press, Winant planned to publish Ellen Marie Bissert’s *The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Dyke*; Bissert was the editor of the journal *13th Moon*. Winant and Bissert even discussed merging Violet Press and *13th Moon*, but as the page proofs were prepared, Bissert withdrew her manuscript, ended the collaborative relationship with Winant, and published the book herself under the imprint 13th Moon Books. In the late 1970s, Winant explored the possibility of putting out a record of songs, but that project didn’t materialize. During the 1980s, Winant also focused on her work as a visual artist.

According to Winant, she printed 3,000 copies of each book and sold most of the copies.³⁹¹ Winant published a second edition of *Looking at Women* in 1980 after the first edition sold out. The main distribution outlets for Violet Press books were women’s bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores. In *Margins*, Winant wrote, “I naively thought the book could be sold through free mentions and reviews in women’s and other

³⁹¹ Personal conversation with Fran Winant.

movement newspapers and magazines.”³⁹² While most of Winant’s books were reviewed and mentioned in women’s newspapers and magazines, the work of selling the books was a personal, one-on-one project, done by reaching out to both readers and booksellers. During the 1970s, Winant’s work and Violet Press were supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Arts Council and the CETA grant for youth employment. Support from these public agencies was critical to the work of Violet Press and Winant.

Violet Press is significant as a very early publisher of lesbian-feminist poetry in the WLM. Winant’s collection, *Looking at Women*, circulated in New York around the same time that Judy Grahn circulated *Edward the Dyke and Other Poems*. The anthology Winant edited, *We Are All Lesbians*, is one of the earliest anthologies of lesbian poems. The production and distribution of the books from Violet Press demonstrate both the do-it-yourself ethos of the 1970s, building on ideologies of empowerment and consciousness-raising and the way that writers networked with friends and colleagues to produce their work. Winant’s work through Violet Press also provides us with insight into the ways that ideas about social change were interconnected, particularly between the WLM and gay liberation. I analyze the content of some of these early poems to discuss this further.

The poems of *Looking at Women* are generally in the confessional mode that characterized much feminist poetry in the early years of the WLM.³⁹³ *Looking at Women*

³⁹² Winant, *Margins*, 62.

³⁹³ For a discussion of this see Howe’s and Bass’s introduction to *No More Masks* and Segnitz’s and Rainy’s introduction to *Psyche*.

speaks to the sentiments of Grahn's "The Common Woman" poems and even to Edward herself. Winant writes in the title poem,

My companion was a woman
People asked us if we were sisters
They asked us
in order to force us to lie
about our relationship
because we were constantly together
because we were lovers
because we could not protect each other
We could not protect each other³⁹⁴

Winant's poem articulates the desire for lesbians to be seen as lovers, and the dangers—as well as opportunities—that presents in the early 1970s. In the poem "I Want To Be," Winant muses, "If I were a scientist / a woman lesbian scientist / sitting in a laboratory / wearing a white coat," her greatest observation would be

there are things about women
that draw me to women
there are things about women
that draw me to myself³⁹⁵

In addition to situating a woman, a lesbian, as a scientist, something that was understood as transgressive of gender roles at the time, Winant suggests here that lesbianism has a particular valence for all women, that is, anyone can be a lesbian, and that lesbianism makes it possible to understand one's self better. By articulating the experience of being a lesbian, Winant names lesbian as a subject position available not only to her as a poet but

³⁹⁴ Winant, *Looking at Women*, 3.

³⁹⁵ Winant, *Looking at Women*, 11; emphasis in original.

to other women as readers. For Winant, lesbian is an almost magical subjectivity³⁹⁶ available to all women.

Winant's poems are not all about women and lesbians, however. Winant's political engagements and commitments included both feminism and gay liberation; her poetry reflects both. She writes about the one-year anniversary of "Christopher St. Liberation Day,"

we are marching into ourselves
like a body
gathering its cells
creating itself
in sunlight
we turn to look back
on the thousands behind us
it seems we will converge
until we explode
sisters and sisters
brothers and brothers
Together

In this passage, Winant utilizes the language of nature—gathering its cells, sunlight, an explosion—to place lesbians and gay men, sisters and brother, firmly in the realm of the natural. This image was a sharp contrast from the medical and psychological discourse that surrounded Winant when she was writing these poems. Metaphorically, she evokes the political and social changes she envisions. What Winant imagines in these poems are changes not circumscribed by a particular ideology of feminism nor by feminism itself. Winant's use of grammatical parallelism to link lesbians and gay men reminds us of the multiple and overlapping allegiances of lesbians and feminists at the time to the WLM and to gay liberation.

³⁹⁶ Katie King, "Lesbianism as Feminism's Magical Sign," *Theory in Its Feminist Travels: Conversations in the U.S. Women's Movements* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 124-37.

In a similar move, in the poem “World Youth,” Winant captures the multiple conflicts between and among people at a meeting at the United Nations about homosexuality. While on one hand the focus of the poem is about homosexuality, it also engages in a broader discourse about national and international politics. Winant centers questions of gay rights and feminism, but considers United States imperialism with equal seriousness. “World Youth” functions as both a poem and a report to readers about what happened at the gathering at the United Nations and what work needs to be done from multiple nationalist perspectives. “World Youth” is significant because it articulates international concerns about homosexuality and feminism. While it expresses these concerns within particular ideologies and values from the early 1970s, it still demonstrates the engagements of lesbians and feminists with concerns broader than and beyond United States activism.

Winant’s engagements in *Looking at Women* reflect a political environment in which she was writing and circulating poetry; in her environment, lesbian-feminism was emergent with other concerns about global citizenship, gay rights, war, and women’s liberation. Winant wrote in *Margins*, “In my work and the way I presented it, I was attempting to make a synthesis of art and politics.”³⁹⁷ Winant’s poetry reveals complex political ideologies that correspond with the emergence of lesbian-feminism. Winant’s poems resist narrow definitions of art or politics.

In October 2010, reflecting on the work of Violet Press, Winant said, “It was a moment when we reenvisioned all of society and imagined a culture of our own as well, voices the old society had always suppressed speaking at last, reaching out to one another

³⁹⁷ Winant, *Margins*, 62.

in a new dialog influenced by consciousness raising and movement organizing but riding a wave of feeling, a sensibility, that went beyond this.”³⁹⁸ Winant links the revolutionary vision of radical feminism with cultural work as a strategy for achieving those envisioned transformations. Winant explains that hearing suppressed voices and engaging in new dialogues shaped by consciousness-raising and movement organizing was one way women imagined that societal changes could happen. She also imbues that moment in her memory with a “feeling, a sensibility that went beyond.”³⁹⁹ This sensibility was the excitement and palpability of change that women experienced at the nexus of the WLM, gay liberation, and the variety of other liberatory movements. Violet Press and its five slender volumes of poetry remind us of the importance of activist work in the production of cultural objects. The history of Violet Press, its books and its principal, Fran Winant, animates how activist formations overlap and energize one another. In the early 1970s, the connections between the WLM and gay liberation are fecund for lesbian print culture.

Womanpress

Today we think in terms of sisterhood—and that’s good, that’s productive. But when a writer reaches sixty she also begins to look for daughters, for inheritors. We hope that our work too will help to make a foundation for those who come after us. We hope that young women coming up realize the challenge and the rich possibilities that are open to them. . . .that they will go on where we leave off.

—Valerie Taylor, “For My Granddaughters,” Lesbian Writers Conference, Chicago, IL, September 13, 1974.

For five years, from 1974 until 1978, lesbian writers from all over the United States and Canada gathered during a September weekend in Chicago, Illinois, for the Lesbian

³⁹⁸ Fran Winant, Presentation at *In Amerika They Call Us Dykes: Lesbian Lives in the 70s*, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, City University of New York, October 8-10, 2010.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Writers Conference. Originally organized by Marie Kuda, owner and operator of WomanPress, novelist Valerie Taylor, Susan Edwards and Rebecca Hunter of Lavender Press, and Polly Adams of Mattachine Midwest, the Lesbian Writers Conference networked lesbian writers, readers, and publishers.⁴⁰⁰ The Lesbian Writers Conference corresponded with a variety of lesbian-feminist publishing in Chicago. Three small presses in particular operated in conjunction with activities of the Lesbian Writers Conference: Lavender Press, Womanpress, and Metis Press. Three important themes emerge from the Lesbian Writers Conference and the publishing connected to it. First, the Lesbian Writers Conference demonstrates the way that community building and community networking are co-constitutive of lesbian publishing. Second, the conference and publishing activities demonstrates the vibrancy of lesbian-feminist print culture outside of United States coastal metropolises. Third, the conference demonstrates the importance of elaborating literary genealogies for lesbian writers to the organizers of the conference and the publishers.

The five conferences all followed a similar format, with a keynote address on Friday night, workshops and break out sessions on Saturday, and readings and celebrations of conference attendees on Sunday. The first conference featured a keynote speech by Valerie Taylor “dedicating the conference to Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster, Ph.D., whose pioneering opus, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, was long out of

⁴⁰⁰ Mychal Brody’s *Are We There yet?: A Continuing History of Lavender Woman, a Chicago Lesbian Newspaper, 1971-1976* (Iowa City, IA: Aunt Lute Books, 1985) documents, through interviews and reprints of articles from *Lavender Woman*, the history of *Lavender Woman* and its publishing in Chicago.

print.”⁴⁰¹ In her keynote speech, Taylor talked about “our origins, our spiritual mothers and grandmothers: Aphra Behn, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf.”⁴⁰² Taylor also urged lesbian writers “to follow the example of May Sarton and Colette, who wrote about friendship, heterosexual love, growing old, and many other parts of life in addition to lesbian love.” Taylor continued, “When we don’t feel like variants any more, the world will be our province.”⁴⁰³ For Marie Kuda, “Val’s keynote was an irreverent history of lesbian writers and ended with her hope that she would live to see the contributions of her literary “grandchildren” at similar conferences in 20 years.”⁴⁰⁴

The 1974 conference included a book fair with “tables laden to overflowing with lesbian/feminist novels, poetry and non-fiction” as well as “out-of-print lesbian novels on display.”⁴⁰⁵ On Saturday, workshops were held for conference participants. Participants in a fiction workshop debated the merits of *Rubyfruit Jungle*, with one participant saying “the truly realistic lesbian novel hasn’t been written yet.”⁴⁰⁶ Frances Chapman described another workshop in *off our backs (oob)* as getting “down to the tension among form, art, revolution and politics, which holds together our lives as lesbian writers and artists.”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰¹ Marie Kuda, “Women Loving, Women Writing,” *Outlines*, September 30, 1998, 18-19.

⁴⁰² Frances Chapman, “Women loving words and other women,” *off our backs* 4, no. 10 (October 31, 1974): 7.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Kuda, “Women Loving,” 18.

⁴⁰⁵ Chapman, “Women loving,” 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

These tensions weren't explicated further for *oob* readers; perhaps Chapman assumed that readers would intuitively understand these tensions. From a contemporary perspective, the report demonstrates the imbrication of form and art with revolution and politics. Sunday morning included poetry readings and panel discussions on politics and art.⁴⁰⁸ Participants came from around the country, including Fran Winant from Violet Press, women from *Big Mama Rag*, a Denver women's paper, and Ellen Marie Bissert, editor of *13th Moon*.

At the first Lesbian Writers Conference in 1974, each conference attendee received a free copy of *Women Loving Women: a select and annotated bibliography of woman-loving-women in literature*. *Women Loving Women* was originally printed by Lavender Press, an offshoot of *Lavender Woman*; the cost of printing the volume "was partially defrayed by advertising from local lesbian businesses." Marie Kuda compiled *Women Loving Women*, which contained approximately 200 bibliographic entries covering works published from 1914 to 1974 with annotations.⁴⁰⁹ A later edition of *Women Loving Women* was issued by Womanpress in 1975, though as Kuda notes, "who knew edition, from imprint, from reprint—in those days we were all flying by the seat of our pants."⁴¹⁰

In 1975, at the second Lesbian Writers Conference, held at the First Unitarian Church in Chicago, 160 women attended. The focus of the conference "was on small

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ The complete text of *Women-Loving-Women* is scanned and available at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org.

⁴¹⁰ Internet comment by Marie Kuda at www.chicagoreader.com.

presses and self-publishing.”⁴¹¹ Barbara Grier provided the keynote for this year’s conference and described how “*The Ladder* was successful in reaching out to and being subscribed to by socially-isolated lesbians, especially before the beginning of a strong lesbian-feminist consciousness”⁴¹² In her address, Grier described her practice as editor of *The Ladder* and as editor at Naiad Books. Grier responded personally to every letter and inquiry from a lesbian as a part of her editorial work; some weeks she mailed more than 300 letters. Conference participants praised Grier’s engagement with lesbians, particularly “socially-isolated lesbians.” Grier’s letter writing and mail- and telephone-based networking demonstrates a commitment to community-building practices through publishing.

The 1975 conference featured lively debates about inclusion and feminist practices. For instance, a workshop was added on “Class consciousness in lesbian literature” which grew out of discussions between women at the conference.⁴¹³ In a discussion about content and style, one woman speculatively asked, “Were we repeating male heterosexist assumptions in trying to determine a standard of lesbian feminist writing?,” while the women from *Lesbian Connection*⁴¹⁴ asserted their desire to be a forum for lesbians “who

⁴¹¹ Mimi Lewin and Tanya Tempkin, “Lesbian Writers Come Together,” *off our backs* 5, no. 9 (November 30, 1975): 18.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ *Lesbian Connection* is a lesbian periodical that was just beginning in 1975 and was based in East Lansing, MI. *Lesbian Connection*, which is still publishing today, is a compendium of lesbian voices, community announcements, discussions, and postings about issues, ideas, and commerce of interest to the lesbian community.

don't consider themselves writers to start writing."⁴¹⁵ They wanted to reach out "to women on a broad base" and include "differing styles as well as varying content and class perspectives."⁴¹⁶ These reports from the conference demonstrate how important class was as an issue for lesbian-feminists, as well as issues of outreach to lesbians generally. In assessing the success of the first two conferences and announcing the third, Kuda wrote on the press release, "In its first two years the conference has drawn women from twenty-six states, Canada and even one woman from England. Twenty-two Lesbian and Feminist publications have been represented, several participants have had books published and many more have had some of their writing published, at least locally."⁴¹⁷

The 1976 conference was keynoted by Beth Hodges, who had been the editor of the special issue of *Margins* titled "Focus: Lesbian Feminist Writing and Publishing," and who was preparing a special issue of *Sinister Wisdom* on lesbian-feminist publishing. The title of Hodges's speech was "Print Is Our Medium." Workshops in 1976 continued to address an array of writing and publishing issues for lesbian-feminists, particularly emphasizing do-it-yourself approaches to publishing, such as "Camera Ready Copy, You & the Printer" by Michele Burke of Nearly Full Moon Press in Wisconsin and Marie Kuda's workshop "Self-publishing," which covered "estimating potential market, planning your publication, copyright, ISBN, LC Numbers, pricing, distribution, bookkeeping, etc."⁴¹⁸ Other workshops included "Lesbians in the Library," presented by

⁴¹⁵ Lewin and Tempkin, "Lesbian Writers," 18.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Folder "Lesbian Writers Conference 1976, Box 5, Catherine Nicholson Papers, Sallie Bingham Collection at Duke University.

Rochelle Bernstein, "Writing and Researching Women's Biography," presented by Barbara Grier, two workshops on lesbians and fiction, a panel on Lesbian-Feminist Criticism, "Teaching of Lesbian Literature" by Evelyn Beck and Susan Lanser from the Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, a poetry workshop with Claudia Scott, and a panel discussion by women who attended the 1976 women in print conference. A Saturday evening meal with entertainment was sponsored by the women of Chicago's Mountain Moving Coffeehouse. Sunday afternoon was a celebration and reading and performance of work from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.⁴¹⁹

In 1977, Alma Routsong, who wrote *Patience and Sarah* under the pen name Isabel Miller, provided the keynote address; in 1978, Yvonne Macmanus, who wrote under the name Paula Christian, was the keynote speaker. In 1978 the conference almost didn't happen because of concerns about "having a conference in a state that refused to ratify the ERA."⁴²⁰ The conference did proceed, but that was the last year of the Lesbian Writers Conference. Marie Kuda notes that they "received letters from sci-fi writer Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ann Shockley who wrote the first inter-racial lesbian love story, and other popular authors expressing interest in future conferences."⁴²¹ The planners of the Lesbian Writers Conference noted the success of the five-year series at a reunion held in 1989. Kuda writes, "Every conference presenter had one or more published books. Of the women who read on those Sunday afternoons, dozens gained

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Kuda, "Women Loving," 19.

⁴²¹ Kuda, "Women Loving," 19.

considerable recognition from their creative or academic writing; for example: short-story writer Becky Birtha's *Lovers Choice*, Chris Straayer's *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies: Sexual Re-orientation in Film and Video*, Marilyn Frye's *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, and fiction writer Julie Blackwomon (who read to us as Julie Simmons) published in *Voyages Out 2* and *Home Girls*.⁴²²

These five gatherings of lesbian writers in Chicago at The Lesbian Writers Conference built and networked a vibrant community of lesbian writers, as Kuda demonstrates. The Lesbian Writers Conference also supported and nurtured three lesbian-feminist publishers in Chicago, IL: Lavender Press, Womanpress, and Metis Press. Lavender Press, which published Kuda's first edition of *Women Loving Women*, published two other books: *Thunder from the Earth* by Rebecca Hunter and Susan S. M. Edwards (1973) and *Portrait* by Claudia Scott (1974). Womanpress published eight books or pamphlets, and Metis Press, founded in 1976 by the publishers of the feminist journal *Black Maria*, published eight books.

Womanpress's publishing played an important role in amplifying the Lesbian Writers Conference. Womanpress, owned and operated by Marie Kuda, reissued *Women Loving Women*, and published three pamphlets from the keynote speeches at the Lesbian Writers Conference. In 1975, Womanpress published a pamphlet of the speech delivered by Valerie Taylor on September 13, 1974, "For My Granddaughters" in a sixteen-page edition and sold it for 50 cents; in 1976, the speech delivered by Barbara Grier on September 19, 1975, "The Possibilities are Staggering," was published in a 16-page edition, sold for 65 cents; in 1977, Womanpress published Beth Hodges's keynote

⁴²² Kuda, "Women Loving," 19.

address from the 1976 Lesbian Writer's Conference on September 17, 1976, titled, "Print is our medium." By printing pamphlets of the keynote speeches, Womanpress ensured extended circulation of the conference speeches, preserving them for future readers and using them as a platform to build attendance at future conferences.

The other three publications of Womanpress were an anthology of poetry and prose from the 2nd Annual Lesbian Writers Conference in 1975, a chapbook by Penelope Pope, and a collection of poetry by Jeannette Howard Foster and Valerie Taylor. Like the keynote pamphlets, the anthology extended the work of the Lesbian Writers Conference. The 128-page anthology, *Women Loving, Women Writing*, priced at \$3.95, "contains materials submitted from forty of the one hundred sixty women from all of the country" and "contributors include high school dropouts and Ph.D.s with a variety of job skills, their ages run from 18 to 62 and their work ranges from the angry to the erotic with some song lyrics, workshop reports and an allegory for children."⁴²³ By creating an anthology from the conference, Womanpress highlighted the women who participated in the conference and offered them a publishing vehicle.

The final two books published by Womanpress highlighted the work of Chicago writers and also emanated from connections made at the Lesbian Writers Conference. Womanpress published *The Enclosed Garden*, by Chicago-born Penelope Pope in the fall of 1976. This 64-page book sold for \$2.25. The collection of poetry by Jeannette Foster and Valerie Taylor, *Two Women*, includes photographs by Eunice Militante. The poems of Jeannette Foster were written between 1916 and 1938 and the poems of Taylor were

⁴²³ Womanpress catalogue, Folder "Women Publishers & Presses," Box 11, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) Archives, ca. 1972-1994, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

written between 1940 and 1975. Foster and Taylor were both revered in the Chicago community, as evidenced by the attention devoted to both of them at the first Lesbian Writers Conference. Foster's book *Sex Variant Women in Literature* provided an important intellectual and literary genealogy for the lesbian writers gathered, and Taylor, who was born and raised in the Chicago-area, was described as "a feminist, peace activist and an advocate of gay liberation, she also spends considerable time worrying about the problem of feeding the world's population. She has published seven lesbian novels, two other books and a sizeable body of short material. Now retired and living in the East, she is working on a novel about two women over sixty—love at any age!" Her influences "range from Edna St. Vincent Millay through Gertrude Stein to Denise Levertov." *Two Women* brought together the poetry of these two writers, providing a map of lesbian love and desire prior to the current insurgence of lesbian-feminism in the 1970s. All of the material published by Womanpress demonstrates the activist role of the publisher. Womanpress not only published and distributed materials by and about lesbians for lesbian readers, the press also took an important role in promoting and building communities for lesbian writers and lesbian readers.

Like Womanpress, Metis Press was another small, Chicago-based, lesbian-feminist publisher. Metis Press made "their public debut at the Omaha Women in Print Conference" in 1976.⁴²⁴ Slowly acquiring equipment for printing, including "a 320 AB Dick, a cantankerous 1250 Multi, platemaker, light table, and dark room," the owners Chris Sanders and Barb Emrys noted, "we do not survive financially; the time we have to

⁴²⁴ Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 195.

spend working to survive has been a great drawback.”⁴²⁵ Between 1977 and 1984, Metis Press published eight titles beginning with Barbara Emrys’s *Wild Women Don’t Get the Blues: Stories* in 1977. In 1978, Metis published three books: Muriel Goldenson Madden’s *On the Wire, Stretched with Power*, Barbara Sheen’s *Shedevils: Stories*, and Army Christine Straayer’s *Momma Used to Hum to Me*. In 1979, Metis published two collaborative books, Linda Johnson Stern and Valerie Pinkerton Tio’s *The Secret Witch*; and, *They Met the Who-Ever-It Was* and *A Book of One’s Own: Guide to Self-Publishing* by Christine Leslie Johnson and Army Christine Straayer. In 1980, Metis published Army Christine Straayer’s *Hurtin & Healin & Talking It Over*. The last book published by Metis was in 1984, Georgia Jo Ressmeyer’s *Bernice: A Comedy in Letters*.

The Lesbian Writers Conference and the publishing of Lavender Press, Womanpress, and Metis Press are all deeply connected with community building, networking and organizing among lesbian feminists. More than half of the publishing of Womanpress is related to materials from the Lesbian Writers Conference. The published artifacts from Womanpress have the intention of spreading the energy and messages of the Lesbian Writers Conference to groups of readers, writers, and activists who couldn’t attend the conference as well as bolstering the on-going influence of the conferences. Lavender Press and Metis Press both enter book publishing from a background in publishing periodicals, demonstrating the extensibility of publishing within the community of editors, publishers, and writers. Both *Lavender Woman* and *Black Maria* had a devoted following of readers; thus, the extension from publishing periodicals to publishing books brought both experience and a known audience. The strong community

⁴²⁵ Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 195.

engagement of the publishers of Lavender Press and Metis Press in building activist and literary formations provided an important foundation for reaching readers.

The Lesbian Writers Conference and the publishers associated with it demonstrate another node of geographically dispersed feminist projects during the 1970s. Earlier narratives of the WLM and lesbian-feminism emphasized locations on “the coasts” or in a particular city such as New York or San Francisco as vanguards of lesbian-feminism. In Chicago, however, there was a vibrant publishing and activist community of lesbian-feminists and that community was networked in national ways. Certainly, geography shapes different expressions of lesbian-feminism; what is possible in New York, NY, or Oakland, CA, is different from what is possible in Chicago, IL, or East Lansing, MI, but all activities were important expressions of feminism and lesbian feminism. These examples of inclusion, modeled by Grier in both her conference speech and her material practices as editor of *The Ladder* and Naiad Books, by Kuda in her leadership of the conference, and by *Lesbian Connection* in its publishing work, are important responses to the values and ideals of lesbian-feminism. All of them built lesbian-feminist practice by engaging lesbians in lesbian print culture.

Literary genealogies and the practice of elaborating them both in print and in communal gatherings is striking in the example of WomanPress. Valerie Taylor and Marie Kuda invoke the description of “literary grandchildren” to describe the intellectual genealogies of writers that they imagined creating through the work of the conferences and through publishing. *Two Women* as a cultural artifact asserts the existence of lesbian desire, and its longevity and historicity prior to the current expansion of lesbian-feminism that women were witnessing and participating in when the book was published.

Moreover, the emphasis of Kuda as publisher in the anthology that came out of the second Lesbian Writers Conference demonstrates the expansiveness of vision that organizers and activists had for lesbian-feminism, both as a political practice and as an ideology.

The bibliography *Women Loving Women* is a significant intervention into lesbian print culture and theories of literary bibliography. The bibliography enacted in *Women Loving Women* is what I characterize as community biography. It tells a story of origin about lesbians and publishing in the 20th century.⁴²⁶ In the introduction, Kuda notes that “minimal bibliographic information is included” on each of the books she presents. For Kuda, bibliography refers not to extensive iterations of published editions but rather to authors and titles of books. More important for Kuda than an exhaustive bibliographic survey is “a solid background in the literature of women loving women,” one that emphasizes in particular lesbianism as a “valid, positive alternative lifestyle.” Through bibliographic entries, supplemented by factual and chatty annotations of the books, Kuda narrates a history of lesbian love and desire, with attention to initial thematic appearances of boarding school narratives, coming out narratives, and prison narratives about lesbianism, to name a few. Included in *Women Loving Women* are H.D., Michael Field, Amy Lowell, Vita Sackville-West, Virginia Woolf, and Gale Wilhelm as well as pulp books by Ann Bannon, Vin Packer, and Tereska Torres. Even biography makes an appearance where appropriate, including Rebecca Patterson’s biography of Emily Dickinson. In *Women Loving Women*, Kuda tells a story about lesbianism through a

⁴²⁶ I take the term story of origin from both Katie King (“Bibliography and a Feminist Apparatus of Literary Production, *TEXT 5: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship* (1991): 91-103) and Kathy Davis in *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

history of lesbian publishing and of lesbian authors. Much like Grier and Foster in their earlier work, Kuda constructs a genealogy for lesbian writers through the practice of bibliography.

The political meanings of the publishing and circulation of *Women Loving Women* are profound for Kuda and for her readers. At the conclusion of her introduction, Kuda writes, “If we each hound libraries and bookstores for copies of some of these books we have really made headway; and if each would write publishers to demand reprints of out-of-print books we will have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. We will have been a small part in a resurgence of energy—women, lesbians demanding as our right access to our literary grandmothers, sisters and book-children yet unborn.”⁴²⁷ Kuda links the readers of her bibliography with their literary foremothers and inserts all of them into a system of publishing and book circulation where everyone has an important part to play as an advocate for lesbian literature. *Women Loving Women* is a tool: not only to guide reading and shape a community biography of lesbianism but also to make lesbian literature more visible to booksellers, libraries, and publishers. Kuda understands “access to our literary grandmothers, sisters and book-children yet unborn” as a right. By articulating this within a political framework, Kuda enacts bibliography as a form of biography, as a political statement, and as a site of political activism.

Kuda’s work within the system of literary culture was successful. In addition to the five years of the Lesbian Writers Conference, by the end of 1978 the small chapbook *Women Loving Women* was “reviewed in library journals in the U.S. And Canada” and “added to the shelves of 123 libraries by the end of 1978.” An announcement inserted in

⁴²⁷ Kuda, *Women Loving Women*, ii.

the book as it went to press informed readers that Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was being released by a commercial press (Diana Press.) In addition, many of the books out of print then were reissued through actions taken by many others within the lesbian-feminist movement.

Out & Out Books

“I feel as if our hearts were beating very fast in those days.” —Joan Larkin

Consciousness-raising groups were foundational to the Women's Liberation Movement,⁴²⁸ but CR groups weren't the only groups that brought women together for revolutionary purposes. A Brooklyn-based writing group called Seven Women Poets in the early- and mid-1970s was the genesis for what would develop into Out & Out Books. Seven Women Poets included Joan Larkin, Jan Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, Alison Colbert, Sharon Thompson, Mary Patton, and Kathryn McHargue.⁴²⁹ Larkin describes the group as “a very intense group” reflecting the “intensity of lesbian-feminism.”⁴³⁰

The women of Seven Women Poets, who had done some readings together, imagined publishing a collection with work by all seven of the women. The idea of publishing a collection corresponded with a trip Larkin planned to San Francisco to visit Martha Shelley. Larkin and Shelley had met when Larkin wrote a fan letter to Shelley

⁴²⁸ In *Dear Sisters*, Baxandall and Gordon describe consciousness raising (CR) as “the major new organization form, theory of knowledge, and research tool of the women's liberation movement. CR assumed that “women were the experts on their own experience” and that “feminist theory could only arise from the daily lives of women.” The proliferation of CR groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s was one element of the sharing and adoption of feminism by women. Baxandall and Gordon, *Dear Sisters*, 67.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Joan Larkin, May 26, 2011; Kathryn McHargue's name was provided by Jan Clausen in a personal email correspondence, June 30, 2011.

⁴³⁰ Interview with Joan Larkin, May 26, 2011.

after listening to her show, “Lesbian Nation,” on WBAI. Larkin recalls, “I loved her voice. I think it was the *Yiddishkeit* that came through. Here was a Jewish dyke who talked like Brooklyn and was very smart, and she had the message that I was passionate about at the time, you know, Dykes Ignite.” At their first dinner together, Larkin was just coming out and Shelley “knew immediately what had to be done.” The two didn’t have a long romance, but they began a friendship.⁴³¹ Shelley “had been very moved by Judy Grahn’s poetry” so she “moved out to California and joined the Women’s Press Collective.”⁴³² When Larkin visited, she stayed in Shelley’s home, shared with Judy Grahn, Wendy Cadden, Alice Molloy, and Carol Wilson, all of the Women’s Press Collective.⁴³³ Larkin talked with the members of the Women’s Press Collective as well as alta of Shameless Hussy Press about the possibility of publishing the collection of the Seven Women Poets. The west coast publishers weren’t able to commit to the project, but Larkin said, “It was inspiring to connect with both alta and with Judy and to see the beautiful books that the Women’s Press Collective were doing.”⁴³⁴ In response to Larkin’s inquiry about the Seven Women Poets anthology, alta prophetically told Larkin “to publish it yourself,” so she returned to Brooklyn with the idea of starting a press.⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Martha Shelley, interview with Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, October 12, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 50.

⁴³³ Ibid, 51.

⁴³⁴ Larkin interview.

⁴³⁵ Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman, *Guide to Women’s Publishing*, Paradise, CA: Dustbooks, 158.

Although the collection of Seven Women Poets was never published, Larkin, Bulkin, Clausen, and Klepfisz started Out & Out Books. Clausen, in her memoir *Apples and Oranges*, describes it as “a cooperative self-publishing scheme” in which they “would issue poetry books under a common imprint” to “give each writer or editor control of her own project while averting the stigma of vanity publication” and that they “would share distribution and publicity efforts.”⁴³⁶ Judy Grahn dismissed Larkin’s anxieties about the stigma of self-publishing during her trip to San Francisco. Grahn’s retort when asked if she was concerned if someone would view the Women’s Press Collective as vanity publishing was, “Hell, that’s not vanity, that’s aggression.”⁴³⁷

The first project published by Out & Out Books was a collection of lesbian poetry, *Amazon Poetry*. Larkin and Bulkin worked on the anthology throughout 1975.⁴³⁸ By the end of 1975, Larkin, Bulkin, Clausen, and Klepfisz collectively had published four books. In addition to *Amazon Poetry*, they published Jan Clausen’s *After Touch*,⁴³⁹ Larkin’s *Housework*, and Klepfisz’s *Periods of Stress*.

Shortly into the work of Out & Out Books, the group Seven Women Poets spiraled into conflict which resulted in “an angry, explosive break up” of the group.⁴⁴⁰ In remembering these years, Larkin said, “I feel as if our hearts were beating very fast in

⁴³⁶ Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 130.

⁴³⁷ Larkin interview.

⁴³⁸ A complete discussion of *Amazon Poetry* follows in chapter four.

⁴³⁹ In *Apples and Oranges*, Clausen describes this book as “self-published.” (Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 141). While I appreciate Clausen’s characterization of the book in her retrospective narrative, self-consciousness about “self-publishing” during the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s does not seem predominant in archival sources.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Joan Larkin, May 26, 2011.

those days.” Her description is both of the quick beats of excitement and possibilities as well as the rapid contractions of the atria and ventricles triggered by adrenaline, heightening reactions and perceptions of emotional intensity. Eventually, Seven Women Poets stopped meeting. Bulkin and Clausen, then lovers, with Klepfisz and her lover, Rima Shore, began *Conditions*, “a magazine of writing by women with an emphasis on writing by lesbians.” Larkin recalls that the starting of the journal was painful to her; the editorial group - formerly close friends - weren’t initially interested in considering her work for the journal.⁴⁴¹ Out & Out Books didn’t publish any books in 1976 after the initial publication of the first four books.

In 1977, however, Larkin resumed publishing and released two books: Bernice Goodman’s *The Lesbian: A Celebration of Difference* and Jacqueline Lapidus’s *Starting Over: Poetry*. Both of these books came to Out & Out Books through personal relationships: Goodman was Larkin’s therapist and well-known in the New York lesbian community as a “guru in creating lesbian communities,” and Lapidus was a friend of Larkin’s.⁴⁴² In 1977, Out & Out Books also published two small pamphlets. The first was a speech by Adrienne Rich titled, “The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand.”⁴⁴³ The occasion of Rich’s speech was Gay Pride on June 26, 1977. Rich writes that “[t]he summer of 1977 was a summer of militant, media-scrutinized “Gay Pride” marches, responding to the antihomosexual campaign whose

⁴⁴¹ Larkin’s poem, “Blood,” was published in *Conditions* 6 in 1980.

⁴⁴² Larkin interview.

⁴⁴³ Out & Out Books also became the distributor of Susan Sherman’s *Women Poems, Love Poems* in 1977, though Sherman had printed the book earlier and it languished without distribution.

media symbol was a woman, Anita Bryant.” As a result of the confluence of gay pride and the vilification of a woman, Bryant, lesbian-feminists felt “torn and alienated.” Rich says, “Our understanding of the meaning of Anita Bryant, and the meaning of woman-identification, was of necessity more complex (than the meaning of the gay male community.)” Thus, a small group of women chose “to separate from the Gay Pride demonstration in Central Park’s Sheep Meadow and hold our own rally.”⁴⁴⁴ This is the rally that Rich addressed. Out & Out Books typeset and printed Rich’s speech as the “first in a series of pamphlets on lesbian-feminism.”⁴⁴⁵ In 1979, Out & Out Books printed a second printing of the pamphlet, after W. W. Norton published Rich’s collection *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, which also contained the essay. The second pamphlet was Barbara Smith’s influential essay, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” which had been published in *Conditions 2*. In the course of publishing these books in 1977, other women joined in the publishing activities, including Larkin’s lover, Ellen Shapiro, who had a background in typography and book design. Shapiro oversaw the design and production work for all of the books produced by Out & Out Books from 1977 on.⁴⁴⁶ Two other women worked with the press briefly, Beth Hodges and Terry Antonicelli; in 1980, Larkin hired lovers Felice Newman and Frédérique Delacoste to help with the press.

In 1978, Out & Out Books published four broadsides, another pamphlet and a book. The broadsides were single poems: “From Caritas: Poem 3” by Olga Broumas,

⁴⁴⁴ Adrienne Rich, Introduction to “The Meaning of Our Love for Women is What We Have Constantly to Expand,” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 223.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Ellen Shapiro, July 5, 2011.

“Carrington” by Melanie Kaye, “Unemployment: Monologue” by June Jordan with illustrations by Lynne Reynolds, and “Frances Holt” by Felice Newman with illustrations by Ellen Weiss. The pamphlet was Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.” Lorde delivered the paper, “Uses of the Erotic,” at the Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women on August 25, 1978 at Mt. Holyoke College. Out & Out Books published it as a pamphlet the same year; “Uses of the Erotic” was reprinted in *Sister Outsider* in 1985 in the Crossing Press Feminist Series. The book was Beverly Tanenhaus’s *To Know Each Other and Be Known: Women’s Writing Workshops*. This book, which documents a series of women’s writing workshops, animates the continued significance of writing as not only an artistic and literary engagement, but also a community engagement for feminists and lesbian-feminists.

In 1979, Out & Out Books published one book by feminist historian Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Women and Support Networks*. *Women and Support Networks* contained two essays by Cook, “Women Against Economic and Social Repression: The Two Front Challenge” and her classic article on lesbian feminism, “Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman, Jane Addams,” which originally appeared in the August 1977 issue of *Chrysalis*. In 1980, the last year of publishing for Out & Out Books, Larkin, with her lover Ellen Shapiro, published two books and a chapbook. The two books were Jane Creighton’s *Ceres in an Open Field* (Creighton did the design work and typesetting for the book) and Joanna Russ’s *On Strike Against God*. The chapbook was the sonnet sequence, “Taking Notice,” by Marilyn Hacker, which appeared in her full-length collection with the same title.⁴⁴⁷ Marilyn

⁴⁴⁷ Marilyn Hacker, *Taking Notice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980).

Hacker brought Joanna Russ to Out & Out Books when the two of them were in an amorous relationship.

By 1980, Larkin was operating Out & Out Books on her own and turning her attention elsewhere. Larkin notes, “I had my own road that I had to travel to sobriety. . . .and part of the letting go of Out & Out Books and distancing myself for a very long time from some of the people that I had done all of the work with was” to be sober. About her years as publisher of Out & Out Books, Larkin remembers both “a lot of anger and intense conflict as well as a lot of just amazing connection and blazing.”⁴⁴⁸ Shapiro remembers, “There was very little money involved and lots of time, and, after a while, it felt like it was time to move on to other stuff.”⁴⁴⁹ In total, Out & Out Books published ten books, four broadsides and four chapbooks. Shapiro reflects that Out & Out Books “was a really good mirror on the times” because “it brought the words of interesting, important writers” to readers cheaply. She says, “there was nothing flashy about the products. It was really about trying to disseminate them in ways that lots of people could read them.”⁴⁵⁰ Through Out & Out Books, a wide range of Brooklyn-based and New York-based writers engaged in some aspect of the project - writing, designing, publishing, and selling books of interest to lesbians and feminists. Larkin recalls that while the press didn’t make money—any proceeds from the books were put into publishing the next

⁴⁴⁸ Larkin interview.

⁴⁴⁹ Shapiro interview.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Ellen Shapiro, July 5, 2011.

one—she didn't heavily subsidize the publishing activities either because the publishing paid for itself.⁴⁵¹

Through the books and activities of Out & Out Books, women shared information among themselves and how they saw the world. Blending book publishing and fine art printing, in the case of the broadsides and pamphleteering, Larkin and her compatriots in the press expressed a variety of feminist ideas. From Audre Lorde's call to recognize how "the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" to Barbara Smith's Black feminist critical perspective on *Sula*, which opened lesbian meanings in the novel to readers, the authors of Out & Out Books were thinking critically about lesbian-feminism and offering new ideas and analyses to readers. The books of Out & Out Press grapple with strands of radical feminism as well as cultural feminism. Out & Out Books enacted different feminist formations through their material publishing activities. Initially, Out & Out Books was a collective; over time, the work became more specialized, and women came and went from the press as interests changed. The books, pamphlets, and broadsides were tools that authors and the publisher used as a form of consciousness-raising and community networking. While all of these enactments of feminist ideologies are important, for Larkin, the "primary motive in founding a press" was "making available to others the books we needed for our survival."⁴⁵²

Out & Out Books was a source for community building and networking both through the production of the books themselves and also through the distribution of the

⁴⁵¹ Larkin interview.

⁴⁵² Joan and Chesman, *Guide*, 157.

books at poetry readings and other events. The books published by Out & Out Books emerged from social circles among writers and lesbians in Brooklyn at the time. For Out & Out Books, relationships drove the publishing and conflict in relationships inspired other publishing projects. While Larkin described the publishing as “disorganized” and “relationship-based,” the caliber of authors published by the press and the quality of the work published continues to appear, in retrospect, extraordinary.⁴⁵³

In Brooklyn, in the 1970s, a group of lesbian writers came together; they became literary luminaries, and their work remains relevant and powerful. Yet I resist seeing these women and their work as exceptional. Part of my resistance to exceptionality reflects feminist ideas from the time, ideals that I believe are still worthy today. The significance of the work of Out & Out Books is how it emerged from a daily practice of feminist engagement. Larkin describes her work as publishing friends and producing material that was urgently necessary for lesbians. While the work was deeply political in terms of whom she was publishing and what she was giving voice to, the work was also housework, to use the title from Larkin’s first collection. It was done in her home with a homemade light table, farmed out to a friend who typed on a new IBM Selectric, produced at the local, non-profit printer. More than exceptional, the work of Out & Out Books was quotidian, much like the daily beating of our hearts. Sometimes our hearts are just faster. Sometimes our hearts flutter.

Night Heron Press

The statement, “Donations and/or words of support are also very gladly accepted,” appears after ordering information for Night Heron Press books in a review of Minnie

⁴⁵³ Larkin Interview.

Bruce Pratt's chapbook, *The Sound of One Fork*, in *The Front Page*, a newspaper covering lesbian and gay issues in the Carolinas.⁴⁵⁴ The review, which considers both Pratt's chapbook and the newly published anthology, *Lesbian Poetry*, is riddled with errors; Pratt's name is misspelled as Platt throughout, there are subject-verb agreement problems, and, at the end of the review, two paragraph-long notes from the editor extol the books reviewed, perhaps betraying the editor's assessment that the reviewer didn't attend to the books well enough. In my reading, these errors add to the charm of the review. Within each error, typographical, grammatical, substantive, are the traces of both the people (the reviewer, the editor, the subject of the review) and the energy, even urgency, of the moment. *The Front Page* is a small newspaper that was founded out of the energy of the 1979 March on Washington for lesbian and gay rights.⁴⁵⁵ In 1982, when these reviews were published, *The Front Page* was in its third year of sustaining the activist energy from the march through publishing. Writing and distributing news and information about gay and lesbian issues throughout North and South Carolina in the early 1980s cannot be considered an easy task. Nor was publishing lesbian poetry. I don't know if Monteagudo, the writer of the review,⁴⁵⁶ added the line about donations, or if the editor of *The Front Page* inserted the line when the pages were being typeset, or if Cris South, one of the women of Night Heron Press, wrote it when she provided ordering information to accompany the review. Whatever the origin of the delightful phrase, it captures some of the sentiment and spirit of publishing for lesbian-feminists. For small

⁴⁵⁴ Jesse Monteagudo, "Lesbian Poetry," *The Front Page* 3, no. 1, 6.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Front Page* merged with *Q-Notes* in 2006 and continues to publish today.

⁴⁵⁶ According to Pratt Jesse Monteagudo was a reviewer who worked out of southern Florida and syndicated his reviews to gay and lesbian newspapers.

publishers, who placed great importance on communicating with other women, words of support, whether through reviews of the books published (even with errors!) or private correspondence, are as important as donations and book purchases.

Night Heron Press of Durham, NC, was a project of three women: Cris South, a printer in Durham, NC, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Mab Segrest. South and Pratt were lovers at the time. The three had worked together as a part of the Feminary Collective. Night Heron Press published two chapbooks in 1981, Minnie Bruce Pratt's *The Sound of One Fork* and Mab Segrest's *Living in a House I Do Not Own*. In a grant application, Pratt described Night Heron Press as founded "to publish the work of Lesbian women, living in or linked to the South in some way, who have been denied access to more traditional means of publication because of their sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, or political point of view." She described the beginning of the press as "[o]perating with the volunteer labor of three women, some donated use of equipment, no advertising budget, and cash spent only for the cost of materials." Pratt noted that from 1981 until 1982, the Press had substantial achievements, selling almost 2,000 copies of the two chapbooks of poetry and "a third book in production now."⁴⁵⁷ At one point, Pratt envisioned Night Heron Press as a larger part of an imagined future. Pratt wrote to her friend Elizabeth Knowlton in Atlanta that she hoped it would be integrated into "Cris' business/copy center when/if that gets going."⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Box 36, folder "Fund for Southern Communities application for Night Heron Press, 1982-1983, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. The third book was never published.

⁴⁵⁸ July 9, 1981 letter to Elizabeth Knowlton, Box 55, folder "Knowlton, Elizabeth, 1979-1994," Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Pratt describes publishing *The Sound of One Fork* “with a minimum of fuss and muss.” The entire process took about two months between early April and late May 1981—including her time selecting and ordering the final manuscript, which she did in consultation with Segrest. The collaboration between Segrest and Pratt as writers and poets was important to the formation of the final book. Pratt describes her process as putting “them in a story/chronological order” and then Segrest “re-ordered them somewhat” which exposed some of the weaker poems in the collection. Pratt notes, “When I read them in her sequence it was clear that those three didn’t hold up to the rest. (I knew this but tried to hide them in chronological order.)” Pratt edited the book and finalized it for typesetting. She reflected to Elizabeth Knowlton, one of the people the book is dedicated to, “I’ve always felt this material was *The Story of My Life* so that’s the organization.”⁴⁵⁹ This observation by Pratt is congruent with what many lesbian-feminists were seeking in poetry at the time. The autobiographical impulse of narrative and confessional poetry appealed to women in the WLM. Both *The Sound of One Fork* and *Living in a House I Do Not Own* are similar in content and tone. Pratt and Segrest explore lesbian domesticity and intimacy between women with particular emphasis on their expression as southern lesbian writers.

The production of Pratt’s chapbook was a family affair. Pratt writes to Knowlton, “When Ransom and Benjamin [Pratt’s sons] were here they helped me finish the remaining 350 copies—folded covers, stapled and trimmed. They were wonderful—and so excited to be helping me and to be making books. Ransom said, ‘Lots of people read books, but not many people make them.’” In 1981, Pratt was a non-custodial mother; she

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

documents the saga of losing custody of her sons to her ex-husband in her later collection, *Crime Against Nature*. Her delight in engaging her sons in producing the book is compounded when she finds Ransom reading the poems as he is stapling the finished books. He said, “Did you really drown a turtle? Why did he say no? Why were the rotten oranges in the refrigerator? Whose refrigerator was it? Is this the Anne I met last summer?” Pratt confides to Knowlton, “I almost wept with joy.” The labor of Ransom and Ben Weaver on Pratt’s chapbook brings the family closer together through the shared project. After the books had been trimmed, collated and stapled, both Ransom and Ben wanted autographed copies and an extra copy to share “with selected teacher/friends.”⁴⁶⁰

Initially, Pratt distributed *The Sound of One Fork* herself. She sent a flyer out with the Humor issue of *Feminary* in the fall of 1981. She noted that bookstores which were already ordering *Feminary* would receive it and “hopefully they’ll pick me up.”⁴⁶¹ Pratt also sent out “publicity to women’s bookstores cross-country, and trying to get library journals to review it—so librarians will order.”⁴⁶² *The Sound of One Fork* reached readers through the dint of Pratt’s labor: she traveled around the country doing readings and events in women’s bookstores, homes, and other lesbian-feminist spaces. Pratt recalls selling books out of the trunk of her car to readers, one by one.

The initial print run of *The Sound of One Fork* was 490 copies; Pratt distributed twenty to friends and a small number of review copies. Eventually, Night Heron Press printed 2,000 copies of *The Sound of One Fork* and sold them all. The final printing of

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² August 10, 1981, letter to Ben Weaver, Box 61, folder “1981 (1 of 2),” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

500 copies cost “\$600 for paper printing, collating, stapling, and trimming.” Pratt only printed 500 copies at a time because that is all she had enough money for - “even bartering with Cris.”⁴⁶³ In 1982, The Crossing Press agreed to distribute both books from Night Heron Press; when The Crossing Press stopped distributing books, *The Sound of One Fork* was distributed by Inland.⁴⁶⁴

Although Pratt characterizes her distribution of review copies as judicious, *The Sound of One Fork* was widely reviewed in both the United States and Canada. Reviews appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, *off our backs*, and *Gay Community News*. In a review for the Canadian newspaper, *Body Politic*, Joy Parks wrote, “The poems in this small volume speak directly and, telling their story simply (the way one would tell a friend), bring truth and delight to the reader in the stark but moving language of women’s bodies and the Southern landscape.” Parks’s review highlights the general reception of *The Sound of One Fork*: lauding Pratt as a poet who unites feminism with Southern experiences and echoing the overall sentiment of lesbian-feminist poetry as confessional conversations between friends.

The review in *Conditions*, however, tells a different and important story. Jewelle L. Gomez reviewed the book in *Conditions: Nine*, beginning with these sentences, “One reason for my lasting attention to a good writer is her subjective, unstinting use of facts and fantasies of her life in her work and the ability to create a kinship between them and

⁴⁶³ January 20, 1986, letter to Sheila, Box 62, Folder, “1986-1988 2 of 2,” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers. Correspondence between Pratt and South indicates that South produced at least 500 copies as a way to pay off a debt that she owed Pratt, Box 57 & 58, Folders 1-5 “South, Cris, 1978-1979, 1982-1986,” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers.

⁴⁶⁴ September 15, 1982, letter to Nancy Bereano of The Crossing Press, Box 12, folder “Correspondence 1981-1985 2 of 4,” Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers.

my own. Minnie Bruce Pratt is such a poet.”⁴⁶⁵ Gomez brings a much more nuanced reading to Pratt’s work than other critics, noting that writers use both fact and fantasy, subtly challenging the idea that lesbian-feminist poetry is only confessional, and highlighting a kinship between herself as an African-American writer and Pratt as a white writer. Gomez continues, “[S]he writes from within a distinctive experience of oneness with her world, the American South, and at the same time conveys her sense of estrangement from its pervasive tradition of separate and unequal.”⁴⁶⁶ Gomez’s choice to frame the review about race demonstrates not only insight into Pratt’s poetry but also the publishing commitments of *Conditions*, which had just transitioned from the all-white founding editors to a new, multi-racial editorial collective.

Gomez’s appraisal of the work is particularly relevant to the poem “Segregated Heart” in *Sound*. In this poem, Pratt begins to make important connections between her identities as a lesbian and feminist and issues of nation and race. Pratt explicated these connections more fully in the essays of *Rebellion*, which Firebrand Books published in 1992. The interconnections between lesbian-feminism and anti-racist politics emerged from important political and intellectual work done by the *Feminary* collective in articulating an anti-racist Southern focus for the journal.⁴⁶⁷

In the end, Night Heron Press published two chapbooks that are now out of print and primarily available to readers only through libraries. Pratt selected a few of the poems from *Sound* for *The Dirt She Ate: Selected and New Poems*. Segrest hasn’t

⁴⁶⁵ Jewelle L. Gomez, “Review of The Sound of One Fork.” *Conditions: Nine* (1983): 173-5.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Personal communication with Minnie Bruce Pratt.

published poetry since *Living*, though her collection of essays, *My Mama's Dead Squirrel*, narratively picks up on many of the themes of *Living*.⁴⁶⁸ Attending to these two chapbooks as artifacts of Night Heron Press demonstrates opportunities that publishing offered to lesbian-feminists. The two chapbooks provided a platform for Segrest and Pratt to promote their work and activism. When *Sound* was published, Pratt was trying to organize her life in a way that provided her time and space to write without the demands of teaching as a lecturer at local universities; Pratt lived, in part, on the money from the sale of the chapbooks. In addition, *Sound* was a tool for her to do readings and lectures which became an important source of personal income for her.

Sound was also a tool that Pratt used to go “beyond [her] personal limits, geographical [and] political, to connect to others in motion—lesbians in motion.” The book, which traveled through distribution at bookstore, also allowed Pratt to physically travel from her home to other communities. Pratt’s experiences on the editorial collective of *Feminary* and with the southern women’s writer conferences, WomanWrites, provided connections throughout the south. She used *Sound* as a platform to “enter into and meet lesbians and overlapping communities—for instance, communist and anti-racist fighter Eddie Sandifer was the host for my reading at the MCC [Metropolitan Community Church] in Jackson, MS.”⁴⁶⁹

Night Heron Press was part of a broader vision of a livelihood for South as a tradeswoman in printing. For South, as for Pratt and Segrest, the material conditions of

⁴⁶⁸ Her later collection, *Memoirs of a Race Traitor*, explores her work against racist and religious violence, two themes that are important to both Pratt and Segrest at the time the chapbooks are published, but muted in their treatments in the collections of poems.

⁴⁶⁹ Personal communication with Minnie Bruce Pratt.

printing intersect intimately with the ideals of feminism. In a 1984 novel by South, *Clenched Fists, Burning Crosses*, the protagonist, Jessie, owns a print shop. The central plot revolves around printing materials for an anti-Klan protest; a subplot of the novel involves a battered woman in a shelter and the actions of feminists in both providing personal safety and security to women and also bringing broader safety to the community through protesting the Klan.⁴⁷⁰ The mingling of themes and experiences in fiction by South suggests the connections between the material conditions that produced books as a part of the Women in Print Movement and the lesbian-feminist theories that shaped women's lives.

Of course, making these connections between the labor of printing and the labor of writing and editing was not always easy work. Pratt remembers conversations and arguments within the *Feminary* collective about “the built-in inequality” between the “blue-collar” work of printing and the “white-collar” work of writing and editing. Two intimate couples in the *Feminary* collective embodied these dichotomies: Pratt and South and Eleanor Holland and Helen Langa. Pratt and Langa were teachers and South and Holland were printers and from working-class backgrounds. Both South and Holland earned their living as printers at least for a while. Pratt recalls “the clash of material reality and political ideals” as “inevitable.” Even though all were “bound together in our lesbian identity,” as a group they wrestled just as much with classism as with anti-racism.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Cris South, *Clenched Fists, Burning Crosses: A Novel of Resistance* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984).

⁴⁷¹ Personal communication with Minnie Bruce Pratt.

Sound and *Living* are in many ways representative chapbooks of lesbian print culture in the early 1980s. The poems within them, how the books were published, and how the books were distributed into the world of lesbian-feminists tell a common story about how lesbian print culture emphasized a “do it yourself” sensibility and about poetry as a medium of the movement. Thinking about the material conditions involved in the production of these two chapbooks, however, opens and deepens the story to reflect how people’s lives and livelihoods connect to poetry, to art, and to revolution.

Conclusion

Although Jan Clausen describes her social life as revolving “around the bicoastal village of feminist publishing,”⁴⁷² the five stories of small presses that I have recounted demonstrate that the lesbian-feminist small press movement was not confined to the east coast and the west coast. Rather, publishing was a political, social, and cultural expression of lesbian-feminism for an array of women in different geographical locations in the United States. Moreover, these women were networked with one another through shared activism, political ideologies, overlapping friendships, intimate relationships, and publishing interests.

The stories of these five small presses demonstrate the connection between community building and publishing in lesbian print culture. Fran Winant’s work as a poet and publisher through Violet Press expresses the experiences she had working with Gay Liberation Front and Radicalesbians; her poems and her publishing practice are shaped by the experience of her activism in the gay liberation movement and the WLM. Marie Kuda’s work as an organizer of the Lesbian Writers Conference shapes her publishing

⁴⁷² Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 2.

with Lavender Press and Womanpress. The spark of inspiration for Out & Out Books came from a group of women writers, and, throughout the life of the press, the principles of collaboration and collectivity are expressed. For Minnie Bruce Pratt, the distribution of *The Sound of One Fork*, while augmented by commercial distribution, is grounded in a community practice of speaking directly with lesbian-feminist readers throughout the south. All of these presses demonstrate a mutually constitutive relationship between community building and publishing for lesbian-feminism. This relationship is equally important in both the formation and operation of presses as well as in their reasons for ending.

Kate Adams describes the reactions of Sherry Thomas, a member of the bookstore collective of Old Wives' Tales in Oakland, CA, who was visiting Harriet Desmoines and Catherine Nicholson in Nebraska when they learned that Women In Distribution (WinD) filed for bankruptcy in 1979. They were all reminded of "the fragility of institutions we've come to almost take for granted" and wondered "Is this the beginning of the end of feminist business strategy?"⁴⁷³ But 1979 is not the end, nor is 1989. Certainly, milestone events suggest reorganization and even retrenchment of both feminist ideologies and forms of activism. Arguments about backlash against feminism as mounted by Faludi and others are compelling, as are arguments about the repercussions of internal struggles, such as the so-called "sex wars" during the 1980s and debates about essentialism and separatism. Rather than seeing the Women in Print Movement, as Trysh Travis names this period, as having a particular end point, I understand the period as containing many endings and new beginnings reflected in constantly changing and evolving relationships

⁴⁷³ Kate Adams, "Built Out of Books -- Lesbian Energy and Feminist Ideology in Alternative Publishing," *Journal of Homosexuality* 34, no. 3 (1998): 113.

and political formations. Publishing and community building have a co-constitutive relationship. As communities change and evolve in their formations, different forms and vehicles for publishing are necessary and emerge to satisfy community and individual needs.

/Interlude 4/Iowa City Women's Press

In the five hundred years' history of movable type, men have traditionally been the owners and directors of commercial printing establishments. In a profession involving use of heavy machinery and equipment women have perhaps naturally filled the roles of printers' devils, press feeders, typesetters, proofreaders, and bookbinders. Moreover, a certain habit of ignoring female contributions has obscured much of the participation in printing.

—Lois Rather, *Women as Printers*, 1.

In the WLM, one site of struggle was male-dominated jobs. During the 1960s and 1970s, women entered the skilled trades to address both sexism and income inequality. Like other skilled trades, printing, the physical component of publishing, was male-dominated. One lesbian-feminist response to these conditions was to initiate woman-owned print shops. In 1978, Joan and Chesman list nine all-woman print shops in the United States, including the Oakland, CA-based Diana Press.⁴⁷⁴ These all-woman print shops were primarily located on the east coast and the west coast, but some, including the Iowa City Women's Press, were located in the middle of the country.

Founded in 1972 by a collective of eight women, the Iowa City Women's Press formed with two purposes: "to help women gain more control over their printed words" and "to help women gain more control over their lives through access to skills."⁴⁷⁵ One particular incident inspired the founding of the Iowa City Women's Press. A male printer refused to print the November 19, 1971 issue of *Ain't I a Woman?*, Iowa City's feminist newspaper. The issue "contained medical self-help photographs" including photographs of a healthy cervix and demonstrations of self-directed vaginal exams and menstrual

⁴⁷⁴ Joan and Chesman's list is a time snapshot and not a comprehensive list of all-woman print shops that operated in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s.

⁴⁷⁵ "The Invisible Lesbian/Feminist Printer," *Feminist Bookstore News* 6, no. 1, 9.

extraction. The printer said “that they would not print ‘pornography.’”⁴⁷⁶ This outraged the local activists; women began to discuss starting their own printing business.

Around the same time, feminists in Iowa City organized a feminist poetry reading. The first reading happened in the spring of 1971; a second reading happened in the spring of 1972. Poetry, for the women gathered at the readings, “was not just an art form on display—the form became the background for an evening of communicating our common female culture.”⁴⁷⁷ From these two reading events, a group of women decided to publish a collection of poetry from the readings. *All Women Are Welcome to Read Their Poetry* was the first book that the Iowa City Women’s Press published. The organizers said, “We saw the poetry readings as special moments in women making their own history and we wanted to share that history with other women.”⁴⁷⁸ Initially, the women who organized the anthology wanted to have it printed professionally, but the cost of professional printing was “astronomical.” They decided to print the anthology themselves on a mimeograph machine. They wrote in the anthology,

Most women probably regard the mimeograph as a simple crude machine and see labor on such a tool as so unrespected that only women do it. Typical to society is the attitude that all labor done by women is crude. Many women will run mimeo machines sometime in their lives for their bosses, or even for political lovers, hardly any women will be allowed near a more sophisticated press. We want to break that cycle by acquiring our own press, but first we wanted to break it by respecting people's labor within the limitation of the only machine allowed to us. We're writing about these realizations to encourage other women to see the tools available to them as what they are - a mimeo is a small press, regardless of its degree of sophistication.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Preface, “All Women Are Welcome to Read Their Poetry,” 1973, 1.

⁴⁷⁸ “All Women Are Welcome to Read Their Poetry,” 1973, frontmatter.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

From publishing the 2,000 copies of the anthology “came the determination to form a women’s press collective to enable women in this town, and throughout the midwest, to control what they want to print.” Proceeds from the poetry anthology were designed to “help to purchase offset press equipment.” The Iowa City Women’s Press was born.

The Iowa City Women’s Press started as a volunteer-run, seven-woman, collective print shop “in a converted garage.” In a letter to Coletta Reid of Diana Press, Lori of ICWP described the work that they were doing to “the converted garage: rewiring, insulating, putting sheet rock up;” Lori said, “we’re building the inside to suit our needs.”⁴⁸⁰ In addition, the ICWP adopted a collective structure that “placed a priority on nonhierarchical democratic values,” which prompted them to create a system of job rotation that they adhered to strictly during the early years.” Initially, the Iowa City Women’s Press wanted to help women get their words and ideas into print; they charged very little for their services. Lori told Coletta we “print at no cost for some women and . . . print at cost for any women who will help us run their materials or do it themselves.”⁴⁸¹ By June 1973, the Iowa City Women’s Press had an impressive amount of equipment, including “a 10 yr. old 1250 [multi-lith printer], a 50 yr. old platen press, a NuAr platemaker (the old fashioned method), a Robertson vertical camera, a light table, a 30” papercutter, a whole punch (weight 1/2 ton), a folder, and a drafting table.”⁴⁸² The ICWP acquired the equipment through the proceeds from the poetry collection and with a donation from Robin Morgan, who gave the ICWP her honoraria from speaking at the

⁴⁸⁰ Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archive.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

University of Iowa. In addition, the ICWP made their printing equipment available to individuals and community groups and taught women how to operate the presses.

The AIAW newspaper collective used the presses of the ICWP to print the newspaper and two special volumes: *Academic Feminists and the Women's Movement*, an analysis of how academic women were taking over the women's movement, and *Because Mourning Sickness Is a Staple in My Country*, a collection of poetry that explores the relationships among gender, sexuality, and class.

The Iowa City Women's Press also published two skills manuals: *Greasy Thumb* (1976) by Barb Wyatt and Julie Zolot and *Against the Grain* (1977) by Dale McCormick. *Greasy Thumb* was an automechanics manual for women; *Against the Grain* was a carpentry manual for women. In 1982, the Iowa City Women's press employed 4-5 women full time and had associated "bindery and typesetting businesses" that employed another 3-4 women.

An article for *FBN* in March 1982, titled "The Invisible Lesbian/Feminist Printer, provides a snapshot of the ICWP. Barb and Joan, two members of the Iowa City Women's Press collective, describe the Iowa City Women's Press as currently concentrating "more and more on printing books for lesbian/feminist publishers and self-publishing women, and on printing periodicals such as *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* and *Sinister Wisdom*."⁴⁸³ After a brief update on the Iowa City Women's Press, Joan and Barb describe two endemic problems for the Iowa City Women's Press: "trying to compete as an undercapitalized business in a highly capitalized industry" and "credibility."⁴⁸⁴ The

⁴⁸³ "The Invisible Lesbian/Feminist Printer," *Feminist Bookstore News* 6, no. 1, 9.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Iowa City Women's Press relied "on old and inefficient equipment" to do their work and struggled with credibility "when women are unable to recognize the dilemma we are in." Barb and Joan explain that mistakes of the press are not the result of "carelessness" but of "material problems."⁴⁸⁵ Limitations of equipment and training created problems for the press, making them less competitive on price and quality in comparison to other, better capitalized print shops. Joan and Barb used the forum in FBN to ask women "to consider seriously the ramifications of not supporting these (lesbian-feminist) shops." Specifically, they noted that it was difficult for them to get women publishers "to understand that the labor of producing a book goes hand in hand with the labor of writing and publishing a book. Lesbian/feminist publishers would find it inconceivable to publish a book written by a man; yet virtually all choose to have their books produced by men."⁴⁸⁶ Barb and Joan wanted this to change. They made three appeals to the FBN community:

1. If you are a publisher of books or periodicals, consider having women-owned printshops do your printing. It is beyond our capabilities at this point to efficiently produce large runs of 300-page books. Where we can be competitive is in the area of smaller books and periodicals, such as 100-200 pages and 2000-5000 copies.
2. If you are involved in any women's organizations, ask where the letterhead, flyers, brochures, or posters are being printed. If there isn't a woman printer in your area who is capable of doing what you need, contact us for names of other women printers nearby.
3. When you go into a women's bookstore, be aware of what books and periodicals are printed by women (look for this information on the copyright page); and know that the money you pay for that book goes directly back to women, all the way down the line.⁴⁸⁷

These appeals to a national community to provide concrete support to the Iowa City Women's Press by using them as a printer demonstrate how the Iowa City Women's

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

Press used feminist ideologies as a way to build a national base of customers. Barb and Joan appealed not only publishers of books and periodicals but also to local women's organizations and to book buyers to support the work of the Iowa City Women's Press. Barb and Joan on behalf of the Iowa City Women's Press mobilize a range of constituents to support the organization—and the principles it embodied. For a period of time, this appeal was effective. In principle, women wanted to matronize woman-owned businesses.

Barb and Joan also solicited feedback from the FBN community in the article.

They asked,

1. Would you consider paying \$.50 more for a book produced by women? This is a way for all of us to capitalize our own institutions.
2. As a bookseller, would you consider displaying women-produced books separately and explain and educate customers about the difference in prices?
3. As a publisher even if you can't feasibly print all of your books with a feminist printer, perhaps you can print one or two books a year, especially those books that are of most importance to our lesbian culture, in a lesbian/feminist shop.⁴⁸⁸

These questions indicate some of the business strategies and consciousness-raising tools that the Iowa City Women's Press mobilized to educate existing and potential customers. The letter concluded, "This is a critical time for the Iowa City Women's Press. We are worried about our future, both in terms of our own jobs and the continuing existence of the press." In 1982, the Iowa City Women's Press was concerned about their economic viability. Barb and Joan continue, "Right now the Iowa City Women's Press is the only lesbian/feminist press in the country in which a book can be typeset, printed and bound by women. Its loss would be a significant one. The loss of any lesbian/feminist press at any stage of its development is significant. The survival of our cultural

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

institutions—our insistence on our public selves—is an important guarantee for the survival of our individual freedom.” The Iowa City Women’s Press did survive throughout 1982, 1983, 1984, and most of 1985, but The Iowa City Women’s Press closed in December 1985.

In reporting on the closing of the press, Carol Seajay wrote,

Over the years the Press printed many of the issues of *Sinister Wisdom*, many of the early Naiad Press titles, early issues of *Lesbian Connection*, and all of the issues of *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* and *Maize*, as well as *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women*, *Shadow on a Tightrope*, and *Saturday Night in the Prime of Life*. *Lesbian Land* was the last book off the press. Aunt Lute Book Company, the publisher started by two of the Press’s founders with the intention of having the books printed by the press, had to have its two most recent books printed elsewhere.⁴⁸⁹

Lorna Campbell, one of the workers at the Iowa City Women’s Press, described the reasons for the press’s closure to Seajay: “Basically we were all good workers. But none of us were managers.” Campbell describes multiple issues at the Iowa City Women’s Press resulting in its closure. The Iowa City Women’s Press invested in another press to modernize and increase their capacity, but they financed this investment with debt. To service debt payments, the Iowa City Women’s Press brought in more work, but simultaneously they faced the challenge of worker burnout. The press tried to address the work situation and limit workers to a forty hour work week, but this move limited overall productivity. Over time, the finances for the press “consistently got worse.” Finally, when the collective of the Iowa City Women’s Press examined what needed to be done to make the press viable, they realized that the pricing schedule was not competitive, the equipment was antiquated, and they didn’t estimate effectively the amount of time that it

⁴⁸⁹ Iowa City Women’s Press Closes, *Feminist Bookstore News* 8, no. 4 (Dec/Jan 1986), 13.

took to run jobs. In addition, the community of lesbian publishers for printing jobs was decreasing; to have a large enough economic base, the collective would need to market their services outside of the lesbian community, a prospect which didn't appeal to members of the collective. In light of all of this, the collective decided to dissolve the corporation, leaving some debts, and releasing all of the workers to pursue other project.⁴⁹⁰

At the conclusion of the article in FBN, Seajay asks, "Is this the end of an era? Are the dreams we birthed no longer possible? Does the press closing represent a settling of visions? Revisions?"⁴⁹¹ Seajay senses some of the issues facing lesbian-feminist publisher in the mid-1980s. The closure of the Iowa City Women's Press, followed in January 1987 by the closure of the San Francisco Women's Press, did mark the end of an era. Not the end of feminism, nor the end of feminist publishers, but the end of an experiment in building an alternative lesbian-feminist economy. Lesbian-feminists envisioned a world in which all aspects of the means of production were controlled by and benefited women. A broad network of lesbian-feminists worked to make this a reality between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, but by the late 1980s, the project failed.

There are two primary reasons for the failure of the alternative lesbian-feminist economy. First, the community of lesbian-feminists was more robust and defined through activism between the years of 1976 and 1983. By the middle of the 1980s, this community began to fray for a number of reasons. Some women developed new activist interests outside of lesbian-feminists, including Central American solidarity work, work

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

on reproductive choice, and anti-nuclear activism; other women had a restless sense of insularity within lesbian-feminist communities; other women experienced stress and burnout from fractious personal and political conflicts. Lesbian-feminist communities were small communities to begin with; as conflicts and strife within the community grew and as women developed new interests and attentions, the community became even smaller and lacked the economic power to sustain the array of community institutions that had been developed.

Second, the forces of commodity capitalism, which dictate that the most inexpensive products and services prevail in the marketplace, overwhelmed lesbian-feminist communities. Barb and Joan rightly note that many lesbian-feminist books published in 1982 were not printed by lesbian-feminist printers. That trend continued as printing technology simultaneously became more sophisticated and cheaper. Printers with established, well-capitalized businesses offered cheaper prices to lesbian-feminist publishers and in service to their own bottom lines, they brought their business elsewhere. Undercapitalized lesbian-feminist printers could not compete. Thus, these two dynamics—changes within lesbian-feminist communities and the forces of commodity capitalism—dealt a fatal blow to many lesbian-feminist business, including the Iowa City Women’s Press.

The Iowa City Women’s Press, however, fulfilled partially their two original objectives. Their first objective was “to help women gain more control over their printed words.” During the thirteen years of operation, the Iowa City Women’s Press did just that. Moreover, they helped to transform the overall environment for women. The refusal of business by the male printer in 1971, which sparked women to create the Iowa City

Women's Press, is now an action relegated to history. Today, commercial printers print feminist and lesbian books without question. Part of the reason for this new approach to business is aggressive capitalism, which dictates that the market responds to money. If lesbians can pay, printers will print the materials. It is not untrue, however, to recognize that the work of feminists and lesbian-feminists created a new social and political climate, which brings more acceptance to the publication and circulation of lesbian materials. The act of taking power to print materials for lesbian-feminist communities, combined with the circulation of these materials by publishers, changed the habitus in which women live. The work of the Iowa City Women's Press was successful in achieving this aspect of its mission and contributing to the transformation of society.

The other goal of the Iowa City Women's Press—to help women gain more control of their lives through access to skills—was also partially achieved. The Iowa City Women's Press Collective not only was an important site of employment and skill building; through its two self-help publications, *Greasy Thumb* and *Against the Grain*, the Iowa City Women's Press Collective educated and advocated for women to have knowledge about skilled trades. Many women involved in the Iowa City Women's Press continued to make other important contributions to lesbian print culture. Joan Pinkvoss, one of the founders of the Iowa City Women's Press Collective, left the collective to become the publisher of *Spinster's Ink*, a small lesbian press, which eventually merged with *Aunt Lute*. Other members of the Iowa City Women's Press Collective worked on the lesbian periodical *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*. The Iowa City Women's Press Collective was an important political and economic formation within the WLM and its work animates many key elements of lesbian print culture.

Chapter 4

“To All of the Women Who Find Something of Themselves in It”

Lesbian Anthologies

On the Tip of Our Tongues

The moment of the poem is not when it is read by a solitary reader whose eyes scan the page. It is not when the inky press runs paper over plates making an impression which will be bound into a book. The moment of the poem is not when the poem is typeset. It is not when the poet sets pen to paper, the first time or the last. Each stroke of the pen, each stroke of the finger on the keyboard, each mechanical intervention to create print is a tragic effort to reclaim the past. The moment of the poem is always, already lost by the time the first word is written, by the time the last word is read.

As when you read Judy Grahn’s “Talkers in a Dream Doorway.”* You are not in New York. There is not a woman leaning in the doorway. You are not leaving. There is no cab honking nine flights below. You are not aware of your own body’s temptation. You are not admitting, or denying the admission of, your desire. You are not imagining pulling a breast to you. You are not saying goodbye with longing. When you encounter the poem, you are reading. Ideally, in bed. You are watching, witnessing words cascade down a page. Reading as if for the first time, though it may be the second, or third, or sixty-ninth time that you have read the poem. Each time the poem remakes you. Rewrites your desire, reconfigures your perceptions of your body, her body, the chaste or racy thoughts of your mind, the intensity between you.

The moment of the poem is both always already lost and waiting, restlessly, to emerge. Patiently pressed in white pages, the moment of the poem emerges again when soft hands crack the spine of a book for a contemplative moment. The book, with the poem, releases a cacophony of sounds—traffic roaring, knuckles digging into thighs, tongues talking in each other’s mouths—but the loudest sounds are the beating of your heart, the wanting something, the wine-flushed face, the flexing tongues, the all-consuming passion. The loudest sounds are what was lost, what never happened: the leaning down, the tongues nodding together, the possession of life.

The moment of the poem a Janus-faced phantom—lost always, already as you read this and waiting, restlessly, to emerge. It cannot be found as it slips farther and farther into a history that cannot be recreated, yet you search for it incessantly, wanting to find, to hold that brief ephemeral, elusive moment. Wanting to say,

we’ve got it,
we’re in the doorway.
we’ve got it right here, between us,

(Admit it) on the tip of our tongues.

***Talkers in a Dream Doorway**

You leaned your body in the doorway
(it was a dim NY hall)
I was leaving as usual—on my way.
You had your head cocked to the side
in your most intelligent manner
eyes glistening with provocation,
gaze direct as always,
and more, as though wanting something,
as though I could have bent and kissed you
like a lover
and nothing social would have changed,

no one minded, no one bothered.
I can't testify to your intention.

I can only admit to my temptation.

Your intensity dazed me, so matter of fact
as though I could have leaned my denser body into yours,
in that moment while the cab waited
traffic roaring nine flights down
as well as in my ears,
both of us with lovers of our own
and living on each end of a large continent.
We were raised in vastly different places,
yet speak this uncanny similar tongue.
Some times we're different races,
certainly we're different classes
yet our common bonds and common graces,
common wounds and destinations
keep us closer than some married folks.

I admit I have wanted to touch your face, intimately.

Supposing that I were to do this awful
act, this breach of all our lovers' promises—in reality—
this tiny, cosmic infidelity: I believe our lips would first be
tentative, then hardened in a rush of feeling, unity
such as we thought could render up the constellations AND our
daily lives, justice, equality AND freedom,
give us worldly definition
AND the bread of belonging. In the eye of my imagination
I see my fingers curled round the back of your head
as though it were your breast
and I were pulling it to me.
As though your head were your breast
and I were pulling it to me.

I admit, I have wanted to possess your mind.

I leaned forward to say good-bye,
aware of your knuckle possibly digging a tunnel
through my thigh, of the whole shape of your body as
an opening, a doorway to the heart.
Both of us with other lives to lead
still sure why we need so much to join,
and do join with our eyes on every
socially possible occasion.

More than friends, even girl friends,
more than comrades, surely,
more than workers with the same bent,
and more than fellow magicians
exchanging recipes for a modern brand of golden spit.

I admit we have already joined more than physically.

The cab's horn roars.
You smile, or part your lips as if to welcome how I'd just
slip in there, our tongues nodding together,
talking inside each other's mouth for a change,
as our upper bodies talked that night we danced together.
Your face was wine-flushed, and foolish; my desire selfish,
pushing you beyond your strength.
You paid for it later, in pain, you said.
I forget you are older, and fragile. I forget your arthritis.
I paid later in guilt, though not very much.
I loved holding you so close, your ear pressed to my ear.
I wanted to kiss you then but I didn't dare
lest I spoil the real bonding we were doing there.

I admit I have wanted to possess my own life.

Our desire is that we want to talk of really important things,
and words come so slowly, eons of movement
squirt them against our gums. Maybe once in ten years a sentence
actually flashes out, altering everything in its path.
Flexing our tongues into each other's dreams, we want to
suck a new language, strike a thought into being, out of the old
fleshpot. That rotten old body of our long submersion. We sense
the new idea can be a dance of all kinds of women,
one we seek with despair and desire
and exaltation; are willing to pay for
with all-consuming passion, AND those tiny boring paper cuts.
I never did lean down to you that day.
I said good-bye with longing and some confusion.

I admit to wanting a sword AND a vision.

I doubt I will ever kiss you in that manner.
I doubt I will ever stop following you around, wanting to.
This is our love, this stuff
pouring out of us, and if this mutual desire is
some peculiar ether-marriage
among queens, made of the longs of women

to really love each other, made of dreams
and needs larger than all of us,
we may not know what to do
with it yet but at least
we've got it,
we're in the doorway.
We've got it right here, between us,

(Admit it) on the tip of our tongues.

Introduction

Anthologies, from the Greek words for “flower” and “gathering,” are collections of writing with particular power in literary circles for canon creation and perpetuation. For lesbian writers and publishers, anthologies define and explore the meanings, past, present, and future, of lesbian identity and lesbian-feminism. Lesbian, as a descriptor (both adjective and noun) for women who build their lives around erotic, emotional, sensual, and sexual relationships with other women, dates to 1890,⁴⁹² but the use of lesbian changes throughout its history in the language. In this chapter, I narrate one history of lesbian poetry by examining anthologies published in the United States, between 1969 and 1989. I examine how editors developed anthologies, including what work anthologies do politically, socially, and literarily, and what meanings they make for lesbian identity formations. I consider what dialogues anthologies encourage in relationship to lesbian identity formations and how anthologies engage in the production of lesbian identities for poets and readers. Two questions shape this history: how are lesbian communities imagined and constructed in different moments in time and by different groups of people?, and how are lesbian identities imagined and constructed by poets in both their poetics and in their practice of poetry?

⁴⁹² J.S. Billings used “lesbian love” in *The National Medical Dictionary* (London: Lea Bros & Co, 1890) to describe tribadism.

During the WLM, anthologies become a crucial literary form; anthologies operated not only as a collection of writing but also as a forum to project an imagined world. Attention to genre in relationship to the WLM is prevalent in scholarly literature. Stacey Young argues that what she terms autotheoretical texts are crucial to the WLM as a method of political speech grounded in personal experience.⁴⁹³ Dana Shugar argues that science fiction and fantasy texts formed a crucial intellectual bulwark for lesbian separatists.⁴⁹⁴ Honor Moore and T.V. Reed examine the significance of poetry for feminist activism.⁴⁹⁵ In a similar register to genre, the form of the anthology is a significant expression of lesbian-feminism during the 1970s and 1980s. Jane Gallop examines scholarly anthologies as “good places to witness the dynamics of collectivity”⁴⁹⁶ within feminism; the dynamics of collectivity for lesbian-feminism are on display in anthologies as well. The rich publishing environment of feminism and lesbian-feminism in the 1970s and 1980s created possibilities for multiple engagements with anthologies. An overview of feminist scholarship on anthologies opens this chapter.

With this history of lesbian anthologies, I make three arguments. First, lesbian-feminist anthologies crystallized and extended lesbian-feminist identities in lesbian-feminist literary, political, and aesthetic contexts. Second, by examining the material

⁴⁹³ Stacey Young, Chapter three, “The Autotheoretical Texts,” *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁴⁹⁴ Dana R. Shugar, Part Three, *Separatism and Women’s Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁴⁹⁵ Honor Moore, *Poems from the Women’s Movement* (New York: Library of America, 2009) and T. V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁴⁹⁶ Jane Gallop, *Around 1981: Academic Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 8.

conditions of the publication of lesbian-feminist anthologies, from how material was solicited and selected for publication to how published books circulated, I illuminate how anthologies produced identities and how identities changed over time, demonstrating that the search for lesbian identity or lesbian-feminist identity is as consuming, and as futile, as the search for the moment of the poem. Writers and editors utilize anthologies, in particular, as a site of identity formation and elaboration for lesbian-feminism because of the unique attributes of anthologies as a gathering of multiple voices. Third, I explore how anthologies express particular values and ethics for lesbian-feminist authors.

I foreground these arguments by considering the work of literary critics Jeannette Howard Foster and Barbara Grier. Foster and Grier created the idea of lesbian readers and then promulgated it through their published criticism to create lesbian communities of readers. Poets, editors, and activists in the 1970s and 1980s conceptualized, published, and sold anthologies for lesbian reader communities. While Foster and Grier never worked as editors of lesbian poetry anthologies, their work as readers and critics brought together poems and poets as lesbian in precursor anthologies for lesbian readers.

To demonstrate these three arguments, I review lesbian-feminist anthologies between 1969 and 1989, with particular attention to the identities defined and articulated through the anthologies, and consider the material means of production of the anthologies in relationship to broader feminist formations. Lesbian poetry anthologies begin with small press publishing in the form of chapbooks. Four chapbooks—*Woman to Woman* (Women's Press Collective, 1970), *Dykes for an American Revolution* (Easter Day Press, 1971), *We Are All Lesbians* (Violet Press, 1973), and *Because Mourning Sickness is a Staple in My Country* (Ain't I a Woman, 1973)—and one collection of lesbian writing

including poetry, *Lesbians Speak Out* (Women's Press Collective, 1971/1974) are the focus of this investigation. All of these anthologies circulate in lesbian reader communities as sites of identity performance, consolidation and explication for lesbian-feminism. Two perfect bound anthologies of lesbian poetry, *Amazon Poetry* (Out & Out Books, 1975) and *Lesbian Poetry* (Persephone Press, 1981), continue the work of the chapbooks, particularly distilling the identity of lesbian through poetry, but also having a keen eye to the literary, particularly intervening in systems of canonization.

If lesbian-feminist publishing of anthologies in the 1970s represents the crystallization of lesbian identities through lesbian print cultures, the 1980s represents the elaboration of these identities. Lesbian-feminist publishing in the 1980s, particularly through special issues of literary journals, produces a variety of anthologies that expand, amplify, complicate, and extend ideas about lesbian identities, particularly through the examination of intersectional identities: lesbian and African-American, lesbian and Jewish, lesbian and Native American, lesbian and Latina. While some of these anthologies are picked up by mainstream, commercial publishing houses, all of them originate with small, lesbian-feminist publishers. The first commercial publication of a lesbian poetry anthology is an anthology that deploys the identity of gay and lesbian, but not lesbian-feminist. *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*, edited by Joan Larkin and Carl Morse and published by St. Martin's Press in 1987, crystallizes a new identity formation, gay and lesbian. *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* expresses a co-gender identity formation and a denouement to the work and activities of lesbian-feminist publishing.

This chapter narrates stories about specialized books—anthologies—and the editing practices and reading practices that brought lesbian anthologies into being. It also tells

stories about politics—politics of identities, politics of publishing, and politics of lesbian lives.

Anthologies and Literary Scholarship

Nancy K. Miller observes that feminist scholarship has “transformed the anthology from its function as repository of the old and classical to its current state as a projection of the new and innovative.”⁴⁹⁷ Miller suggests, and I amplify, the significance of anthologies in projecting, even creating, new and innovative writing and identities. Miller references, in particular, the canon-creating anthologies of Gilbert and Gubar⁴⁹⁸; a variety of poetry anthologies do similar work. In 1973, major publishing houses in New York published three anthologies of women’s poetry: *No More Masks!*, edited by Florence Howe and Ellen Bass; *Rising Tides*, edited by Laura Chester; and Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey’s *Psyche*. In 1974, Vintage books published Louise Bernikow’s *The World Split Open*, and, in 1975, Bantam Books published Lucille Iverson’s *We Become New*. Each anthology assembled poems by women poets and positioned the poets and the poems in relationship to feminism, explicitly in *No More Masks!* and implicitly in *Psyche*, through the lens of identifying and defining a women’s poetic tradition. The work of anthologizing feminist poetry continued throughout the subsequent decades with books such as *Early Ripening: American Women’s Poetry Now* (1987), *Collected Black Women’s Poetry* (1988), *A Formal Feeling Comes* (1994), a revised and updated *No More Masks!* (1993), *One Hundred Great Poems by Women* (1995), and *The Extraordinary Tide: New Poetry by American Women* (2001).

⁴⁹⁷ Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 57.

⁴⁹⁸ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, editors, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*, 1st edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985).

The WLM prompted the publication of anthologies of women poets. “Recovery” of literary work of women poets was an important strand of feminism at the time. Elaine Showalter describes it as the “second mode of feminist criticism engendered by . . . the study of women *as writers*, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women.”⁴⁹⁹ Annette Kolodny notes that the “most obvious success” of feminist literary scholarship “has been the return to circulation of previously lost or otherwise ignored works by women writers.”⁵⁰⁰

All of the aforementioned anthology projects reflect the impulse to identify and claim women poets lost to the canon. While feminism made significant contributions to recovering presumptively heterosexual women poets and shepherding them back into print, the work of recovering lesbian poets *as lesbians*, with attention to how they organized their intimate and sexual lives, did not have the same amplitude as the recovery of women poets during this time period.⁵⁰¹ In fact, some of the recovery work of women poets reflects a conscious “closeting” of the women, presenting them as feminist icons and not as lesbians. Scholarly attention to Emily Dickinson demonstrate this tendency as

⁴⁹⁹ Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” in *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 530.

⁵⁰⁰ Annette Kolodny, “Dancing Through the Minefield” in *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 475.

⁵⁰¹ See Bonnie Zimmerman’s 1981 article, “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism” in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, edited by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

either ambivalence or hostility to seeing Dickinson in a woman-centric or lesbian context⁵⁰² as do the attentions to Bishop, Woolf, and H.D.⁵⁰³

In Miller's configuration of anthologies as formative and projective, lesbian poets often were obscured or elided. Elly Bulkin analyzes this issue in her essay,

"'Kissing/Against the Light:' A Look at Lesbian Poetry."⁵⁰⁴ She writes,

The 1973 publication of *No More Masks!* and *Rising Tides* was tremendously important for women, but it did almost nothing to establish lesbians as significant contributors to women's literature. The problem stemmed not from the lack of lesbian poets in each book, but from the impossibility of identifying them unless they were represented by poems about subjects not connected directly and explicitly to lesbian oppression and/or sexuality.⁵⁰⁵

While Bulkin criticizes *No More Masks!* and *Rising Tides*, elsewhere she acknowledges Louise Bernikow and her introduction to *The World Split Open* favorably. Jan Clausen in *A Movement of Poets* explains the significance of Bernikow's introduction to lesbian poetry communities: Bernikow "acknowledged the historical correlation between

⁵⁰² Adrienne Rich's essay from *Shakespeare's Sisters*, "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," provides a reading of Dickinson as a lesbian, but also documents the strenuous efforts within the literature to identify a male love interest for Dickinson.

⁵⁰³ More recent scholarship on Dickinson, H.D., Bishop, and Woolf has brought attention to the lesbian and woman-centric aspects of the writers' works and lives. On Dickinson, see Martha Nell Smith and Ellen M. Hart's *Open Me Carefully* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 1998); on H.D. see Susan Stanford Friedman's *Psyche Reborn* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and *Penelope's Web* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 1991); on Bishop see Carmen L. Oliveira's *Rare and Commonplace Flowers: The Story of Elizabeth Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); on Woolf, see Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (San Francisco: Cleis, 2004).

⁵⁰⁴ Elly Bulkin, "Kissing/Against the Light": A Look at Lesbian Poetry," *Radical Teacher* (1978), 7-17.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

women's poetry and woman-loving."⁵⁰⁶ In evaluating feminist anthologies critically, Bulkin and Clausen acknowledge the function of anthologies in canon formation and intervene on behalf of lesbian poets.

During the 1970s and 1980s, lesbian-feminist critics, anthologist, publishers, and poets engaged keenly in canonical criticism, but canon formation wasn't the only concern of lesbian-feminist editors in compiling anthologies. Anthology editors also thought about how to produce lesbian as a subject position by publishing books that gathered lesbian writing and disseminating these books to communities of lesbian readers. By producing lesbian anthologies, editors simultaneously looked forward to form new lesbian-feminist communities and looked backward to understand lesbian-feminists in the past.

Early 'Anthologists': Jeannette Howard Foster and Barbara Grier

Before lesbian poetry anthologies could be imagined, lesbian readers had to be imagined. Two literary critics, working outside of the traditional context of literary criticism, shaped lesbian reading practices and produced identifiable communities of lesbian readers. Jeannette Howard Foster and Barbara Grier, through their writing, imagine, create, and embolden communities of lesbian readers.⁵⁰⁷ In her 1956 self-

⁵⁰⁶ Jan Clausen, *A Movement of Poets* (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1982), 16.

⁵⁰⁷ Lesbian reader communities precede Foster and Grier. In 1928, Djuna Barnes published privately in France her book, *The Ladies Almanack*, including a limited number of books in which Barnes hand-painted images within the book. *The Ladies Almanack* is both a celebration and farce of lesbian life at the time. Barnes sold it privately to friends and acquaintances, building a lesbian readership for her work through her publishing practice. While there are examples of lesbian reader communities that precede Foster and Grier's work in the 1950s, the concatenation of Foster and Grier's writing and publishing with the political formation of the Daughters of Bilitis and later feminist organizations makes lesbian reader communities both sustainable and replicable.

published book, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, Foster, a librarian and literary critic, reviews a broad array of literature from antiquity to the present for themes of “variance,” Foster’s term for love between women and lesbianism. In *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, Foster discusses a number of poems and books of poems, including the book of Ruth from the Bible and the poetry of Sappho, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Louise Labe, Adah Isaacs Menken, Michael Field, and Emily Dickinson. Through her narration, Foster teaches her readers, whom she imagined to be both lesbians and enlightened others, to read lesbian themes in poetry. She “unlocked” and “decoded” themes, imagery, and biographical narrations as consonant with lesbianism. Although Foster primarily focuses on thematic portrayals of lesbianism without regard to authorship, that is, she is as content to read portrayals of lesbianism by men, heterosexual and homosexual, as she is those by women, she also engaged biographical information to identify lesbian authors. Foster constitutes the idea of lesbian poetry in two ways. First, through poems with lesboerotic emotive and sexual expressions within the text; second, through the idea of “lesbian poets” as women who loved other women and wrote about their love poetically. Foster reads as a lesbian for lesbian themes and to identify other sex variant women. Through *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, Foster creates a ‘precursor anthology’ of lesbian poetry and lesbian poets. This ‘precursor anthology’ is not a bound book, but rather a yoking together of poems and poets for readers to encounter as lesbian. In short, Foster teaches readers of her book to read as lesbians.

The distribution of Foster’s 1956 edition was limited. After trying to publish it with a commercial publisher, Foster self-published it with Vantage Press with a press run

of 3,500.⁵⁰⁸ Of those 3,500 copies, “Vantage sold nearly eleven hundred copies” and sold “unbound pages to British publisher Frederick Muller, Ltd., in 1958” for a British edition.⁵⁰⁹ The 1975 edition by Diana Press, made with the original plates from the 1956 edition, sold 2,272 copies (probably on an original press run of 2,500)⁵¹⁰ and earned Foster \$1,383.72 in total royalties.⁵¹¹ This edition doubled the initial audience of the book and was a modest success for Diana Press.⁵¹² More importantly, the Diana Press edition of *Sex Variant Women in Literature* reached lesbian readers directly. In 1984, Barbara Grier reissued *Sex Variant Women in Literature* through Naiad Press. In spite of the limited circulation of the first edition of *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, the book did crucial work. *Sex Variant Women* defined lesbian literature and lesbian poetry, established a lesbian literary tradition, and mobilized communities of lesbian readers.

Foster’s work inspired one reader and critic in particular, Barbara Grier. In her prodigious book reviews for *The Ladder*, Grier positioned a number of books of poetry, including the first poetry collection by Mary Oliver (who would not come out until the

⁵⁰⁸ Joanne Passet, *Sex Variant Woman: The Life of Jeannette Howard Foster* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2008), 193.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁵¹⁰ Coletta Reid’s records on the book indicate that in February 1978, Diana Press had 150 additional copies of the book in stock. File Drawer One, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

⁵¹¹ File Drawer One, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

⁵¹² Although the book was a modest success for Diana Press, Foster, with deteriorating health and in need of money to support herself, hired a lawyer to demand a financial statement on book sales and owed royalties. This action corresponded with turmoil at Diana Press and increased the negative publicity about Diana and the failure to make timely royalty payments to authors.

next century) as lesbian.⁵¹³ Grier preferred to use the term lesbian for women-loving women over Foster's preferred term, sex variant. Like Foster, Grier identified within poems emotive and sexual expressions of lesbianism, whether or not the author of the poems was herself a lesbian. Through her reviews in *The Ladder*, Grier carefully directed readers to poetry where they could find Sapphic love, affection, and emotions in poetry. Grier's reading of poetry was not limited to poetry by lesbians, though she did delight in knowing and identifying poets—and fiction writers—as lesbian when she could. Grier's reviews of May Sarton's work as well as that of Natalie Clifford Barney and Renee Vivien revel in what poems by lesbians have to offer lesbian readers.⁵¹⁴

Given the lack of women who openly identified as lesbians either in their poetry or individually in their lives, Grier, like Foster, treats representations of lesbianism by heterosexual men and women with equal time, attention and enthusiasm. Grier identifies lesbian poetry, or as she often calls it “poetry of lesbiana,” as poetry infused with the spirit of lesbianism, or female erotica, love, and lives, and only sometimes written by lesbians. For example, she writes of Boris Todrin and his poem “Hate Song,” “It is hard to be enthusiastic over someone who obviously wrote in hatred . . . This is the story of one man's loss of his wife to another woman. It is very effective poetry though certainly negative in its approach.”⁵¹⁵ James Wright's work earns Grier's appraisal of “unusually

⁵¹³ Oliver acknowledged her partner, Molly Malone Cook when she won the National Book Award in 1992, (Sue Russell, “Mary Oliver: The Poet & the Persona,” *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* (Fall 1997): 21). but she didn't write about her partnership with Cook until in the early 2000s.

⁵¹⁴ Barbara Grier, *Lesbiana: Book Reviews from The Ladder* (Reno, NV: Naiad Press, 1976), np.

⁵¹⁵ Grier, “Poetry of Lesbiana,” Undated copy from Lesbian Herstory Archives.

intuitive, coming as they do from a male author's pen" for his two poems, "Sappho" and "Erinna to Sappho."⁵¹⁶ Grier's reading practices were concordant with the wishes and desires of her readers during the 1960s, primarily the women reading *The Ladder*. Like Foster's, Grier's reading practices, as expressed in her reviews, demonstrate the ways she read and analyzed literature for lesbian themes, desires, and images as well as named authors and poets as lesbian.

This reading practice of Grier and Foster prefigure the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In *Between Men* and the *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick reads homosociality within canonical texts with the intention of excavating power at the intersection of gender and sexuality for men in canonical texts. Grier's and Foster's intentions were different from Sedgwick's; they wanted to bring visibility to lesbian desire through their reading practices. In spite of these different intentions, the reading strategies of all three are strikingly similar. Consider Sedgwick's exploration of whether Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd* is a homosexual: "Claggart is depraved because he is, in his desires, a pervert, of the sort that by 1891 had names in several taxonomic systems although scarcely yet, in English, the name 'homosexual' [.]"⁵¹⁷ Now consider Foster's reading of the Book of Ruth from the Hebrew Bible, "This great short story, long acclaimed as a masterpiece of narrative art, is the first of a thin line of delicate portrayals, by authors seemingly blind to their full significance, of an attachment which, however

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 96.

innocent, is nevertheless still basically variant.”⁵¹⁸ Both Sedgwick and Foster read the texts to label characters as homosexual or variant, even though such labels are barely accessible to either the authors writing the texts or contemporaneous readers. Moreover, both are engaged in teaching the readers of each of their texts how to read like them. Sedgwick’s work is written for an academic audience; Grier and Foster both wrote for “common readers” and primarily addressed lesbian readers. The similar practice of reading in spite of these different audiences is striking; all share an investment in using literature as a tool to identify homosexual or variant desire. For Grier and Foster, this close reading practice articulates a lesbian subject position and an understanding lesbian identities in the 1950s and 1960s.

Reading for lesbian themes, however, is only one part of forming a lesbian reading community. Another component is publishing for that reading community. Publishing for lesbian reading communities has a long history in the twentieth century, primarily centered around small groups of friends and associates, as exemplified by publication and circulation of books like Djuna Barnes’s *The Ladies Almanack* and Lisa Ben’s *Vice Versa*.⁵¹⁹ The Daughters of Bilitis was the first organization that had at its center a mission to address the needs of sex variant women, or female homophiles, to use the language preferred by the women of The Daughters of Bilitis.⁵²⁰ *The Ladder* was the

⁵¹⁸ Jeannette Howard Foster, *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1984), 22.

⁵¹⁹ Lisa Ben’s newsletter, *Vice Versa*, published between June 1947 and February 1948 is the first known print journal for lesbians. See Streitmatter and Gallo for more information about *Vice Versa*. A complete archive of the issues of *Vice Versa* is available here: <http://www.queermusicheritage.us/viceversa0.html> (accessed 19 April 2012).

⁵²⁰ Marcia Gallo’s history of the Daughters of Bilitis, *Different Daughters*, is useful for both its perspective on the development of the organization as well as the ways in which

print journal of the Daughters of Bilitis, published regularly from 1956 until 1972, in booklet form with two staples. *The Ladder* was mailed to subscribers around the United States. *The Ladder* as a print product provides vital insight into lesbian life and culture during this time period. *The Ladder* contained a wide range of materials within its pages: biographies of famous lesbians, reports from meetings of the Daughters of Bilitis, narratives about radio shows, commentaries by members, re-written news clippings of interest to homophile women, positions on debates within the community, and notes of personal interest to members.⁵²¹ Poetry began appearing in *The Ladder* in February 1957 with volume 1, issue 5. That particular issue included two poems by Jo Allyn (most likely a pseudonym, which was the convention for the journal) titled “Rain” and “Awakening.” The appearance of poetry in the journal regularly continues through 1972, when *The Ladder* stops publishing. It is striking that a small organization with limited resources published poetry consistently within its pages. Poetry provided emotional texture to the emergent subjectivity of lesbian. Poetry, in short, conveyed the shared emotional and imaginative bonds of women reading *The Ladder*.

While Grier’s reading practices and reviewing practices trained women to read poetry as lesbian in the tradition of Jeannette Howard Foster, the advent of the women’s

the founders and members understood lesbian as a category and descriptor of their identity.

⁵²¹ A reprint of all of the issues of *The Ladder* was collated and bound into large books in 1975 by Arno Press, the same year that *Amazon Poetry* was published; this reissue of *The Ladder* made the journal available to a new generation of readers. The Arno Press edition of *The Ladder* wasn’t the only gathering of materials from *The Ladder*, however. Coletta Reid of Diana Press, in collaboration with Barbara Grier, edited and published three anthologies of material from *The Ladder*. These anthologies are *Lesbian Lives: Biographies of Women from The Ladder*, *The Lesbians Home Journal: Stories from The Ladder*, and *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder*; all were published in 1976.

liberation movement prompted new practices of writing, reading and circulation. In short, rather than reading for lesbianism coded within a text, more women wrote poems that openly used the word lesbian, as well as dyke, lover, butch, and gay. Foster and Grier, through their practice of literary criticism, created “precursor anthologies” of lesbian poetry. That is, while they did not work as editors bringing together individual poems and publishing them into a single book, they brought together poems and poets as lesbian. They created the possibilities and discussions of lesbian poetry as a special genre of poetry—and, perhaps just as importantly, they created an audience for lesbian poetry. This was vital work for subsequent anthologies published during the 1970s.

Small Press Lesbian Anthologies

Woman to Woman is the first book published in 1970 by Women’s Press Collective and the first lesbian anthology published in the lesbian print movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The first printing of *Woman to Woman* was a mimeographed edition of 1,000 copies. A second edition was published using the Women’s Press Collective’s offset printer. The second edition had a red cover and was 6.5” by 8.5”, the size of legal paper folded in half.⁵²² The book was bound with two staples and collated by hand. The pages alternate between interior gray paper and a thinner onion-skin paper. The graphics and artwork of the book are printed on the thinner paper; the printed text on the gray paper. The book is unpaginated, but there are twenty-four pages of the interior gray paper with onion-skin paper in between most pages. The printing of the book includes a few blank pages, most likely errors in planning the printing, and one poem with a typewritten

⁵²² The Women’s Press Collective purchased their paper at a discount store and as a result books within editions and in subsequent printings often had different paper stock.

note that indicates the proper order to read the poem because the pages were reversed in a printing error.

Woman to Woman carries the sub-title, “a book of poems and drawings by women.” *Woman to Woman* is both one of the earliest examples of lesbian-feminist poetry publishing and not a lesbian book. It is not a book of lesbian-feminist poetry as it would come to be formulated by the middle of the 1970s because it includes work by heterosexual feminist writers, such as Anne Sexton’s poem, “Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward.” At the same time, *Woman to Woman* is the first book published by the Women’s Press Collective, which was a primary publisher of lesbian-feminist books during the 1970s. In addition, many of the poets included in the collection are lesbians and explicit lesbianism in the poetry is evident. For instance, one poem in the middle of the collection begins, “Theres one thing a man cant have: the/love between two women.”⁵²³ This poet affirms the separateness of lesbians from patriarchal culture. Another poet writes, “I am starving for physical comfort./I cannot go to a woman who has not expressed an openness to loving me./I can go to a woman for love—to give love to.” While the poet affirms intimacy and affection between women, the poem concludes with the challenges of lesbians loving heterosexual women:

No man deserves your love and attention.
For womankind I am jealous of your man-spent moments.
I simply, fearfully, cautiously, bewilderingly love you.
Besides the “attraction of opposites”
How do we beings get together to love?

In these lines the poet bemoans the time the beloved spends with men and wonders how to create a world that is more hospitable to lesbians. In another poem, lesbianism is the

⁵²³ *Woman to Woman* is unpaginated.

salve for harsh experiences with patriarchy. Judy Grahn's poem, "Asking for Ruthie," about a prostitute, ends with this prayer for Ruthie.

sun cover her, earth
make love to Ruthie
stake her to hot lunches in the wheat fields
make bunches of purple ravens
fly out in formation, over her eyes
and let her newest lovers
be gentle as women
and longer lasting

With these lines, Grahn imagines the natural world, the sun, earth, and ravens providing solace for Ruthie. She then asks that her love be "gentle as a women" and "longer lasting." Grahn valorizes the sexual intimacy of women while punning on the limitations of sexual intimacy with men. *Woman to Woman* as an artifact represents the slipperiness between lesbian, lesbian-feminist, and feminist during the early years of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Woman to Woman foregrounds two aspects of lesbian print culture: iterative printing and editorial interrogation. Much of the book is a compilation of reprinted poems. Reprinting poems in books, journals, magazines, and newsletters is a common practice throughout the 1970s and has an iterative effect on lesbian identity. Many of the poems in *Woman to Woman* are reprinted from previous publications, including Sexton's poem, an excerpt from *Genesis*, and selections from Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*. Judy Grahn's "The Common Woman" poems appear in the anthology, as well as Susan Griffin's "I think of Harriet Tubman"; this is the first printing of both of these poems, which were reprinted extensively during the next decade. Excerpting and reprinting materials was a central strategy in lesbian print culture to reach new women with writing by, for, and about lesbians. The iterative quality of lesbian print culture, much like the

iterative quality of the world wide web today, is a way that lesbian identity formations were expressed and solidified over time.

One fascinating aspect of the book is that neither the poems nor the artwork are attributed to individual artists. Reflecting on this in the second edition, the editors acknowledge that they “believe very strongly that women deserve recognition as individuals and that women have been ‘anonymous’ too long,” and also “that ‘famous’ women are used as tokens in the publishing world, and our attempt in *Woman to Woman* is to reject the exploitative standards of that world and at the same time reject the divisions which fame creates among women.”⁵²⁴ The choice made by the publishing collective to balance these two ideological commitments was to publish the poems without individual attribution but to recognize the writers through a listing on the back page of the book. These egalitarian and anti-hierarchical editorial beliefs shape other lesbian publishing projects in the first half of the 1970s.

Although the poems and artwork are printed without attribution, the anthology includes many prominent poets. Included in the book are poems by Alta, Anne Leonard, Anne Sexton, Barbara Harr, Barbara Reilly, Carol Berge, Connie McKinnon, Cynthia Mack, Diane DiPrima, Diane Wakoski, Jennie Orvino-Sorcic, Judy Busy, Judy Grahn, Mallory King, Marge Piercy, Marilyn Hacker, Marilyn Lowen Fletcher, Marion Buchman, Naome Gilbert, Pat Parker, Red Arobateau, Sonia Sanchez, Susan Griffin, and Valerie Solanas. At the time of publication in 1970, the most notorious name on this list would have been Valerie Solanas for her *SCUM Manifesto*. In addition, the poets Anne Sexton, Diane DiPrima, and Diane Wakoski would have been recognizable to readers.

⁵²⁴ Untitled introduction to *Woman to Woman*, unpaginated.

Hacker, Grahn, Piercy, Parker, Sanchez and Griffin were just beginning their careers as poets; *Woman to Woman* might have provided an introduction to their work for many readers. Alta, the founder and publisher of Shameless Hussy Press in 1968, would have been well-known to west coast readers. Artwork for *Woman to Woman* is contributed by Brenda, Susan Coleman Anson, Wendy Cadden, Susan Forkner, Gail Hodgins, Rachel Oldham, Betty Sutherland, Deborah Figen, Robin Cherin, Jeri Robertson, Karen G., Sue Holper, and “one other sister.” All of the artists and writers contributing to the book are published without attribution. This challenge to editorial conventions placed primacy on the readers’ direct encounters with the poems and artwork; that is, readers experienced the work without the mediating influence of the author’s reputation.

In addition to the ideological tension in attribution of poems and artwork, the collective that produced *Woman to Woman* negotiated copyright issues. Another statement on the last page of the collection reads, “We have made every reasonable effort to obtain permission to reprint the poems and excerpts in *Woman to Woman*. Anyone objecting to their publication in this book should write to *Woman to Woman* . . . and we will revise future editions accordingly.”⁵²⁵ A paradox confronted early lesbian editors and editorial collectives: the need to respect and honor the work of authors versus the need to circulate widely the poems to reader communities that, in some cases, desperately needed them as a balm for isolation from sexism and homophobia.

The editors of *Woman to Woman* describe the process for compiling the book in the introduction. “The editing standards for this book were set by some 60 women—with

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

varying politics and tastes—who were asked to pick poems that talked to them.”⁵²⁶ Thus, *Woman to Woman* is a truly collective product, with many women involved in the editorial work—something that has been traditionally defined as the work of a single or small group of people, especially for small books like *Woman to Woman*. Women involved in the project were aware that their actions as editors directly challenged editorial convention. Moreover, in the introduction, they directly challenge prevailing aesthetic standards for poetry. The editors write:

We believe that any poetry or drawing that talks to people is good art, living art, and that a collection of ideas is more interesting and more important than a collection of names. This is the point the book tries to make by its odd structure, which will probably never be repeated. In *Woman to Woman* we wanted to catch a glimpse of ourselves, so after much discussion we decided to let it stand as the small, strange jewel that it is.⁵²⁷

The odd structure that the makers of the book emphasize is both the unconventional attribution of the poems and artwork in the book, and the collective process for editing the collection. The anthology was not simply an object curated by one or two people; it was a community project that reflected particular ethical and philosophical commitments by the women involved. By the second edition of *Woman to Woman*, when this introduction was written, perceiving the anthology as a “small, strange jewel” reflects the response of readers to the book, a response so positive it necessitated the second printing.

While *Woman to Woman* is not labeled a lesbian anthology, four anthologies published in the next four years have lesbian stated or implied in their titles: *Dykes for an*

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

Amerikan Revolution published by Easter Day Press in Washington, DC, in 1971;⁵²⁸ *We Are All Lesbians* published by Violet Press in New York in 1973; *Because Mourning Sickness is a Staple in My Country*, published by *Ain't I a Woman* in Iowa City, IA, in 1973; and the first edition of *Lesbians Speak Out*, published in 1971 for the West Coast Lesbians' Conference held at the Metropolitan Community Church and then reissued in a significantly expanded, perfect-bound, second edition in 1974.⁵²⁹ All of these collections are a fascinating hybrid of newly-available commercial print production and handmade flair.

In reviewing *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution for off our backs*, Frances Chapman wrote, “*Dykes* as a printed artifact says something about the eventually numbing effect of the glossy, eye appeal of the slick, stylish media of the Establishment and the Counter-Establishment.”⁵³⁰ The same could be said for *We Are All Lesbians*, *Because Mourning Sickness is a Staple in My Country*, and *Lesbians Speak Out*. Although all of these publications were professionally designed, pasted up, and produced as printed artifacts, they also express a visual aesthetic that defines lesbianism in opposition to “slick, stylish media.” In both content and presentation, these four anthologies define lesbian as containable within the object of a book and challenge the

⁵²⁸ Easter Day Press published two chapbooks, *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* and *Notes Towards a Women's Analysis of Class*. The two chapbooks reflect how closely political issues are imbricated with poetry for women writing and publishing at this time in Washington, DC.

⁵²⁹ That is, bound with a glued spine.

⁵³⁰ Frances Chapman, “Women Loving Words and Other Women” *off our backs* (31 Oct 1974), 7.

meaning of lesbian and the art of book-making. All three chapbooks and *Lesbians Speak Out*, a perfect-bound book, have poetry at the center of their project.

Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution is a thirty-two page chapbook bound with staples.⁵³¹ The cover is lavender cardstock; on the front and the back is the same image, possibly taken from a photograph of the title spray painted on a door next to another door with the word, Agnew. The interior stock is alternating cream and lavender paper. The entire chapbook is printed with pink ink. *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* contains poetry, prose, and drawings by children and adults. This small publication includes a number of poems, perhaps most notably poems by Rita Mae Brown, though other poets like Edith Rosenthal, Cynthia Funk, and Kate Winter are included, as well as a number of women who publish only with their first name.⁵³² While *Woman to Woman* grappled with the editorial meanings of authorial acclamation in their anthology and ultimately eschewed associating authors with poems, *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* suggests a different concern for authorial assignation: being publicly identified as a lesbian. *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* prints full names, presumably where the authors consented, and first names, presumably for the authors who were comfortable with a modicum of anonymity.

Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution is as focused on poetry as it is on politics. Chapman reflects on this dual focus in her review for *off our backs*, writing, “Although some of the writings assert the politics which says that Lesbianism is an obligatory

⁵³¹ An electronic copy of the book is available at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org.

⁵³² In her review of *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* (which Grier calls “an untitled paperback anthology”), Grier states that although “no editor is listed. . .one strongly suspects Rita Mae Brown is the editor” (Grier, *Lesbiana*, 254).

preliminary to the liberation of society, this is overshadowed by the language and emotions of alive and sensible women.”⁵³³ Chapman’s appraisal of the anthology references a political debate about the role of lesbians in the feminist revolution, but Chapman subsumes the political with attention to the aesthetic. For Chapman, the primary feature of poetry is the language and emotions of women. She concludes the review by noting, “Lesbianism is still a political doctrine, but there is little of the strident and accusatory harangue with which the doctrine is usually argued. Poems are better than polemics any day.”⁵³⁴ Chapman pronounces the chapbook a success because, while it may be informed by lesbianism and politics, it transcends this political orientation through language and emotion. The relationships between poetry and politics, language and emotion, and polemic and poems become key areas of analysis for reception and analysis of lesbian poetry over the next decades.

The politics of *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* are important, in part because it is an artifact that locates additional lesbian print culture activity in the metropolitan Washington, DC-area. One of the political statements in the book is about daycare. The piece is signed by Colitta, Helaine, Sue, Ginny, Sharon, Joan, Susan, Rita, Tasha, Betty, Charlotte, and Marlene.⁵³⁵ Many of these women become the founders of The Furies, the influential lesbian separatist collective that produced the newspaper by the same name, the very year that *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* was published. Thus, while here I

⁵³³ Chapman, “Women Loving,” 7.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ The presumptive identities of the signers are Coletta Reid, Helaine Harris, Sue (Lee) Schwing, Ginny Berson, Sharon Deevey, Joan Biren, Rita Mae Brown, Tasha Peterson, Betty Garmen, Charlotte Bunch, and Marlene Wicks.

read *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* as one of a handful of poetry chapbooks published in the first five years of the 1970s and part of a genealogy of lesbian print culture in the 1970s, it is also an artifact that speaks about the political activism on behalf of lesbian-feminism and lesbian separatism in Washington, DC.

Grier's appraisal of the book is less inflected by reading the politics of the book and more shaped by the aesthetics of the poems. For her readers in *The Ladder*, Grier refers to the book as an "untitled paperback anthology" and tells them, "the cover is best left unmentioned, but if you buy it, go beyond the cover to read the contents."⁵³⁶ Grier's distaste was probably for the word "dykes" and the spelling of American as "Amerikan." These two words presumably had particular meaning politically for the contributors to the anthology and for the editors, denoting a political awareness of the identity of lesbian as dyke and a critique of American politics and culture. For Grier, however, what is primary is the quality of the work. She writes:

Included are some unbelievably horrible poems. . .but there is some very good material, too. Right now the big thing is 'everyone' expresses herself regardless of what it might do to the next person. It's a good idea, at least in theory. Ironically, while the book trumpets revolution, the best poem in it is "For Queen Christina" by Rita Mae Brown, which celebrates a woman who gave up her throne for love of another woman, which seems politically very very intelligent indeed.⁵³⁷

Grier, as a speculative critic, offers an aesthetic appraisal of the material, singling out one poem as "the best." She also comments on an emergent political and aesthetic practice of lesbian publishing: freedom of expression extricated from aesthetic appraisal. Finally, Grier situates the political message of the book to be congruent with her own politics: praising action that prioritizes celebrating and making visible love between women.

⁵³⁶ Grier, *Lesbiana*, 254.

⁵³⁷ Grier, *Lesbiana*, 254.

The anthology *We Are All Lesbians*, published by Violet Press of New York in 1973, is twice the size of *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution*, but the two are similar in many ways. Though absent of drawings and writings of children, *We Are All Lesbians* combines art with typeset poetry and handwritten poetry as well as the reproduction of a musical score and a chant. *We Are All Lesbians*, in addition to its larger size, is larger in its vision of a lesbian community. The anthology includes a poem by Elsa Gidlow writing about Sappho as well as poems written for Emma Goldman, the goddess Diana, and St. Joan of Arc. A handful of poems are written in the tradition of Judy Grahn's "The Common Woman Poems," with titles like "For the Woman Who Pours Molten Lead" and "Middle Class Hippie to the Warehouse Dyke." Fran Winant, the unnamed editor of the collection, addresses Gertrude Stein and Emily Dickinson as icons for lesbian poetry in her poem "Gertrude and Emily." Winant echoes the language of Stein, saying, "Gertrude your language was called/hermetic/as in 'hermetically sealed'." She continues asserting that Stein's writing "couldn't be allowed to make sense" and asking:

When you talked about
"tender buttons"
were those breasts you meant
when you asked
"when do I see lightning"
and answered
"every night"
were you talking about making love⁵³⁸

In this way *We Are All Lesbians* expresses the ways that poetry was a form of dialogue in the lesbian community at the time. Winant writes explicitly in an intertextual dialogue with Stein, while other women in the anthology are engaged intertextually with Judy Grahn, for instance, and Elsa Gidlow, who was a contributor to the anthology and living

⁵³⁸ *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution*, chapbook is unpaginated.

at the time in Marin County, California. Through the intertextual dialogues with Stein, for instance, the anthology expresses the desire for a broader literary history for lesbians and appropriates that history when necessary. The intertextual engagement with living poets like Grahn and Gidlow demonstrates the ways that contemporary poetry circulated within and among lesbian communities.

The desire for a broader literary history earned *We Are All Lesbians* a lashing in the review magazine *Margins*. *Margins* was “A Review of Little Mags and Small Press Books” publishing in the 1970s. In the twelfth issue of *Margins*, Angela Peckenpaugh reviewed *We Are All Lesbians*. She began the review noting, “More lesbians speak in *We Are All Lesbians* than have in the past, and the tone—rather than emphasizing paranoia or disappointment—is generally celebration, almost like a religious movement with testimony by converts.”⁵³⁹ Peckenpaugh, like Chapman in *off our backs*, comments on the appearance of the book, characterizing it as “a group effort, with various art styles (none very professional.)”⁵⁴⁰ She notes that the drawings are “almost all” of women and that the hand-written poems give it “the effect of informality and homely originality, rather than artistic prowess.”⁵⁴¹ While these critiques may be valid—and may not have even been of concern to the creators of the anthology, Peckenpaugh is most upset about the inclusion of Emily Dickinson in the dedication and in Winant’s poem. She writes that the dedication, “got my dander up.” Then she explains, “To my knowledge, Dickinson was not gay. So why the implication.” This reception by a reviewer in the literary

⁵³⁹ Angela Peckenpaugh, “We Are All Lesbian,” *Margins*, Number Twelve (June-July 1974), 40.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

establishment (in spite of the wide attention and circulation of Rebecca Patterson’s biography on Emily Dickinson from 1951, in which she presents Dickinson as a lesbian, thwarted by her love for Kate Anthon) reminds us of the world into which women published *We Are All Lesbians* and *Dykes for An Amerikan Revolution*. The assertion of lesbian identity for writers was a daring one, as is evidenced by the number of writers in these two anthologies who do not attach their full names; and to name other, famous writers as lesbians, as Winant does in her poem and as the anthology does, is to open oneself for attack and ridicule—both of which Peckenpaugh delivers with fury.

Another anthology published in 1973 is the small chapbook *Because Mourning Sickness is a Staple in My Country*. This chapbook has fifty-two pages of poetry, printed on newsprint and “paid for and distributed by” *Ain’t I A Woman?*, an Iowa City collective and newspaper publisher. The chapbook measures 6 ¾ inches by 5 inches and is bound with two staples. The front cover is all black with the title printed in white type. The back has only the name and address of the newspaper *Ain’t I A Woman?*. *Because Mourning Sickness* has two sentences on the inside front cover describing the contents, “This is a collection of poems by working-class dykes who have been going through changes and writing poems, among other things. The book is designed to fit your back pocket.” These poems, most without titles, are all printed without an author attribution.

Because Mourning Sickness interrogates the intersection of class, sex, and sexual orientation in the poems. In one poem, the poet writes:

I would be a committed woman
I am, not, that is to say,
I am a woman that commits
I commit the felony – loving
 women.

published and distributed by Women's Press Collective. A collective of six women—Judy Grahn, Wendy Cadden, Brenda Crider, Sunny, Jane Lawhon, and Anne Leonard—produced *Lesbians Speak Out*. In an undated and unattributed document from the archives of the Women's Press Collective, these reflections on *Lesbians Speak Out* were recorded:

Editing *Lesbians Speak Out*, was a very painful process but it taught us a lot. A group of women put a collection of articles together and we wanted to expand on it. We asked for contributions and got mostly poetry; and decided to accept at least one of everything that had been sent to us by each woman. And that was a big step from the traditional way that editors pick and choose and end up with 17 poems by one person and three others, and then they say, "Oh, well, no one else in the world can do it." And the result is that it's an incredibly wealthy book, it's rich in different kinds of experiences 'cause people were writing about very real things and it's all in there. We worked on it for something like four years. There were six of us working on it and we disagreed so much that we have six introductions to this book.⁵⁴²

In these reflections on *Lesbians Speak Out* is another explicit critique of conventional editing standards. While the author indicates that the disagreements within the collective resulted in the six introductions to the book, reading *Lesbians Speak Out* retrospectively, the multiple introductions to the 1974 collection emphasizes the importance of collectivity to the enterprise, rather than a failure in a collective process. While *We Are All Lesbians* was primarily edited and compiled by Fran Winant,⁵⁴³ *We Are All Lesbians*, *Dykes for An Amerikan Revolution*, and *Because Mourning Sickness is a Staple in My Country* all reflect a collective impulse in their presentation. Editorship is not ascribed to a single person. Moreover, many of the poems, if signed, are signed only with first

⁵⁴² Loose document, File Drawer 2, Diana Press Papers, Mazer Archives.

⁵⁴³ Winant was known at the time as the publisher of Violet Press; her first book of poetry solicited submissions to *We Are All Lesbians*, but she is not identified as editor in the chapbook.

names. While one interpretation of this is that some women were afraid to use their full names, it is also possible that the eschewing of the patronym is a statement against patriarchy and the assignation of names of fathers and husbands to women and children. What distinguishes *Lesbians Speak Out* is the explicitness of its collective editorial approach.⁵⁴⁴

According to Grahn's introduction, "*Lesbians Speak Out* was originally conceived and collected by Carol Wilson as a series of articles, selected and typed on stencils by Natalie and Ellen; and mimeographed in a great hurry by the Women's Press Collective for a conference in L.A."⁵⁴⁵ The conference was the Los Angeles West Coast Lesbians' Conference in 1971.⁵⁴⁶ Returning from the conference, the larger group of six editors began a three-year process of expanding the collection and producing the second edition, perfect-bound; it was published in 1974. To solicit contributions to the second edition of *Lesbians Speak Out*, the editors placed a small piece in the December 1971 issue of *The Advocate*. It read, in part, "The Lesbians Speak Out Collective is preparing a second edition of its book, *Lesbians Speak Out*, and is seeking as wide a range of materials as possible about lesbians to include in the volume. The group wants articles, poetry, songs,

⁵⁴⁴ Kathryn Flannery discusses how editors of feminist publications "presumed that readers would become writers. . .to fuel cultural and political change" ("That Train Full of Poetry" in *Feminist Literacies, 1968-75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 129). The editorial decisions made by the *Lesbians Speak Out* Collective are concordant with Flannery's analysis, as well as Kim Whitehead's notion of a "coalitional" voice in feminist poetry (*The Feminist Poetry Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), xix).

⁵⁴⁵ *Lesbians Speak Out*, unnumbered front matter.

⁵⁴⁶ There are two West Coast Lesbians' Conferences; the first is in 1971 and is held at the Metropolitan Community Church; the second is in April 1973 and is held at the University of California-Los Angeles (ULCA).

pictures, drawings, short stories, and whatever else is available.”⁵⁴⁷ In addition, the collective announced that it was looking for letters for a collection of lesbian letters.⁵⁴⁸

Unlike *Dykes for An Amerikan Revolution* and *We Are All Lesbians, Lesbians Speak Out* contains equal parts poetry and prose, accented by a variety of photographs and line drawings. *Lesbians Speak Out* gathers many previously published tracts from the WLM, including Martha Shelley's “Gay Is Good,” Radicalesbians’s “Woman Identified Woman,” pieces from Gay Women's Liberation in Berkeley/Oakland, and a report from the Lesbian Mother's Union. In addition, essays in the anthology address a variety of issues of concern in the early days of Gay Women's liberation: the experience of lesbians in high school, conference reports, sexuality concerns, concerns about feminism and liberation. Reflecting a hallmark of lesbian-feminist editorial practices, *Lesbians Speak Out* embraces conflicts and differences of opinion. For instance, there is a report from the April 3rd 1970 all women’s dance in New York, organized by members of the Gay Liberation Front and one of the first events that sparked the development of the Radicalesbians. This report, written by members of the RAT class workshop, contains both praise and critique of the event—a visible working through how to think about various political and social formations.

One thing that is striking about the anthology is how photographs and graphics punctuate the text. For instance, accompanying the article by two members of the Lesbian Mother's Union is a full-page photograph of families at the beach. In the image, the reader can see about a dozen and a half people and two dogs. At the center is the back of

⁵⁴⁷ *The Advocate* 74 (December 1971): 8.

⁵⁴⁸ I do not know what, if anything, came of this project.

a naked child and another child being towel dried by an adult. The report on the Los Angeles Gay Women's Conference features three photographs of women speaking at a conference. An article on schizophrenia includes on the facing page a line drawing by Ned Asta animating the experience described in the text.

Poetry is significant and central to *Lesbians Speak Out*. The first poem is Judy Grahn's "A History of Lesbianism," reflecting not only Grahn's role editorially on the book, but also the persistent concern among lesbian-feminists at the time with imagining and articulating a history. Poems are primarily by women in the Bay area, including Willyce Kim, Pat Parker, Sandy Boucher, and Grahn, but also included are two poems by Fran Winant, Rita Mae Brown, and many poems by women who use only their first names. Yet, calling *Lesbians Speak Out* a "poetry anthology" would be a misnomer. It is a lesbian anthology and it contains lesbian poetry alongside essays, political analysis, conference reports, and artwork. The poetry of *Lesbians Speak Out* mirrors the wide array of issues that the book addresses and is as central to articulating what lesbianism is and who lesbians are as the prose or artwork. One of the most striking things about the book, in fact, is the way that all elements within the anthology work in concert to render a vision of what lesbians are, what their concerns are, and what it means to be a lesbian and to be in community with lesbians. Grahn writes:

It is the poems and graphics which I love best about the book. I used to think art had to fit a certain form, a standard. Now I think anyone who sets out to make a drawing or poem, does--unless she is too secretive to say what she really means, or writes in a specialized language, such as academic or Greek or only-to-herself. Is it not so, that moving art comes from moving people--from women who are taking risks, moving toward each other and away from what destroys them; toward strength and away from helplessness; towards the earth and away from cloudy dreams. About 80 lesbians have a piece of their real selves in this

collection and it's grand, and already I'm ready for more. As the song says, we're still not satisfied.⁵⁴⁹

Grahn articulates the significance of poetry and artwork to her individually and also decouples it from the mode of “speculative criticism” dominating literary criticism at the time. Grahn articulates rather an aesthetic philosophy of art as coming from “moving people” who “put their real selves in this collection.” This may function as a broader editorial and aesthetic statement for lesbian-feminist publishing.

Wendy Cadden, Grahn’s lover, writes part of her introduction in poetry. She writes,

We are the ones who must write
the stories and the articles
that describe us

we are the ones who must make
the pictures of ourselves

who must make the reference to
ourselves in history

The reference to making history in these lines and the importance and primacy of lesbians creating and writing their own lives and their own history is an important part of *Lesbians Speak Out*.

At the conclusion of *Lesbians Speak Out*, a page and a half is dedicated to “books by, for, or of interest to lesbians.” This is a common practice of both periodicals and books: offering readers an opportunity to find other books like it. Including pages with information for finding additional materials in lesbian-feminist print objects was a way to yoke together not only like-minded books but also authors and publishers. It created the effect of multiplicity for readers of the book. These two pages dedicated to other books

⁵⁴⁹ *Lesbians Speak Out*, unpaginated front matter.

articulate and extend the formation of lesbian—and highlight the centrality of printed materials in defining lesbian.

These anthologies establish important norms for reading and circulating lesbian poetry in the early 1970s. The various calls for submissions demonstrate the commitment to soliciting writing from a wide range of writers. Anonymous authorship, while it can be read as a need to shield women from the very real concerns of violence, hostility, losing children, etc., for being out as lesbians, also reflects a cultural value. Women believed in undermining patriarchal nomenclature and in deflecting attention from the singular author. Anonymity in editorship also suggests the political meanings bound with editorship. The variety of editorial practices, including attention to diverse voices in anthologies, representing authorship in multiple fashions, using poetry as central to theoretical and political articulations of lesbian, and resisting definitions of lesbian poetry only in relationship to speculative criticism, demonstrate the importance of lesbian poetry in articulating and recovering a history and in imagining a future.

All four of these anthologies interrogate the value of editorial and authorial ascription through the elimination of a named editor and the eschewing of authorial ascription. Part of the lack of authorial ascription was fear of identification with burgeoning lesbian-feminist activism by hostile outsiders. Particularly for contributors to *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution*, many of whom are mothers, the dangers of being openly known as a lesbian in the early 1970s are obvious. Fears about being openly lesbian, however, were not the only reason for eschewing authorial ascription. As the editors of *Woman to Woman* indicate, refusing to identify authors and editors was also a

political act which challenged literary representations of authors and the formalized aesthetic measures of the literary world.

I turn my attention now to the 1975 publication of *Amazon Poetry* as an important collection of poetry—the largest one at the time and the first perfect-bound book solely of poetry—that brings together poems under the appellation “lesbian.” By focusing on a perfect-bound book, I don’t want to fetishize print (as is the impulse today as more publications migrate to the internet), but rather to emphasize the importance of print culture to the writers and readers of the time. Print culture was a vehicle for lesbians to share ideas and analysis, as well as a tool to make visible the lives and bodies that women experienced in the world. The expansion of lesbian poetry anthologies from the thirty-two pages of *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* to the sixty-four pages of *We Are All Lesbians* to the 218-page *Lesbians Speak Out* reflected not only the possibility of more poems for readers and communities of readers to engage, but also the growing importance of the lesbian community.

Amazon Poetry and Lesbian Poetry

Two perfect-bound anthologies of lesbian poetry appear in the United States in the 1970s and the 1980s;⁵⁵⁰ the first, *Amazon Poetry*, published by Out & Out Books, crystallizes lesbian poetry. The second, *Lesbian Poetry*, published by Persephone Press in 1981, extended and interrogated the boundaries of lesbian poetry. I examine the genesis

⁵⁵⁰ Virago Press published another lesbian poetry anthology, *Naming the Waves*, in 1988. Christian McEwen edited *Naming the Waves*; McEwen, born in the United Kingdom, lived in New York when she edited the book. *Naming the Waves* is “a collection of transatlantic lesbian poetry, roughly half of which is British and half North American.” Virago Press was well-known among lesbian-feminists in the United States, but the books primarily sold in the U.K. I admire *Naming the Waves* enormously, but regretfully exclude it from this analysis, given its limited United States circulation.

and circulation of these two anthologies to think about how the identity formation of lesbian evolves between 1975 and 1982 and how women contest and expand the meaning of lesbian.

On April 19, 1975, in *Majority Report*, a feminist newspaper printed in New York and distributed throughout the United States, there was a small news story, which referred to “a group of women” soliciting poems for an upcoming anthology. The article stated that “Although they [the group of women compiling the anthology] know that lesbian poets are writing in all parts of the country, they have not yet heard of most of these women.”⁵⁵¹ Both the presence of this article in *Majority Report* and this statement reveal Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin’s intentions in compiling *Amazon Poetry*: they wanted to find a larger group of lesbian poets and publish poems from poets who had not yet been heard. The article continues, “Excellent poems are going unread, in large part for lack of publishing outlets and limited space in those that do exist.”⁵⁵² In this statement, Bulkin and Larkin convey their political analysis about publishing. In spite of the strengths and new opportunities that feminist publishing created for women and women writers, it had limitations; simultaneously, commercial publishing, due to sexism and homophobia, too often excluded lesbians. Hence, the need for the proposed anthology for lesbian poets who want “to make their poetry visible to those presently unaware of the vitality of current lesbian literature.”⁵⁵³ In *Amazon Poetry*, Bulkin and Larkin wanted to demonstrate the “vitality” of lesbian poetry and to make it available to a

⁵⁵¹ *Majority Report* (April 19, 1975): np.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

large audience. The call for poems indicated that *Amazon Poetry* would “be published in the fall of 1975.”⁵⁵⁴ The deadline for poets to submit their work was July 15, 1975.

Identifying lesbian poets and drawing the correlation between lesbianism and women’s poetry were two issues that Bulkin and Larkin addressed in crafting and publishing both *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry*. These two anthologies created and circulated a body of work that was identifiable as lesbian to readers. Although *Amazon Poetry* was not the first book to circulate carrying the appellation lesbian in relationship to poetry, it was the first perfect-bound anthology of lesbian poetry. One of its tasks was to define the term lesbian poetry. In the essay, “Kissing against the Light,” Elly Bulkin describes the two fundamental assumptions about lesbian poetry. Bulkin writes, “1) the poet’s lesbianism is an essential, not an incidental, fact about her life and her work; 2) a discussion of lesbianism must focus not only on our political ideas (what we think), but on our feelings (how we act, what we say, how we live our expressed politics).”⁵⁵⁵ Bulkin asserts the centrality of lesbianism to a writer’s life and expands lesbianism to be not simply a political formation but an affective, or lived, experience as well. Bulkin’s definitions provides one lens for thinking about lesbian poetry; Bulkin’s definition, however, reflects a specific formation of lesbian, informed by the time and location.

Larkin said in an interview in 1981 that she and Bulkin received about 2000 submissions for *Amazon Poetry*.⁵⁵⁶ In addition to promoting their call for work in

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Bulkin, “Kissing,” 11.

⁵⁵⁶ Maida Tilchen, “Getting to Know Who We Are: The Lesbian Poetry Tradition/An Interview with Joan Larkin and Elly Bulkin,” *Gay Community News* (August 1, 1981): 11.

feminist publications like *Majority Report*, Bulkin and Larkin “made up about 200 little flyers and sent them around to women’s centers, women’s newspapers, women’s coffee-houses for posting.”⁵⁵⁷ In this way, the process of compiling the anthology was itself a community-organizing project. Larkin notes in a 1981 interview that at the time they were distributing flyers, “there wasn’t even a simple way of finding all those places, but we found the names of women’s presses and coffee-houses in Kirsten Grimstad’s and Susan Rennie’s *Women’s Survival Catalogue*.”⁵⁵⁸ Bulkin and Larkin’s roles as editors included the traditional roles of selecting poems for inclusion, compiling and copy editing the manuscript, and overseeing production as well as identifying a community and network of people through which they could find poets.

In addition to these organizing strategies, Bulkin and Larkin also solicited poems from poets they wished to include, including Susan Griffin and May Swenson.⁵⁵⁹ In the solicitation letter to May Swenson, Larkin reiterated the process, writing, “We have sent notes announcing our anthology to women’s centers, women’s bookstores, and women’s publications throughout the country in an attempt to locate exciting poetry by women we haven’t yet heard of.”⁵⁶⁰ Through this letter, sent to Swenson’s publisher and delivered by the publisher to Swenson, Larkin asked Swenson to contribute a poem to the anthology, which she did.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Swenson Correspondence, Subject File Folder “Amazon Poetry,” Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, NY.

The organizing process with which Bulkin and Larkin approached *Amazon Poetry*, while not described in the final book itself, is one of the hallmarks of lesbian poetry at the time: it was a tool to network and connect lesbian-feminists and a process through which lesbians could collaborate. Bulkin and Larkin model collaboration in their co-editorship of the anthology and in the process of identifying poems for inclusion and in reaching out to poets to participate. Larkin and Bulkin both believed that there were many other lesbian poets out there in the world that they needed to connect to for the project.

Organizing *Amazon Poetry* was for Larkin and Bulkin both a political project and an aesthetic project. *Amazon Poetry* was one of the first books published by Out & Out Books. Aesthetic questions and political questions concerned Larkin and Bulkin equally as poets and anthologists while assembling *Amazon Poetry*. In the letter to May Swenson, Larkin wrote,

Some of the poetry we have received recently is from women who can't yet allow their real names to be used in a book of lesbian poetry. This makes us very conscious now of the potential impact on them and on us and on an oppressive society of the appearance in it of so many of our sisters. For us, this is an affirmation of our completeness and pride as woman-identified women. We are very much against, however, limiting the scope of the book to poems about sexuality or the politics of feminism. We simply want good poems, poems that reflect the variety of our lives and love of the craft of poetry.⁵⁶¹

In this part of the letter, Larkin outlines for Swenson some of the political issues of assembling the book and some of the challenges that some poets faced in considering having their poems included. Larkin then writes, however, about their commitment to

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

aesthetics in the book, using the phrases, “good poems” and “love of the craft of poetry.”⁵⁶²

When the manuscript was completed, it included thirty-eight poets who contributed a total of sixty-three poems to the anthology. The most prominent names at the time include Ellen Bass, co-editor with Florence Howe of *No More Masks*, Adrienne Rich, May Swenson, and May Sarton. When published, *Amazon Poetry* lists at the end of the book sixteen “small-press poetry” publishers, including Diana Press in Baltimore, MD, Feminist Press in Old Westbury, NY, Out & Out Books in Brooklyn (the publisher of *Amazon Poetry*), and Women’s Press Collective in Oakland, CA. All of the listed presses include full mailing addresses so that women interested in purchasing books by contributors can order them.

Larkin and Bulkin raised money to publish *Amazon Poetry*. Initially, they approached Glide Church, who ultimately did not provide financial assistance. Larkin told Swenson in her initial letter, “we did later get enough from a private donor to make perfect binding possible, which will extend our distribution possibilities.”⁵⁶³ Out & Out Books published *Amazon Poetry* at the end of 1975. Between four and five thousand copies of the anthology were ultimately sold or distributed, according to later interviews with Larkin and Bulkin as well as records from Persephone Press, who published *Lesbian Poetry* in 1981, partly based on the successful sales history of *Amazon Poetry*.

From this thick description of *Amazon Poetry*, I examine three things. First, I interrogate the idea of “lesbian” that is presented through the book by examining two

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Swenson correspondence. Larkin does not recall who the private donor to *Amazon Poetry* was (Larkin Interview).

stories of poets in relationship to the collection. Second, I explore the idea of generations of poets and how identity is bound by experience and experience, in turn, is bound by history. Finally, I discuss how *Amazon Poetry* was revised, updated, and expanded into *Lesbian Poetry*, published in 1981, and suggest some of the changes that the new collection made to the identity of “lesbian,” particularly in relationship to the greater inclusion of lesbians of color.

Locating Lesbian in Amazon

Of the first edition of *Amazon Poetry*, the editors write in the “Prefatory Note,” “What is a ‘lesbian poetry anthology’? Some expect only love poetry; others, a collection of poems specifically about our oppression as lesbians. Instead, we have put together a book of poems that show the scope and intensity of lesbian experience.” The poems of *Amazon Poetry* certainly do that, but rather than reading the poems closely, what I want to examine is how the inclusion of one poet and the exclusion of one poet serve as a way that lesbian was understood not by common, lesbian readers at the time, but by literary critics.

Two central questions about anthologies, because they are a site of the aggregation and multiplication of power, are: who is included? and who is not included.⁵⁶⁴ To think about these questions, I examine a case of inclusion in *Amazon Poetry* (which later became exclusion in *Lesbian Poetry*) and a case of exclusion. My intention in exploring these editorial decisions is not to suggest anything about the processes of the editors of the anthology, but rather to examine the ways that women

⁵⁶⁴ The complete tables of contents with poets and poems for both *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry* are available at the Lesbian Poetry Archive, www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org.

thought about and organized their work as poets in relationship to the changing social context of “lesbian” during the times when these anthologies were published.

A handful of poets with prominent reputations in the world of poetry are included in *Amazon Poetry*. Among readers of feminist poetry, many of whom were already familiar with a process of “decoding” to identify lesbians, Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, Audre Lorde and Ellen Bass were important names in the anthology. Similarly, May Sarton, who had come out more than ten years earlier, in conjunction with the publication of her novel *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*, had a large and public reputation as a novelist and poet. The poet who may have surprised some readers and who certainly delighted the editors when she agreed to participate is May Swenson.

Larkin and Bulkin solicited Swenson directly to include her work in the anthology. In the initial letter, dated July 12, 1975, Larkin wrote, “I am afraid you may consider our request an invasion of your privacy. I do know that you have not identified yourself with the women’s movement. I hope, nevertheless, that the letter attached will help to interest you in lending support to our project by allowing us to include something you have written.”⁵⁶⁵ Enclosed with the letter is a full description of the project, and, in the body of the letter, Larkin describes the anthology with its title, *Amazon Poetry*, as an anthology that is lesbian and for “woman-identified women.” A second letter was dispatched to Swenson in August of 1975. Swenson responded to Larkin’s request for poems affirmatively on August 16, 1975.

⁵⁶⁵ Swenson Correspondence, Lesbian Herstory Archives. Though Swenson had not appeared in a feminist anthology, she indicates in her reply to Larkin that she was waiting to hear from *Ms. Magazine* about one of the poems. Swenson’s engagement with feminism as a movement is as complex as her engagement with lesbianism as a movement and merits further examination.

I enclose a copy of an old poem, one I still like: TO CONFIRM A THING. This was published in my collection, TO MIX WITH TIME, in 1963—has never been paid any particular attention that I know of. To me the statement it makes doesn't seem at all obscure, but perhaps the metaphors constitute a thicker veil than I expected. TO MIX WITH TIME is now out of print, and I own all rights to the poems in it, so that permission for reprint is the only one necessary.⁵⁶⁶

Swenson's positive response to Larkin demonstrates her willingness to have her work read as an expression of eroticism between women. Swenson's participation in the anthology was a political act, understood as such by Swenson, Larkin, Bulkin and the readers of the anthology.

Swenson believes that the poem makes a "statement" that "doesn't seem at all obscure," though she is aware that the poem is not read overtly as lesbian and postulates that "perhaps the metaphors constitute a thicker veil than I expected." In fact, Swenson's poem in *Amazon Poetry*, in relationship to other poems such as Marcie Hershman's "Making Love to Alice" or Pat Parker's "For Willyce," is thickly veiled and obscure. Putting Swenson's poem in dialogue with the poems of May Sarton and Elsa Gidlow, however, reveals congruence in their presentation of lesbianism. Different generations express lesbianism differently in poetry.

Kirstin Hotelling Zona analyzes Swenson's aesthetic in relationship to lesbian poetry with the question, "What do we make of a self-identified lesbian's poetry that is often drenched by tropes of heterosexual desire?"⁵⁶⁷ Zona answers this question with a thoughtful reading of the "blatantly heterosexual or stereotypically gendered tropes" in Swenson as a strategy that "radically refuses normative sexuality through a *performative*

⁵⁶⁶ Swenson Correspondence, Lesbian Herstory Archives.

⁵⁶⁷ Kirstin Hotelling Zona, "A 'Dangerous Game of Change': Images of Desire in the Love Poems of May Swenson," *Twentieth Century Literature* 44.2 (Summer 1998): 219.

appropriation.”⁵⁶⁸ Zona reads Swenson’s poetry as a negotiation of Swenson’s lesbianism in relationship to the larger poetry academy and as a subversive strategy for expressing her own sexuality through more acceptable images and tropes. Informing Zona’s textual reading of Swenson’s poems, however, is an understanding of lesbian identity as constituted during the period of the 1970s and 1980s, rather than a lesbian identity constituted prior to the 1970s, when Swenson wrote the poems. These different meanings of lesbian and different constructions of lesbian identity move fluidly and overlap.

In fact, Swenson’s relationship to the word “lesbian” was a vexed one. Swenson willingly and quite happily allowed Larkin and Bulkin to include her poem in *Amazon Poetry*, but five years later when asked for poems for the new anthology, *Lesbian Poetry*, Swenson refused. She wrote to Larkin, “I have not sent you any poems for inclusion in the proposed anthology—nor would I do so—any more than I would submit any writing to a book titled, for instance, ‘The Heterosexual Women’s Poetry Anthology’.”⁵⁶⁹ In a long letter to Larkin, Swenson writes that part of her reason for refusal (in addition to the title “inviting the charge of being crude”) was “People attracted to such a title would not, I think, be looking principally for first rate poetry.”⁵⁷⁰

Ironically, in 1988, Larkin again solicited poetry from Swenson for the co-gendered anthology she edited with Carl Morse, *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*, and at that time in spite of the title, Swenson assented to include poems. Sue Russell writes, “It is difficult to speculate about why she accepted the later invitation and not the

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 219-220.

⁵⁶⁹ Sue Russell, “A Mysterious and Lavish Power How Things Continue to Take Place in the Work of May Swenson,” *Kenyon Review* 16.3 (Summer 1994): 132.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

earlier one.”⁵⁷¹ I would argue, however, that part of what is at work in these inclusions and exclusions is the changing way in which lesbian identity is constructed at these times. Russell, writing about Swenson’s lesbianism, notes, “While Swenson did not go out of her way to disclose her lesbianism, neither did she go out of her way to hide it.”⁵⁷² This characterization of Swenson’s identity deployment by Russell, which seems accurate to me, is an expression of a particular location of identity construction and deployment informed by mid-century queerness.

Swenson’s presence in *Amazon Poetry*, absence in *Lesbian Poetry*, and resumed presence in *Gay and Lesbian Poetry In Our Time* reflects changing associations with language and identities. Russell underscores some stability in the construction and deployment of lesbian identity for Swenson; that is, she didn’t “go out of her way to disclose” it nor did she “go out of her way to hide it.” This construction is congruent with the descriptions of identity that Michael Sherry articulates in *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture* for his subjects, including Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, and Paul Menotti. It is also congruent with Elizabeth Bishop’s identity as a lesbian. Bishop’s actions, however, in relationship to identity formation and deployment are very different than Swenson’s actions.

I turn here to Elizabeth Bishop, the absent poet in *Amazon Poetry*, *Lesbian Poetry*, and all future anthologies of queer poetry no matter how named. If Swenson’s presence excited contemporary readers of poetry, the absence of Elizabeth Bishop would have gone unnoticed. Bishop refused to have her work published in women-only

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

collections. As she told the editors of *Psyche: The Feminine Poetic Consciousness*, Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey, in a letter, “I simply prefer the sexes mixed.”⁵⁷³ Segnitz and Rainey contextualize this remark in their introductory essay as follows, “Few women would disagree with this statement as the ultimate goal of the current women’s liberation movement, which hopes to bring about a climate in which the sexes can be “mixed” in a more realistic, humane, and just manner.”⁵⁷⁴ They continue the essay, however, with a thorough discussion of Bishop’s work saying, “[S]ince Elizabeth Bishop is a major poet, and since she exemplifies the more intellectual approach to poetry we have discussed, we’ve decided, after deliberation to include a discussion of her poetry in hopes that the reader will at some time read or reread her work.”⁵⁷⁵ In this way, Bishop’s absence from *Psyche* is truly a spectral presence as the authors frame and analyze her work in relationship to the authors included in the anthology.

In *Amazon Poetry*, the absence of Elizabeth Bishop was less of a presence for readers. As Bishop scholarship evolves, however, stories of Rich’s solicitation of Bishop for *Amazon Poetry* emerge. According to Richard Howard, after Bishop met with Rich, Bishop said, “Do you know what I want Richard? Closets, closets, and more closets.”⁵⁷⁶ Bishop, in Howard’s recollection, plays on the newly emergent trope of “the closet” as something from which gay and lesbian people emerge. In fact, such an experience was

⁵⁷³ Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey, *Psyche: The Feminine Poetic Consciousness; an Anthology of Modern American Women Poets* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), 30.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau. *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 330.

discordant with Bishop's life. She was open about her many relationships with women, including, in particular her relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, which whom she lived in Brazil for over a decade.⁵⁷⁷ Bishop lived her life as a lesbian similarly to Swenson; she didn't "go out of her way to disclose" it nor did she "go out of her way to hide it."

Russell and Sherry articulate this construction of identity—as something that is neither hidden nor revealed. It is an identity construction of a particular time and location, and a construction that changes with the political and social formations of the 1970s. *Amazon Poetry* as a title, as Swenson suggests, is evocative of lesbianism, but not annunciatory. The move from evocation to annunciation, from "Amazon" to "Lesbian," demonstrates how the meaning of "lesbian" changes. For Swenson – and Bishop – "lesbian" was located in "Amazon," but for new readers, "lesbian," or "Lesbian" was the word they sought, without cloaks or veils.

Understanding Generations of Lesbians

Different constructions of lesbian identity can be crudely mapped onto generations. Linda Garber in *Identity Poetics* makes similar generational gestures in her work. Garber articulates connections between Pat Parker and Audre Lorde as a generational relationship, in which Parker is a foremother to the work of Lorde. Similarly, Garber articulates a relationship between Judy Grahn and Adrienne Rich in

⁵⁷⁷ Carmen L. Oliveira details the sixteen year relationship between Bishop and Soares in *Rare and Commonplace Flowers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

which Grahn's work functions as a precursor to Rich's work on lesbianism in poetry in the 1970s.⁵⁷⁸

After the publication of *Lesbian Poetry*, Larkin and Bulkin recognized these generational dynamics. In an interview with *Gay Community News*, Bulkin said:

I think we've had a couple of generations. The earliest generation was women writing in the late 60s and early 70s. That wave was Judy Grahn and Pat Parker and Willyce Kim, who were publishing with Diana Press and the Women's Press Collective, and in *Amazon Quarterly*. At some point, what they were doing could be looked at as a "school."⁵⁷⁹

Bulkin continued by characterizing aspects of the writing of this "earliest generation":

It was important that they be anti-hierarchical; the "common Woman" poems by Judy Grahn are an example of this. They [the poets] wanted to communicate directly with the audience—they didn't want images or symbols that might interfere. There was a great emphasis on oral tradition. A lot of poems were written for somebody to stand up in front of an audience and make immediate contact with women who had felt, as a result of how poems were taught to them in high school, that they could never understand a poem. I see that as the first generation.⁵⁸⁰

While I suggest that labeling Grahn as part of a "first generation" involves a misnomer, because lesbian poetry extends farther back in history, Bulkin's description of this school of poetry is important. It produces the constellation of Swenson, Bishop, and Sarton as a "school" of poetry with a different construction of lesbian identity. *Amazon Poetry* gathers generations and interrogates what lesbian means and how it is represented on the page by poets at different times and in different locations.

Larkin also identifies another "school" or generation of poets in her reflections.

⁵⁷⁸ Linda Garber, *Identity Poetics: Race, Class, and the Lesbian-Feminist Roots of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁵⁷⁹ Tilchen, "Getting," 11.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

There are poets who are in the book[,] who are in *Amazon Poetry*[,] that came from a much more traditional place in terms of how they learned to write poetry, and who their audience was. They had written a great deal of heterosexual-identified poetry, and in some cases, like Adrienne Rich, had received awards and recognition from the white male establishment. That's a whole other group of people.⁵⁸¹

Larkin identifies different schools of poetry in a different register than Bulkin. While Bulkin gestures to more literal generations in relationship to when they became active as poets, Larkin delineates different milieux in which poets worked. Prior to coming out as a lesbian, Rich's work received accolades from the "white male establishment." Similarly, Swenson's work was first associated with lesbianism in *Amazon Poetry*. These are less generational differences than differences in the period of coming into consciousness, as Nancy Whittier suggests in her work *Feminist Generations*. Coming out in a heterosexually-identified literary establishment and asserting the presence of lesbians—and the authority for lesbians to be in such a space—was political work for lesbians and feminists; work that Larkin and Bulkin embraced. Different political stakes, shaped by their historical moment, make different identity constructions exigent.

Larkin and Bulkin both reflect on generationality in their comments about *Amazon Poetry*. While I recognize the significance of generationality in these anthologies, I am cautious about invoking generationality too forcefully. Generationality can provide a useful framework to think about the lives and work of lesbian poets. Current women's studies scholarship attends to generational issues within feminism.⁵⁸² Moreover, within literary history, generational issues are significant; one example is scholarship on Elizabeth Bishop and her relationship with the elder Marianne Moore. While generational

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² In particular, see Whittier's *Feminist Generations*.

analysis can be productive, I resist generationality as a framework for three reasons. First, the “wave” analysis of feminist history is rooted in generationality. In addition to providing an inaccurate narrative of feminist history, the organization of feminism into “waves” (which Larkin references in her statement above) invites generational discord and conflict. The idea of “third wave feminism” is a manifestation of how historical narrative frameworks shape current feminist activism; more recently, Susan Faludi’s writing about generational conflict in “American Electra: Feminism’s Ritual Matricide” demonstrates how thinking about generations of feminism invites the recapitulation of past conflicts.⁵⁸³ Quite simply, the epistemic framework of generations breeds conflict. Second, generational analyses leads to teleological thinking about history; they promote the idea that there is a progressive trajectory of human history. While this idea is appealing, it is empirically false. Finally, generational discussions reify heteronormative narratives about human life.⁵⁸⁴ While age and experience create differences within communities, framing them as generational implies a familial arrangement that inevitably reverts to heterosexual families and obscures kinship relationships and non-normative families. These are exactly the types of hegemonic systems that lesbian-feminists worked to subvert and reimagine during the 1970s. Ultimately, more than generationality, the examination of identity construction hinges on these two questions: what experiences

⁵⁸³ Susan Faludi, “American Electra: Feminism’s Ritual Matricide,” *Harper’s*, October 2010.

⁵⁸⁴ Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004) and Kathleen Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) synthesize this source of my discomfort elegantly and eloquently.

construct the meaning of lesbian identity for individuals and for communities?, and how are those experiences bound historically?

Larkin's comments about the different generations or schools of poets explicitly acknowledges the importance of audiences in relationship to poets' work. An important part of *Amazon Poetry*, in addition to gathering poems by lesbian poets, was the creation of an audience for lesbian poetry. For Larkin, that audience is not heterosexual, white, or male, but rather an audience of lesbians reading and interpreting lesbian poems. The size and scope of the audience for an anthology is important; commercially, it defines the potential sales. Larkin and Bulkin were less concerned with the commercial possibilities, however, and more concerned with creating an anthology that would mobilize communities of readers for lesbian poets. Through their editorial work, they imagined communities of readers; by publishing *Amazon Poetry*, they created a book that mobilized communities of readers. Larkin and Bulkin printed 500 copies of *Amazon Poetry* in the first printing through Out & Out Books. They immediately sold out. Larkin remembers going to a second printing within a month or two. In total, Out & Out Books printed three or four printings of *Amazon Poetry*, probably totaling 2,000-4,000 copies. *Amazon Poetry* sold briskly through 1980.⁵⁸⁵

The circulation and reception of texts is crucial as writers imagine and create new texts. Jacqueline Bobo's and Janice Radway's work examine how communities of readers and communities of reception among African-American women and readers of romance novels, respectively, alter how we understand various literary and social texts and how those texts are used in people's lives to make meanings. The collection, publishing, and

⁵⁸⁵ Larkin interview.

distribution of women poets in anthologies that were feminist had the effect of both creating communities of readers of feminist poetry and of creating new communities of feminist poets. *Amazon Poetry* did similar work for lesbian poets. Larkin reflects on the constellation of politics, aesthetics and communities of readers in relationship to *Amazon Poetry*.

One facet of the new wave is for those people to come out as lesbians. Not simply to come out, but to develop a politics which is very much reflected in their poetry, and has made changes in some aspects of their poetry. But they have moved toward a place where they can simply be talking to women, instead of assuming that they have to explain themselves to men, or that they have to consider men as part of their audience.⁵⁸⁶

Larkin links politics with the craft of poetry in this statement and articulates the centrality of the audience for poets. The creation, production, and circulation of *Amazon Poetry* constructed “lesbian” as both a subject position and as a reader position; *Amazon Poetry* built new lesbian literary communities of writers and readers.

Lesbian Poetry, Anthology Redux

When *Lesbian Poetry* was published in 1981, it was a much larger collection of poems—nearly 300 pages in length compared to the 112 pages with thirty-eight poets of *Amazon Poetry*. In this edition, there is a more robust set of back materials, as well as a lengthy introduction by the editors titled “A Look at Lesbian Poetry.” The size of the book signals the effectiveness of poetry as a medium for the movement. *Lesbian Poetry* demonstrates the way in which feminist publishing had grown, been taken up by mainstream presses, and ironically also had contracted. The final part of the book contains not only greatly expanded contributor biographies and an essay by co-editor Elly Bulkin titled, “Lesbian Poetry In the Classroom,” but also a full six pages of “Work by

⁵⁸⁶ Tilchen, “Getting,” 11.

Contributors,” which includes a listing of each book and chapbook published by the contributors along with full mailing addresses or other instructions on how to get their books. The introduction to this section includes these notes: “While large commercial presses have the resources to bill you, women’s presses do not—so help them out by prepaying (in United States currency).”⁵⁸⁷

Lesbian Poetry also reflects a commitment to and a belief in lesbian communities that were multiracial and multicultural in their conception and formation. This value was being articulated in new and different ways within lesbian communities by the time *Lesbian Poetry* was published. The vital statistics of *Lesbian Poetry* in comparison to its predecessor, *Amazon Poetry*, illuminate some of the differences between 1975 and 1981. In *Amazon Poetry* there were sixty-three poems by thirty-eight poets. Of these poets, three of them (Audre Lorde, Willyce Kim, and Pat Parker) were lesbians of color; Lorde and Parker, African-American, and Kim, Asian-American. Therefore, four per cent of the poets were lesbians of color, and their poems represented a total of eleven per cent of the collection.

Lesbian Poetry included work by sixty-four poets, with a total of 145 poems. Of the poets, eighteen of them were lesbians of color, or twenty-eight per cent of the contributors; and forty-one of the 145 poems were from lesbians of color, or twenty-eight per cent. The racial-ethnic backgrounds of these eighteen lesbians were also more diverse, and included African-American women, Mexican-American women, Latina women, Native American Women, and Asian-American women. The greater number of poems by lesbians of color in *Lesbian Poetry* is heralded by the editors and reviewers

⁵⁸⁷ Bulkin & Larkin, *Lesbian Poetry*, 298.

because it reflects the particular values of inclusion and multiracialism that were circulating in the lesbian-feminist communities at the time.

By 1981, more lesbian poets were being published by mainstream commercial publishing houses, including Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Hacker, and Audre Lorde. Bulkin and Larkin looked for a commercial publisher, but couldn't find one. Receptive ones were waiting to see how "lesbian books" would sell. Judy Grahn's book, *The Work of a Common Woman*, had just been published by St. Martins, and Bulkin and Larkin indicate that St. Martins was among the publishers waiting to see how "lesbian books" would fare in the marketplace. While they were interested in commercial publishing for this new poetry anthology, Larkin and Bulkin also "didn't want to be exploited—by Sapphic images or by a Hollywood image of two women kissing."⁵⁸⁸ This represents some of the political concerns about the growth of lesbian publishing and the fears about what happened to lesbian work when it entered the commercial or mainstream sphere. Ultimately, Persephone published *Lesbian Poetry*; Bulkin met Greenfield and McGloin at the National Women's Studies Conference. Larkin noted, "It's important to have publishers who appreciate the fact that poetry is involved with political activism, is a political statement."⁵⁸⁹ Larkin's statement here resonates on many levels in relationship to *Lesbian Poetry*. She and Bulkin saw the project as "political activism" and a "political statement" not only in relationship to the world of publishing, but also in relationship to how the book was constructed, particularly the aesthetic standards of the project and the racial-ethnic make up of the anthology.

⁵⁸⁸ Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich, "Coming Out with Culture," *Sojourner*, 27.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

When it was published, *Lesbian Poetry* was celebrated by Persephone Press on May 9, 1981 with a reading event titled, “The Lesbian Poetry Reading.” The event was held at the Arlington Street Church in Boston and began with opening remarks by Barbara Smith, followed by readings by Bulkin, Parker, Moraga, Clausen, Hershman, Rich, Allen, Larkin, Lorde, Becker, Cliff, and Grahn. Many of the poets read not only a selection of their own poems from the anthology but also the poems of other women who were not in attendance at the event. The event was accompanied by a printed program, which highlighted the readers’ biographies as well as instructions for finding their books, and included advertisements from local businesses and forthcoming books from Persephone Press. Over 900 women attended the event.⁵⁹⁰

While reviewers of the earlier anthologies, *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution* and *We Are All Lesbians*, commented on uneven and even questionable aesthetics within those collections, Larkin and Bulkin asserted the primacy of aesthetic considerations in compiling *Lesbian Poetry* and affirmed that they had the same standards for *Lesbian Poetry* as they had for *Amazon Poetry*. Larkin said about aesthetics, “The poem itself had to be a powerful, poetic, integrated statement.”⁵⁹¹ Also like these earlier anthologies, the success of this endeavor was greeted with some ambivalence by reviewers. Andrea Loewenstein, reviewing the book for *Gay Community News* writes, “I liked some of them [poems] a lot, others not at all.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Tilchen, “Getting,” 11.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁹² Andrea Loewenstein, “Transmitting the Message,” *Gay Community News* (August 1, 1981): 11.

While Loewenstein's review was not entirely uncritical, her assessment of the book lends some insight into the function that this book had for shaping lesbian identity at the time. Loewenstein writes, "This is an anthology of poems by women who have chosen to take the risk and suffer the consequences (and there are consequences) of publicly identifying themselves as lesbians."⁵⁹³ Loewenstein's assessment here reflects the continuing and increasing framework of gay and lesbian identity in relationship to "the closet." Loewenstein valorizes public identification as lesbian by noting the risks and subsequent consequences. This is a framework that is effective and relevant for some of the contributors in the anthology, but is less meaningful for the older generation, as I have discussed. She continues, "It is probably logical that there are lots of lesbian poets—the act of peeling away and discarding the realities we were taught in order to find our true sexuality and identity is not unlike the peeling away and coming to terms which is necessary to write an honest poem."⁵⁹⁴ Loewenstein's metaphorical language analogizes the experience of poets with the experience of lesbians in coming out and is an example of how poetry was imbricated with lesbian-feminism.⁵⁹⁵

The process for putting together *Lesbian Poetry* was quite different than that for *Amazon Poetry*. Poems were not solicited through an open call because, as Bulkin said, "It would have totally overwhelmed us."⁵⁹⁶ Instead, Bulkin and Larkin solicited poems

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Jan Clausen's discussion of poetry and lesbian-feminism in *A Movement of Poets* remains a timely and important analysis as does Katie King's discussion of it in *Theory in Its Feminist Travels*.

⁵⁹⁶ Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich, "Coming Out with Culture," *Sojourner*, 17.

from existing networks. They reviewed manuscripts from *Conditions*, which Larkin was editing at the time and which had a guest-edited special issue in 1979 titled, *The Black Women's Issue*, that sold over 5,000 copies. They also considered materials at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. This process, and its results, demonstrates a value of lesbian-feminism: consciously creating multicultural texts. While it may seem that an open solicitation process, like the one engaged in *Amazon Poetry*, would result in a more open and transparent process and by extension in a collection that reflects racial-ethnic and class diversity, in fact, the opposite is true. *Lesbian Poetry*, compiled through process centrally-controlled by the editors, reflects more racial-ethnic diversity. As the editors knew, achieving a multicultural community project required attention to the process and an active structuring of the outcome to be more inclusive of a variety of voices.

Bulkin and Larkin explicitly articulate the value of multicultural anthologies and the processes used to achieve it in their assessments of the project. In addition, in interviews and other writings, they share three other observations about racial-ethnic diversity and inclusion in *Lesbian Poetry* as important in their work. Bulkin and Larkin note that first, the advancement of lesbian movements creates more visibility and possibilities for lesbians of color; second, academic locations and formations are exclusive of lesbians of color; and third, writing about race is not only the responsibility of lesbians of color—white lesbians must share the work as well. The questions of race and examining racism in lesbian communities were not simply questions of inclusion or representation, however. Larkin cited Minnie Bruce Pratt as an important contributor because of how her poems address a history of racism. Larkin noted that Pratt “cross[es] those divisions between white women and women of color, to really struggle with those

divisions, at the point when she's come out and recognized her bonding with women."⁵⁹⁷

These observations, combined with the book itself, demonstrate how thinking about race in relationship to publishing was crucial to lesbian-feminists in the early 1980s.

Interviews with Bulkin and Larkin, as well as Joan Nestle's review of the book in manuscript form and later published in *Sinister Wisdom*, indicate that one of the most important developments for the editors and for lesbian readers of *Lesbian Poetry* was its inclusion of more lesbians of color. Bulkin said, "In *Lesbian Poetry*, more than 1/4 of the poems are by lesbians of color, and so it is much more reflective of the women out there who are writing very powerfully."⁵⁹⁸ Bulkin positions this development of more lesbians of color writing and publishing poetry to questions of "generations or waves as a concept."⁵⁹⁹ Bulkin continues,

For the most part, the earlier lesbian poets who were known historically were white and upper-middle class or upper class, women like Amy Lowell or H.D.⁶⁰⁰ What I see in the last five years is an increase in the number of lesbians of color who are writing as lesbians of color. This book is only a reflection of what's out there. Earlier, that material wasn't being published, but a great deal of it was being written. There was a lack of accessibility, and fewer publications.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁷ Tilchen, "Getting," 9.

⁵⁹⁸ Macdonald and Rich, "Coming Out," 17.

⁵⁹⁹ Tilchen, "Getting," 9.

⁶⁰⁰ Given that this interview was conducted in 1981, this statement most likely reflects the best information available to Bulkin; however, I want to note that since this time, the poetry of African-American lesbians and bisexual women such as Angelina Weld Grimké, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Nella Larsen have been recovered and considered more fully. I am cautious about this analysis in relationship to Bulkin. In fact, Bulkin discusses Grimké in her introduction to *Lesbian Poetry* so she was well aware that the history was not exclusively white, though she does say "for the most part." This is an area deserving of more analysis within the textual evidence; in addition, more genealogical work is needed on poets who are lesbians of color.

⁶⁰¹ Tilchen, "Getting," 9.

Here Bulkin reflects on the material conditions of publishing, that is what is being published and what opportunities exist for publication, as important to understanding a tradition of lesbian poetry. Bulkin's comments reflect both a concern with the centrality of portraying the experiences of lesbians of color and the systemic barriers to those portrayals. While Bulkin's comments could be interpreted as a historical narrative of progress, I do not believe that is an accurate interpretation. She is reflecting on what has been and what was then, not on what might happen in the future.

Larkin expands on Bulkin's reflections further, particularly in consideration of race and genre. She says:

We tried not to define poetry in a strict academic sense. There's a Pat Parker poem called "Movement in Black" which is basically a performance piece. It also worked well on the printed page. There's a piece by Sapphire which in some ways moves over toward prose poetry, and is typeset like prose. Michelle Cliff's piece in the book, "Obsolete Geography," was turned down by Poets and Writers, which categorizes people as writing either fiction or poetry, and they said her poem was neither. I think we've tried to move away from this attitude of excluding women because we have this definition and they didn't fit into it. We wanted to try to get at what women are actually writing.⁶⁰²

Larkin first notes the challenge of academic formations for lesbians of color, and their commitment as editors to not draw lines that were exclusive. Larkin also considers how writing by lesbians of color at the time was confounding traditional genre definitions—that is, the distinctions between poetry and prose as well as between poetry and memoir. Larkin notes that the response of such genre-crossing resulted in confusion, at best, and hostility, at worst, from various publishers.

Loewenstein recognizes the inclusion of women of color poets as well in her review of *Lesbian Poetry*, "It is one of the very few poetry anthologies of any kind which

⁶⁰² Ibid.

contains more than a token representation of non-white poets, and this makes it a far richer and deeper collection.”⁶⁰³ Loewenstein reflects one value of lesbian-feminism at the time: multiracial engagements enhance community. Loewenstein continues and expands this formulation: “The poets included range widely in class and experience.”⁶⁰⁴ With this sentence, Loewenstein affirms that the imagined multicultural community is not only multiracial, but also draws on a range of class backgrounds and other experiences as a central to its formation. Loewenstein concludes, “It is a relief not to have to read the (by now standard) apology to working class women or women of color which accompanies so many feminist publications—the editors realized too late that they were not including everyone and will do better next time.”⁶⁰⁵ Loewenstein names past experiences of failed multiculturalism and praises the anthology for not making these mistakes.

I’m cautious to not valorize the work of Larkin and Bulkin with regard to race in either *Lesbian Poetry* or *Amazon Poetry*. Ultimately, I don’t believe an imagined past of perfection in relationship to multicultural or multiracial practices exists. I do believe that the process, commitments, and outcomes achieved by Larkin and Bulkin in *Lesbian Poetry* provide a model for future practice in compiling anthologies and thinking about lesbian poetics. The conscious multiracial representation and analysis that Bulkin and Larkin produced in *Lesbian Poetry* is important. At the same time, tensions around racism are evident in the poems of *Lesbian Poetry* and resist any utopian readings of the

⁶⁰³ Loewenstein, “Transmitting,” 11.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

book or of the lesbian community at the time. For instance, Julie Blackwomon writes in her poem “Revolutionary Blues,”

when I say sisters help me
the noose tightens on my neck
I cannot breathe
 it is because I am black
my sisters say
 yes,
but what has that to do
 with our revolution?⁶⁰⁶

Here Blackwomon reflects some of the common experiences of racism that women of color were addressing in lesbian-feminist communities.

Barbara Noda’s poem, “Strawberries,” is an apostrophe to her father, whose “strawberry-stained/skin” was “a field brown/as dark as your curses/ of Mexicans.” In the poem, Noda writes of how he “plows his whole family/under and bitter and sodden” and concludes that he did not “escape/the strawberries/a dusk encrusted/shimmering “ that “plowed and plowed/a carcass/ a lifetime.”⁶⁰⁷ In this poem, Noda, a writer of Japanese descent, does not shy away from the difficulties between people of color as well as exploring the crushing effects of exploitive work on her father.

Barbara Smith’s poem, “Theft,” dedicated to Angelina Weld Grimké, begins

The white women
are talking about
their poets.

For hours.

While claiming that
they do not have enough.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ *Lesbian Poetry*, 132.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

When she claims Grimké, one white woman shouts, “She’s not Black!” and Smith “tries to explain in seconds/about bloodlines,/Black and white halves of families/Rape.”⁶⁰⁹

Smith captures the challenges of inter-racial communication as well as the legacies of slavery and racism in the United States. Smith’s conclusion is that “we must save our best and/darkest selves for us.”⁶¹⁰ This conclusion gestures to Smith’s publishing with Kitchen Table Woman of Color Press, which focused on publishing women of color only. Within the poem, Smith advocates that women of color save their words and the commercial possibilities for their words for enterprises owned and operated by women of color.

Thus, far from suggesting that Bulkin and Larkin constructed a utopian world in *Lesbian Poetry*, I suggest only that they assembled a collection of poetry that consciously included lesbians of color, represented in larger numbers than in their prior anthology. Yet, through the poetry they included, Larkin and Bulkin gathered poems that expressed some of the struggles and thinking about race and racism in the lesbian community at that time.

Anthologies and Identity Formations

Through editing, publishing, and circulation, *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry* stabilized one meaning of the phrase “lesbian poetry” to be poetry by lesbians and reflecting and shaping lesbian identity. In the 1980s, lesbian-feminist publishing used anthologies in a new way, equally political and aesthetic: to elaborate intersectional identity formations, particularly racial-ethnic identity formations.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

Within journal publishing, special issues on particular topics are *de rigueur*. Anthologies played an important role in synthesizing the identity formation of lesbian and lesbian-feminist as I have discussed. In addition to examples discussed previously, other anthologies aided in the deployment of lesbian, including the 1969 special issue of *Motive* magazine and the fall 1977 special issue of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* titled “Lesbian Art and Artists.” This issue of *Heresies* was edited by a special collective and included a note above the editorial collective statement that said, “All contributors to the issue are lesbians.” The production and distribution of the issue highlights the significance of lesbian as a particular identity category within feminism.

In 1985, ten years after *Signs* began publishing, a special issue of *Signs* was published, titled simply “The Lesbian Issue.” The editors, Estelle B. Freedman, Barbara C. Gelpi, Susan L. Johnson, and Kathleen M. Weston, in their introduction reflect that the fifteen essays of the issue demonstrate “the more thorough development of lesbian studies in literature and history, disciplines that are overrepresented” in the issue of the journal. They positioned the issue as “a milestone in feminist scholarly recognition of the legitimacy of lesbian studies and its import to a full understanding of women in culture and society.”⁶¹¹ The issues of *Signs*, *Heresies* and *Motive* demonstrate the continuing power of special issues in the articulation of lesbian identities through nearly two decades of feminist publishing.

Special issues, published by lesbian-feminist journals during the 1980s, articulated and crystallized intersectional identity formations in lesbian-feminist communities. Special issues of lesbian-feminist journals ignited and extended particular

⁶¹¹ Freedman et al., *The Lesbian Issue*, 1.

dialogues about race and racial-ethnic formations within lesbian-feminism. Special issues function sometimes as an act by white editors responding to charges of racism. Barbara Smith names this dynamic: “The late 1970s and early 1980s was the era of the “special issue,” the response of some white feminist journals and periodicals to increasing numbers of women of color raising the issue of racism in the women’s movement.”⁶¹² While Smith’s statement critiques white journal publishers and bolsters her argument for the need for dedicated publishers for women of color, special issues modeled one effective action that white editors could take to address institutional racism. The effect of these special issues was generative both of new publishing activities and new political formations, strategies, and actions. Three examples of special issue publishing extended conversations about race within the WLM and opened new opportunities for lesbian-feminist publishing at commercial publishing houses.

Two lesbian couples, Rima Shore and Irena Klepfisz and Jan Clausen and Elly Bulkin, founded *Conditions* in 1976 as a “magazine of writing by women with an emphasis on writing by lesbians. They published the first issue of the annual magazine in 1977. A perfect-bound book of 150 pages, the first issue featured poetry, fiction, feature articles and an extensive selection of reviews. Issues of racism and the representation of women of color in lesbian journals concerned four members of the founding collective. They invited Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel to edit a special issue, *Conditions Five*, in 1980 that featured the work of African-American writers. Titled *The Black Women’s Issue*, *Conditions Five* was the best-selling issue of *Conditions*. It provided a foundation for *Home Girls*, the anthology Barbara Smith initially edited for Persephone and later

⁶¹² Barbara Smith, “A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 11-13.

published through Kitchen Table Press. Over 10,000 copies were printed and sold. *Conditions Five* articulated the intersections of Black and lesbian; readers reacted to *Conditions Five* with excitement and praise. The publication of *Conditions Five* also prompted the all-white editorial collective of *Conditions* to rethink how it worked and initiated a transformation of the editorial collective from a group of all-white founders to a multi-cultural collective. This collective guided *Conditions* through the next decade of publishing.

Sinister Wisdom published two special issues that extended conversations about feminist identity formations. Beth Brant, a Mohawk/First Nation writer, edited a 1983 issue featuring work by Native American lesbians. After the issue sold out, Firebrand Press republished this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* in 1988 as *A Gathering of Spirit*. In 1986, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz edited a special issue of *Sinister Wisdom* on Jewish lesbians.⁶¹³ This issue extended the work of Evelyn Torton Beck in *Nice Jewish Girls*, particularly including work by Israeli lesbians and dialogues between United States Jewish lesbians and Israeli lesbians. Kaye/Kantrowitz expanded this issue and published it as a book, *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, with Beacon Press in 1989. These publishing activities animated particular identity formations that were then extended, replicated, modified, and reimagined by women once they received the published product.

Thinking about anthologies as originating in lesbian-feminist periodicals and then traveling to small publishers and commercial publishers demonstrates how publishing articulated and amplified lesbian-feminist and feminist identities. These anthologies

⁶¹³ Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz was the editor of *Sinister Wisdom* when this issue published.

crystallized identity formations. Through publishing, women could replicate and reauthor identities through the continued circulation and rereading of books, sometimes for more than a decade. The publishing practices of these anthologies also offer different histories of the WLM; they crystallize not only identities but also frame debates and highlight issues of persistent concern.

Publishing continues to write histories of the WLM indirectly by reissuing foundational texts and publishing retrospective anniversary texts. Two recent examples of this are *Still Brave* and *This Bridge We Call Home*. *Still Brave* is an anniversary text of *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Published by The Feminist Press on the 30th Anniversary of *All the Women*, *Still Brave* assesses the impact of *All the Women*. *This Bridge We Call Home* is an anniversary edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*. Embedded within each of these texts is an origin story of each of the original books and a new narrative framing the significance of the book. Attention to these stories and the publishing activities behind them invites new considerations of the histories of the WLM.

Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time

While lesbian anthologies found commercial publishers, the first collection of lesbian poetry with a commercial publisher was not dedicated exclusively lesbian poetry, rather it reflected a new identity formation: gay and lesbian. St. Martin's Press published *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*, edited by Joan Larkin and Carl Morse, in 1988.

The identity formation of gay and lesbian is not new. There is a long history of literary collaborations between lesbians and gay men. The Gay Liberation Front included both lesbians and gay men. The 1970 issues of *Motive* focused on gay liberation were in

two parts – one by gay men and one by lesbians – and edited collaboratively. Karla Jay and Allen Young collaborated together on two books, *The Gay Report* (1979) and *Lavender Culture* (1978). Morse curated a co-gender reading series in New York beginning in the 1980s. Felice Picano published the anthology *A True Likeness: Lesbian and Gay Writing Today* in 1980 from his press, Sea Horse Press. *A True Likeness* collected fiction and poetry by lesbian and gay male writers. Negotiating gender divisions is an on-going task within lesbian and gay communities; writers and editors foreground different configurations of gender partnerships and collaborations at different historical moments. The lesbian-only publications that I have been examining thus far demonstrate one tendency in lesbian publishing. The anthology edited by Larkin and Morse is another tendency.

While co-gender publishing is a part of the history of lesbian print culture, the timing of the publication of this anthology is significant. By 1988, many of the small lesbian-feminist publishers had folded. Firebrand and Naiad Press continued to publish and have substantial sales, but many of the other small presses were out of business. Few lesbian-feminist printers were in business in 1988. Feminist bookstores continued to operate in over a hundred communities in the United States and were growing in number internationally, but increasingly feminist bookstores stocked titles for gay men and books and materials that were lesbian and gay. Identity categories were changing.

Two developments are important in the changing landscape of identity elaborations. First, in March 1987, a group of activists founded the direct action group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). The activism of ACT UP focused initially on the AIDS epidemic in the United States. Many lesbians were among the early

organizers involved in ACT UP, particularly lesbians with activist experience in the lesbian-feminist movement and the pro-choice movement. Ann Cvetkovich documents lesbian involvement in ACT UP in *An Archive of Feelings*⁶¹⁴ as does Deborah B. Gould in *Moving Politics*.⁶¹⁵ In addition to energizing a new type of direct action to draw attention to AIDS, ACT UP helped to synthesize a new identity formation of gay and lesbian.

Second, the glossy, national magazine *OUT/LOOK* debuted in the spring of 1988. *OUT/LOOK* billed itself as a “national lesbian & gay quarterly” and created a “national forum for discussion of lesbian and gay culture, politics, and opinion.”⁶¹⁶ The publishers of *OUT/LOOK* printed 9,000 copies of the first issue and 15,000 copies of the second issue in the summer of 1988. The 8 1/2 x 11” glossy magazine *OUT/LOOK* provided a print outlet for new conversations among gay and lesbian activists and intellectuals. Taken together, the work in ACT-UP and the advent of the new glossy publication *OUT/LOOK* signifies how the identity formation of gay and lesbian becomes central during the late 1980s.

Gay & Lesbian Poetry In Our Time contains the work of ninety-four poets. Of the included writers, forty-two (45.7%) are women. The forty-two lesbian writers included in *Gay & Lesbian Poetry In Our Time* represent a broad array of writers both established

⁶¹⁴ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁶¹⁵ Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotions and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988)

⁶¹⁶ *OUT/LOOK* (Summer 1988), 3.

and emerging in lesbian literature.⁶¹⁷ Of the forty-two lesbian writers, sixteen are women of color or thirty-seven percent (37.2%). The collection represents a broad diversity of lesbian poets. Some like Rich, Grahn, and Jordan were well known not only in lesbian communities but in broader literary communities. Others were well-known from lesbian print culture, like Dorothy Allison, Cheryl Clark, Jane Clausen, Irena Klepfisz, Pat Parker, and Kate Rushin. Susan Saxe was known among political lesbian-feminists as a political prisoner. Rukeyser's first appearance in a lesbian anthology is in *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*. The lesbian poets of *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* extend the conversation about lesbian poetry initiated by Bulkin and Larkin in *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry*. In this collection, however, the work of lesbians and gay men is commingled.

The introduction is a transcribed conversation between Carl Morse and Joan Larkin, performing exactly the kind of dialogue, between a gay man and a lesbian, that the book offers. In the introduction, Larkin and Morse trace the genealogy of lesbian and gay poetry, respectively, from the small press publications in lesbian print culture and gay male print culture. Larkin recalls the Women's Press Collective as the first all-women's press, while Morse recalls *Gay Sunshine* magazine and *ManRoot Magazine* and

⁶¹⁷ The forty-two lesbian writers in the collection are Dorothy Allison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jane Barnes, Ellen Marie Bissert, Beth Brant, Olga Broumas, Susan Cavin, Jane Chambers, Chrystos, Cheryl Clarke, Jan Clausen, Tatiana De La Tierra, Alexis De Veaux, C.M. Donald, Beatrix Gates, Jewelle Gomez, Melinda Goodman, Judy Grahn, Susan Griffin, Marilyn Hacker, Joy Harjo, June Jordan, Irena Klepfisz, Joan Larkin, Audre Lorde, Honor Moore, Cherríe Moraga, Robin Morgan, Eileen Myles, Suniti Namjoshi, Pat Parker, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, Kate Rushin, Susan Saxe, Vickie Sears, Anita Skeen, Linda Smukler, May Swenson, Kitty Tsui, Lisa Vice, and Heather Wishik.

ManRoot Press.⁶¹⁸ Larkin and Morse discuss the occasional tensions between lesbians and gay men and the points of common cause. Morse says, “The point is, although lesbians and gay men are not separate, we are distinct—and, often, we see things differently.”⁶¹⁹ Rather than an identity that is smushed together, gay/lesbian, this is an identity that is a handshake: gay and lesbian.

Published by a mainstream commercial publisher, *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* is the beginning of a period of greater commercial publication of lesbian and gay authors, not only in anthologies but individual novels and poetry collections. *Gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time* also signals the reformation of a new identity category: lesbian and gay as opposed to lesbian or lesbian-feminist.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined over a dozen anthologies to consider how anthologies produce identities within lesbian-feminist communities. Anthologies are a significant genre for lesbian-feminists. They enable a multiplicity of voices to represent lesbian, and they have the space and structure to enact a commitment to multicultural inclusion. Early anthologists like Jeannette Howard Foster and Barbara Grier did not publish anthologies but trained readers through their critical writing to recognize lesbian books and specifically lesbian poetry. Through their literary criticism, Grier and Foster helped to generate communities of readers. Beginning in 1969, with the publication of *Woman to Woman*, lesbian-feminists published small anthologies of lesbian writing.

⁶¹⁸ Joan Larkin and Carl Morse, Introduction, *Gay and Lesbian Poetry In Our Time* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), xviii.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

These anthologies continued to proliferate through lesbian-feminist communities with a variety of intentions.

The publication of *Amazon Poetry* and its expansion into *Lesbian Poetry* in 1981 crystallized lesbian poetry as a category of literary output for lesbian communities. In reflecting on *Amazon Poetry* in her essay *A Movement of Poets*, Jan Clausen wrote, it was “the largest collection of lesbian poetry then available, and the most comprehensive through the end of the decade.”⁶²⁰ *Lesbian Poetry*, similarly, was a significant and comprehensive collection of work. What enhances the meanings of these text, however, is not simply the poems inside them, though they each are interesting and worthy of individual consideration. Rather, by embedding these texts in the historical conditions of publishing, including an examination of what existed prior to their publication and what was imagined through and after their publication, we are more able to understand the significance of the collections in enabling specific lesbian identities and in creating and imagining specific lesbian histories.

Lesbian Poetry and *Amazon Poetry* constructed lesbian identity for a new generation of poets in intimate dialogue with previous generation of poets. They also were engaged in issues important to the feminist community about how to bring the voices of women of color and working class women more to the forefront for serious critical and intellectual engagement. Upon the publication of *Lesbian Poetry*, Larkin said in an interview, “It’s thrilling to be connected with this book and I think it is sort of a milestone, but in a way I regret that it’s standing so much by itself right now. I would like to see more of this work being done. A lot of people weren’t included for various

⁶²⁰ Jan Clausen, *A Movement of Poets* (Brooklyn: Long Haul Press, 1982), 17.

mechanical reasons, but I'd hate to have a gap of five years again before another anthology of lesbian poetry is published."⁶²¹ There was in fact another gap – and it was longer than five years. The next significant anthology of lesbian poetry was the co-gendered, *Gay & Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*, published in 1988. Today all of the anthologies of lesbian poetry are out of print and have been for many years.

By mapping these anthologies, I examined how anthologies defined what it meant to be a lesbian, as well as what meaning lesbian editors sought to make in producing and distributing poetry that interpellated lesbian. In the dedication to *Amazon Poetry*, Larkin and Bulkin wrote,

*We dedicate this book to women of every race,
of every class,
of every age;*

*We dedicate it to the 300 women from nearly forty states and four countries who
sent us their poetry;
to those who didn't sign their poems or asked us to publish them anonymously;
to those who have long been out as lesbians and as lesbian writers;
to those who found in this book the right place to come out publicly.*

*We dedicate it to the women who felt too frightened to send us their poetry;
to the silent women who have not yet begun to write;
to all of the women who find something of themselves in it.*

*We dedicate it to the women we love who make possible our lives and our words;
to our daughters—and to other women's daughters and sons—that they may grow
up to understand.*

This dedication captures the hopes and aspirations that Bulkin and Larkin had for *Amazon Poetry* and *Lesbian Poetry*. It also captures the spirit of lesbian print culture and the publication of numerous anthologies. Ultimately, these anthologies are part of a long history of literary expressions and multiracial and multicultural aspirations by women-

⁶²¹ Tilchen.

loving, perverse, sexually deviant, sex variant, homophobic, homosexual, and lesbian women. By attending to the words and the conditions that brought anthologies into being, we can begin to understand their lives more fully and what their lives mean for our lives today.

/Interlude 5/ Barbara Grier, Common Reader

Before she built the largest commercial space devoted to lesbian literature, before she was the most prodigious publisher of lesbian literature, before she was the most voluminous reviewer of lesbian literature, before she compiled definitive bibliographies of lesbian literature, Barbara Grier was a reader—a common reader. What made Grier’s common reading uncommon is what she did in addition to reading. Grier created an uncommon future for lesbian literature.

Barbara Grier was born in 1933, and, at the age of twelve, she came out to her mother. The knowledge of her sexual orientation and the availability of public libraries began her lifelong passion for lesbian literature. Grier’s project of reading and cataloguing books by lesbians and about lesbian experience was nurtured by her early friendship with Jeannette Howard Foster, but reading alone or in small communities of lesbians was not enough for Grier. She sought public platforms to share her joy of and discoveries in lesbian literature.

Grier found her first publishing home in the newsletter of the Daughters of Bilitis, *The Ladder*. By the early 1960s, Grier was a regular contributor to *The Ladder*, writing articles, under a variety of pseudonyms, and numerous book reviews, most often using the pseudonym Gene Damon. Writing for *The Ladder* enhanced Grier’s project as a reader and bibliographer of lesbian literature. In 1967, Grier self-published her first bibliography, *The Lesbian in Literature*, which gathered together Grier’s reading list of lesbians in literature with extensive annotations. Grier published two other editions of *The Lesbian in Literature*, one in 1975 and one in 1981.

Grier didn't limit herself to book reviewing or writing articles at *The Ladder*. In 1970, she became the editor of *The Ladder* with Rita LaPorte. The two had an ambitious vision of a national lesbian magazine in the spirit of *Newsweek*. Emboldened by the growing Women's Liberation Movement, they wanted to dramatically expand the readership of *The Ladder*. This dream was not realized; *The Ladder* folded in 1972, but Grier kept reading and exploring ways to publish lesbian literature.

Shortly after the end of *The Ladder* and during the period that Grier, her partner Donna McBride, with another couple, Anyda Marchant and Muriel Crawford, were hatching the idea of Naiad Press, Grier met Coletta Reid, one of the owners and operators of Diana Press. Grier pitched a series of anthologies from work published in *The Ladder*. Grier mailed Reid microfilm of the issues of *The Ladder* along with a letter outlining the anthologies. Reid responded enthusiastically. Together Reid and Grier edited *The Lesbians Home Journal*, a collection of short stories, *The Lavender Herring*, a collection of essays, and *Lesbian Lives*, biographical sketches. All were published by Diana Press in 1976. With substantial circulation within lesbian-feminist communities, these three anthologies ensured the continued circulation of lesbian writing from *The Ladder* and provided an important afterlife for this significant publication.

Naiad Press launched in 1974 with the publication of a novel by Sarah Aldridge, the pen name of Anyda Marchant, one of the co-founders of Naiad. Grier supplemented her bibliographies in *The Lesbian in Literature* with a collection of book reviews that she wrote as Gene Damon for the column *Lesbiana* in *The Ladder*. The book *Lesbiana*, a

collection of book reviews,⁶²² was the first title by Grier that Naiad Press published. Grier's work as a reader, bibliographer, and book reviewer influenced the Naiad Press. From 1973 until 2003, Naiad Book published over 550 titles. The types of books Naiad published reflect Grier's wide-ranging attentions as a reader. While best-known for romance, mystery, and adventure titles, Naiad also published or republished important literary books, including Renee Vivien's poetry, Gale Wilhelm's novels, work by Jane Rule and Patricia Highsmith, and important pieces of lesbian literary history like Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* and J. R. Roberts's *Black Lesbians: A Bibliography*. During its heyday, Naiad published twenty-five titles a year and had revenue approaching \$1 million. By any measure, Naiad was an incredible achievement and much of its success is due to Grier's hard work and readerly passion.

There are many ways to describe Barbara Grier: astute business woman, fierce advocate, relentless negotiator, devoted to lesbian rights, willful, determined, funny, generous, intractable, demanding. All of these descriptors are apt, but at the core of all these attributes, at the core of all of Grier's work, is the fact that she was a reader. Grier read voraciously. When she was not reading, Grier created new books to read. She published books and created a publishing company that altered the literary and cultural landscape for lesbians.

Judy Grahn liked to imagine what she could do with an ocean freighter; Barbara Grier knew what she could do with a warehouse. In February 1988, she built one on the property where she and McBride operated Naiad in Tallahassee, FL. Freight trucks delivered boxes of books from commercial printers to the warehouse early in the

⁶²² Barbara Grier, *Lesbiana: Book Reviews from The Ladder, 1966-1972* (Reno, NV: Naiad Press, 1976).

morning. In the afternoons and evenings, Grier, her long-time partner Donna McBride, and Naiad employees transported boxes to the post office, boxes that they had filled with orders during the day for bookstores and for individuals. Orders sent initially by mail or with a friendly telephone call to Naiad Press, whose phone line was in Grier's and McBride's home and advertised as open from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. Later, orders would come through the fax machine; Grier trumpeted the occasion of a dedicated fax line in one of her frequent "Dear Friends" letters. A warehouse. A freighter. Big dreams by iconic lesbians who changed lesbian print culture.

Chapter 5

Literary Appraisals

What You Wore

What will you wear? The question breeds delight when thinking about readings at feminist bookstores, demonstrations with lesbian activist groups, celebratory dinners with friends. Your closet, filled with clothes: festive, alluring, fierce, fanciful. Whatever you wear, when you are out among your people, feminists, lesbians, lesbian-feminists, social justice activists, is greeted with praise. They recognize, affirm, and celebrate you, your being, your essence, swaddled in clothing, comfortable and familiar.

What will you wear? Conveying ‘lesbian’ through garments requires careful choices about audience and occasion. How many times have you asked your lover, your friends, *Is this too dykey? Is this not dykey enough?* You want to convey poet, professional but also lesbian. What will make the mark? What will you wear to an evening event at the Guggenheim? Sponsored by the Academy of American Poets? Where the host for the evening is a woman who uses the appellation ‘Mrs.’ followed by her husband’s first and last name? What will you wear to an event where you will be honored? After being judged worthy, excellent, exceptional? What will be festive? Appropriate to the venue? Appropriate for the occasion? You want something that honors the award, but still expresses you as a person, you as an activist, you as someone entrenched in a community of activists, poets, and intellectuals who don’t spend evenings at the Guggenheim. You want something that conveys the gravitas of the evening, the gravitas of your work for which you won the award, but still reflects you—your being,

your essence, your place in the world. What will you wear? A gown? A suit? A dress? A skirt?

You select Batik. Cotton fiber waxed then hand-dyed. Light purple. Mint green. Here a line, there a curly-cue. Wax prevents the dye from penetrating, leaving raw cotton exposed, revealing a fanciful design. A smock shirt and pants. Separates. The top, long sleeves, mint green, a lavender-purple bib. Darker pink piping details the design. The pants, mint green. Pockets sewn in the side. Not deep, but enough for your hands to touch your thighs. You imagine the women who made this frock. Picking, cleaning, spinning, weaving cotton. Waxing, dying cloth. Pattern makers and seamstresses. Each thread, every square inch, the work of women. Yes, that is appropriate, the best way to dress for the event. Separates. Batik. Made more elegant with button earrings, a striking necklace. Flat, comfortable shoes. What will you wear? You wear batik.⁶²³

Introduction

I have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of these three cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began.

-Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933: 6.

If only we all had the certainty of Alice B. Toklas as voiced by Gertrude Stein; Toklas, or Stein, knew genius “on sight” when something within her rang; she was never mistaken. Most of us don’t have such personal or literary discernment. We rely on, or at least are influenced by, others. Literary institutions are one facet of the field of influence.

⁶²³ The outfit that Minnie Bruce Pratt wore to the Lamont Award celebration is in her archive at Duke University. Box 127, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Literary institutions accrue and assert power to shape what we read and how we make judgments about what we read. Literary institutions, like many complex systems, are slow to adopt changes from the social and political environment; they also are invested, consciously or unconsciously, in maintaining the status quo to ensure the continuity of their own power. This chapter explores power in literary institutions. In particular, I examine the interventions of lesbian-feminists into institutional systems of literary appraisal during the 1970s and 1980s. The interventions of lesbian-feminists demonstrate their keen engagement in literary appraisals. Lesbian-feminists advocated inclusion of lesbians and feminists and envisioned systemic transformations of literary appraisals to serve lesbian-feminist writers.

First, two key terms. Literary reception is how formally authorized communities, such as critics, scholars, fellowship and award committees, critically assess creative work. These formally authorized communities include institutions like the Modern Languages Association (MLA), the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), the Pulitzer Prize Foundation, the Lambda Literary Foundation, and the National Book Association (NBA). Authorized communities also include governmental organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a variety of state-based arts organization, and more informal networks such as national, state, and local poetry laureates. Some of these communities are predominately heterosexual, some are mixed lesbian and heterosexual, and some are predominately lesbian and/or LGBT. They all make literary judgments about what books are worth reading and what books should be singled out for special recognition. They also explicitly and implicitly promote the writings and careers of individual authors. Over time, literary reception accretes to

become literary appraisals. During the twenty years of my concern, lesbian-feminists intervened in these literary judgments in numerous ways with a variety of intentions and outcomes.

I distinguish between literary appraisals and aesthetic appraisals, although the two are co-constitutive. For my purposes, literary appraisals are judgments made by formal institutions. Literary appraisals focus on particular texts and particular moments in time. For instance, on behalf of institutions, people (for example, individuals, panels of judges, and committees) select prize-winning books among a particular cohort of books published. The cohort of books may be defined by date of publication, geographic location of the author, content, or a combination of these factors. These literary appraisals are often time-bound and periodically repetitive—often they happen on an annual basis. The production of these appraisals by an individual or committee is generally black-boxed; that is, the input and output are known, in this instance the books nominated, the list of finalists, and the winner, but the process of arriving at the decision is opaque. The selection of judges as well as the judges' reviews, considerations, deliberations, votes, and process of arriving at the decision are not made available to outsiders. Aesthetic appraisals, on the other hand, are made by individual critics, although often these individuals have institutional imprimaturs. For example, literary critic Helen Vendler has the institutional imprimatur of Harvard University; anthologies, an important site for canon-making which plays a central role in aesthetic appraisals, bear the institutional stamp of publishers, such as W. W. Norton, Oxford University Press, or Broadview. Aesthetic appraisals invoke standards of excellence as their mode of judgment, focusing, in particular, on judgments of beauty, transcendence, and sublimity. In making aesthetic

appraisals, critics judge works worthy to be a lasting part of literature. The intention of aesthetic appraisals is to shape the future reception of a particular text; aesthetic appraisals focus less on the current moment, although contemporary standards and opinions obviously influenced these judgments deeply, and more on perpetuity. Like literary appraisals, aesthetic appraisals are also produced within a black-box, in this instance, usually the mind of an individual, but often through an undisclosed committee process. Together literary appraisals and aesthetic appraisals adhere; together, they participate in processes of canonization and narrations of literary history.

As noted previously, Paul Lauter makes a distinction between formalist, or speculative, criticism and “canonical” criticism.⁶²⁴ Lauter describes formalist criticism as “offering unique forms of knowledge or experience, interpreted by specially-sensitized individuals;”⁶²⁵ it is “indebted to Continental philosophy,” “deeply concerned with questions of epistemology” and conducted primarily in “graduate institutions” in the United States and Europe.⁶²⁶ For Lauter, this critical practice separates literary works from people’s lives.⁶²⁷ Canonical criticism, on the other hand, “emphasizes the impact of literary works on how we conduct our lives, how we live within, extend or restrict, and develop the communities that give our lives meaning.”⁶²⁸ For Lauter, canonical criticism

⁶²⁴ Paul Lauter, “The Two Criticisms—or, Structure, Lingo, and Power in the Discourse of Academic Humanists” in *Canons and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 133-153.

⁶²⁵ Lauter, “The Two Criticisms,” 135.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

focuses on the construction of literature courses and anthologies, “the roots of our systems of valuation,” and on what is important for students to read and learn.⁶²⁹

“Canonical” criticism maps roughly to the fifth facet of the parallelepiped as I have outlined it: literary appraisals. Formalist, or speculative, criticism, maps roughly to the sixth facet of the parallelepiped: aesthetic appraisals.

Since the beginning of the WLM, feminist literary critics and scholars have grappled with literary appraisals, or canonical criticism, and aesthetic appraisals, or speculative criticism. In 1985, Elaine Showalter outlined two historical tendencies in feminist literary scholarship: “exposing the misogyny of literary practice” and the recovery of writing by women.⁶³⁰ These two strategies of literary scholarship intervened in both speculative and canonical criticism; they transformed literary scholarship, and the discipline of literature more broadly, to include women. These two strands converged in the mid-1980s with the contested question of a ‘female aesthetic.’ Female aesthetics were initially mapped to lesbian consciousness and imbricated with lesbian separatism; later questions about female aesthetics were contested in broader discussions about essentialism and social constructionism. In this chapter and the next, my questions about aesthetic appraisals in relationship to lesbian-feminism acknowledge this history, but I am concerned more with the canonical criticism Lauter discusses. Alicia Ostriker models how to think about the stakes of both literary and aesthetic appraisals simultaneously in *Stealing the Language*. Ostriker writes as a speculative critic but grounds her analysis deeply within questions of canonization and materialism.

⁶²⁹ Lauter, 134.

⁶³⁰ Elaine Showalter, “Introduction,” *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory*, (New York, Pantheon, 1985), 6.

My concerns are strongly materialist, aligned with Lauter's analysis and practice of canonical criticism and Ostriker's hybrid analysis. Like the material, the aesthetic is a vital node of inquiry and examination for lesbian poets. Conversations about the aesthetic aspects of poetry and the aesthetics of lesbianism are evident in both personal correspondence between and among lesbian-feminist poets and within the pages of lesbian literary and political journals. Certainly, the concern with aesthetics is shaped at least in part by the pervasiveness of speculative criticism in academia, where many of the poets and writers I examine trained and taught. Although it is possible to dismiss speculative criticism and aesthetics as objects constructed and reconstructed at different historical moments for the purpose of policing boundaries, I am reticent to dismiss them completely. Rather, I am interested in exploring how lesbian-feminists addressed both speculative and canonical literary criticism in activism and in print culture. My intention for this exploration is two-fold. First, I want to understand the co-constitutive relationship of the speculative and canonical forms of criticism, or the literary and aesthetic as I think of them. Second, I think about how lesbian-feminist work can be apprehensible in both modes of critical praxis. Ultimately, speculative criticism, or aesthetic appraisals, and canonical criticism, or literary appraisals, are both about power—the power to write, the power to publish, the power to have work read by contemporary readers and by readers of the future.

This chapter examines four moments of lesbian-feminist encounters with power, in particular the power of literary institutions. Thinking about these encounters, these questions are especially important: how are lesbian-feminist texts made visible to literary institutions? How are lesbian-feminist texts received by literary institutions? How do

lesbians feel about the reception of lesbian-feminist texts by literary institutions? What history of engagement with literary institutions shapes the literary landscape for lesbians and feminists today? First, consider the 1974 National Book Awards: four women poets were finalists for the 1974 NBA in poetry; three organized to make a statement about the nature of literary reception and national awards. Second, Stanley Kunitz awarded the 1978 Yale Younger Poets award to Olga Broumas; the announcement of the award in light of two earlier awards to lesbian poets, Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich, argues for how Kunitz mapped a new form of literary appraisal for lesbian poets. Third, feminist and lesbian-feminist advocacy in relationship to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is crucial to facilitating greater recognition of women writers and poets. Finally, the story of Minnie Bruce Pratt's winning the Lamont Poetry Prize in 1989 signals new modes of literary appraisals. All of these stories animate the engagement of lesbian-feminists with systems of literary appraisal. Lesbian-feminists involved with print culture were not only producing materials to be read by friends and others in their cohort; they also were invested in producing literary works that would be recognized and appraised as significant in the current moment and by history. In the conclusion, I reflect on the success of lesbian-feminists' work in the 1970s and 1980s in light of the status of lesbian-feminist poets today. One of the legacies of lesbian-feminist engagements in literary appraisals is making lesbian visible as a citizen-subject in the United States. This apprehensibility of lesbian in relationship to United States citizenship sets the stage for political engagements in the 1990s and beyond in issues like military service and same-sex marriage. If I am sanguine about the literary appraisals of lesbians in the

contemporary milieu, I am dour about aesthetic appraisals, a question I discuss in the final chapter.

“A Realm Beyond Ranking and Comparing” The National Book Awards 1974

On Thursday, April 18, 1974 at 6 p.m., a crowd gathered at Alice Tully Hall inside Lincoln Center in New York City for the twenty-fifth annual National Book Awards (NBA). Like many award ceremonies, the NBA feature a program followed by a gala reception. In 1974, NBA were given in ten categories, including poetry; the award winner in each category received \$1,000. Award nominees, publishers, agents, members of the National Book Committee, and other publishing insiders gathered in Alice Tully Hall on this Thursday night in April. The National Book Committee, a non-profit organization, administers the awards through an Awards Policy Committee; outside independent readers determine the award recipients.⁶³¹ The NBA are prestigious among publishers for recognizing outstanding books annually. Newspapers generally report the winners of the NBA in the following morning’s edition, but the NBA are an event for publishing insiders. Readers become aware of the NBA primarily through books, which, after winning or being a finalist, have a seal emblazoned on the cover noting the distinction. In spite of the large numbers of writers and readers in the United States, the NBA have never taken on the profile of the Oscars, the Emmys, or even the MTV Video Music Awards. Book prizes in the United States don’t attract throngs of gawkers; they are festive events for insiders—commercial publishers and selected writers.

⁶³¹ Of the eleven members of the Awards Policy Committee in 1974, three (27%) were women: Martha Duffy, Nancy Wilson Ross, and Kate Wilson. Martha Duffy was a writer for *Time Magazine* and had just been promoted to senior editor in 1974; Nancy Wilson Ross was a novelist.

For the 1974 National Book Award in poetry, the three judges, David Kalstone, Phillip Levine, and Jean Valentine, named eleven books of poetry, published in 1973, as finalists. Seven of the books were by male poets; four were by female poets.⁶³² Allen Ginsberg, Hayden Carruth, Evan S. Connell, Jr., Peter Everwine, Richard Hugo, Donald Justice, and Charles Wright were the seven nominated male poets. The four nominated books by women were *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* by Adrienne Rich, *From a Land Where Other People Live* by Audre Lorde, *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems* by Alice Walker and *Armed Love* by Eleanor Lerman. Rich, Lorde, and Walker were all well-known in feminist literary circles; Lerman, at the age of twenty-one, was a relative newcomer. Arriving at the event that evening, Rich, Lorde, and Walker had a pact. If any one of the three won, they would deliver a pre-written statement on behalf of all of them.

The finalists for the NBA were announced on Monday, March 18, 1974 in the *New York Times*. At the time of the announcement, the *New York Times* had reviewed only two of the four NBA finalist books by women: Lerman's *Armed Love* and Rich's *Diving into the Wreck*. Although the *New York Times* is not the only location of book reviews, it was and continues to be a site of literary appraisal with broad influence, not only in literary communities but also among reading publics. Considering what was reviewed in the *Times* and how it was reviewed in the *Times* provides one window into literary appraisals. The *Times* reviews for these two books by Rich and Lerman provide insight into how *Times* critics appraised lesbian poets.

⁶³² Four finalists of eleven, or thirty-six percent (36%), is not a bad ratio. In fact, for the NBA, that ratio persists. From 2000 through 2009, of the winners of the NBA in poetry, three were women (30%), and of the forty finalists, fourteen were women (35%).

X. J. Kennedy reviewed Lerman's book with two other books by male poets on February 17, 1974, a month before the awards were announced. Kennedy opens his assessment of Lerman's book with this statement, "If volumes of poetry carried letter-ratings the way movies do, then 'Armed Love' would deserve at least a double X." Aligning Lerman's poetry with pornography, Kennedy describes the poems as "glimpses of life in a drug-torn Lesbian ghetto" and asserts that most often "the raw facts just remain on their page like meat left in its butcher's paper, untouched by deep understanding or by art." Kennedy's choice of simile to describe Lerman's work must be seen through the lens of gender. By describing her poems with their lesbian content as raw meat on a butcher's block, Kennedy metaphorically aligns women with objects for (male) consumption. Although Kennedy alludes to an artistic process for writing poetry in which the raw material of life experience is transformed into art, his simile brings to mind, not Rukeyser's visions in *The Life of Poetry* which affirm women's engagement, but rather Carolee Schneemann's performance art *Meat Joy* (1964), which explores the corporeality of women's bodies in relationship to raw meat as a source of varied emotions from revulsion and pleasure. Schneemann demonstrates the artistic possibilities of raw meat, even as she critiques as a feminist equations of women's bodies with meat. Kennedy leaves no room for Lerman's work to have similar agency.⁶³³ The review concludes with an obligatory reference to Sylvia Plath; she is, for Kennedy, the only female poet with the "skill and intelligence" to meaningfully "relate her private agonies

⁶³³ Recently, Lady Gaga performed a contemporary interpretation of the trope of analogizing women's body with meat when she appeared at the MTV Video Music Awards on Sunday, September 12, 2010 in a dress made of raw meat.

to those of a larger world.”⁶³⁴ The trope of comparing women poets to Plath is recurrent in the *New York Times*. Being rated “double X” earned Lerman a great deal of notoriety in poetry circles, but Kennedy’s appraisal of *Armed Love* dismisses her work as raw, unartful, and pornographic.

Among reviewers for the *Times*, Kennedy was not alone in ignoring how poetry was making connections between women writers and readers based on personal experience and how poetry was circulating in the WLM. On August 25, 1973, Harvey Shapiro reviewed Erica Jong’s *Half Lives* and Rich’s *Diving into the Wreck*. Shapiro was a long-time reviewer for the *New York Times*; he became the editor of the *Times Book Review* in 1975. On one hand, Shapiro’s review offers some praise and a rigorous analysis of the work of both poets. On the other hand, it fails to take seriously the political and social meaning of feminism. For instance, Shapiro describes Jong’s work as “quick, easy, raunchy (the pose is sometimes that of a female rake).”⁶³⁵ He then asks, “does she manipulate her audience?” Shapiro’s question begs another: which audience? An audience of feminists hungry for words to express their lives? An audience of women in danger of being manipulated by lesbians and rakish straight women? An audience reading the *New York Times Book Review* that might be duped into reading these poems? All of these questions are unanswered. At the conclusion of his review, Shapiro asserts that “men don’t fare too well in these poems,” invokes Emily Dickinson with the line, “Emily Dickinson, you’ve come a long way” (blessedly removing the “Baby” at the end

⁶³⁴ X. J. Kennedy, “Lovers of Greece, Women and Tennessee,” *New York Times* (February 17, 1975), 346. Reading reviews of women poets in the *New York Times* might lead one to believe that the only poet worthy of comparison was Sylvia Plath.

⁶³⁵ Shapiro’s word choice, rake, modified by female, demonstrates how profoundly gender and sexuality were contested in this historical moment.

of that well-trodden phrase), and identifies the “inevitable recall of Sylvia Plath” in Jong’s work. Then, he turns to Rich.

Although Shapiro praises Rich for her “gravity and honesty” as well as her “subtle rhetoric,” he ultimately asserts that the problem with the collection is that “the rhetoric was developed to handle the personal, the private, and the wider connections the poet wishes to assert are mainly just asserted.” This comment demonstrates Shapiro’s derision of feminism in Rich’s work; many of the connections that she makes are with women. Shapiro’s minimization of her work as “asserted” and not earned is a rhetorical strategy to dismiss feminism. He argues, “the poet is unwilling (because of her wider concerns) to draw her characters plainly and we are frequently left with an indefinite “you” and a poem that is close to clarity but not brought to clarity.” Shapiro concludes his review of Rich by describing her as “insisting on anger” and says that while he finds “exhilaration” in her commitment to unearthing new modes of being, he ultimately finds the poems “off-putting, self-congratulatory” and “patronizing.”⁶³⁶ Overall, rather than seeing the content and craft of Rich’s and Jong’s work as dynamic innovations in contemporary poetry, Shapiro invokes traditional modes of appraisal and diminishes some of the very aspects of the work—anger, accessibility, and rhetorical power—that distinguish it for contemporaneous readers.

The type of comparative reading that Shapiro does of Rich and Jong is a standard book review technique, but it is one that Rich disliked. Clausen recounts in her memoir that Bulkin wrote a review “that acknowledge[d] her (Bulkin’s) preference for Rich’s

⁶³⁶ Harvey Shapiro, “Two Sisters in Poetry,” *New York Times* (August 25, 1973): 21.

subtle language over Morgan's rhetoric."⁶³⁷ According to Clausen, Rich objected, saying, "Our criticism mustn't reproduce the competitive atmosphere of the male poetry scene." This *New York Times* review is an excellent example of the atmosphere Rich alludes to in her conversation with Bulkin.⁶³⁸ Readers must have objected to Shapiro's review as well, because Rich's book was reviewed again in the *Times* four months later by Margaret Atwood. Atwood's review followed an emerging feminist convention to appraise work on its own merits; Atwood concludes her review, "It is not enough to state the truth; it must be imaged, imagined, and when Rich does this she is irresistible."⁶³⁹ Atwood counters Shapiro by saying that Rich not only states the truth but renders it imaginatively and irresistibly. Atwood's review can be read as a corrective to Shapiro's review; its presence on the pages of the *New York Times* demonstrates how feminists demanded that readers—even in patriarchal contexts—read their work differently.

Although neither Walker's nor Rich's books were reviewed by the *Times* before being named finalists for the NBA, Walker reviewed two books for the *Times*, June Jordan's *Fannie Lou Hamer* and Rosa Guy's *The Friends* (a young adult title). Through these reviews, her name and the nominated book were mentioned in the *Times*; her presence on the pages of the *Times* marked her as significant in the literary field for

⁶³⁷ Clausen, *Apples and Oranges*, 2.

⁶³⁸ Susan Stanford Friedman's recent article "Why Not Compare?" (*PMLA* 126.3 (2012), 753-762) summarizes the reasons for not comparing, which center "on the ways in which comparison presumes a normative standard of measure by which the other is known and often judged," (753) elucidates a number of important reasons for comparisons, and offers models for comparative readings. Like Rich's chiding against comparison, Friedman's manifesto for comparison is grounded in contemporary needs and desires for feminist literary criticism.

⁶³⁹ Margaret Atwood, "Diving Into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972," *New York Times* (December 30, 1973).

Times readers. At the end of September 1974, after Lorde's book was a finalist for the NBA, Helen Vendler wrote a long review of books published by Dudley Randall through Broadside Press. Vendler's review considers work by Don Lee (Haki R. Madhubuti), Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, and Audre Lorde. Vendler notes that "Lorde's poems, like others in the Broadside series, depend less on ambiguity or irony than on the force of earnestness and plain speech." Vendler appraises the work in a way that doesn't minimize lyricism or craft but rather understands the craft as central to the political work of the poems. She notes that the poets "distrust a concealing rhetoric," which I understand to mean language that is too refined, too crafted, too likely to obscure the underlying, powerful emotions. Vendler writes that the poets of Broadside "practice instead only the mute rhetoric of contiguity." For these poets, like feminist poets, "The convergence of causes to the final effect is rhetoric enough." Stating the ideas within the poem is powerful enough and justifies a rhetoric that is, in Vendler's words, "muted." Vendler's review, unlike Shapiro's or Kennedy's, explores the work on its own terms, creating greater space for acceptance by readers of the *Times*.⁶⁴⁰

Returning to the award ceremony in April 1974, the NBA for poetry was the penultimate award given that evening. There were two winners in the poetry category: Allen Ginsberg and Adrienne Rich. Both of the poets delivered political acceptance speeches. Peter Orlovsky, Ginsberg's lover, delivered Ginsberg's speech. I imagine his

⁶⁴⁰ I note that while I appreciate Vendler's treatment of the Broadside Press authors in 1974, as a critic today Vendler's work is troubling from the perspective of race and gender. Vendler's recent review of Rita Dove's anthology, *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (New York: Penguin, 2011) in *The New York Review of Books* (Helen Vendler, "Are These the Poems to Remember?," *The New York Review of Books*, November 24, 2011) positions her as a less sympathetic reader. Dove's response, "Defending an Anthology" (*The New York Review of Books*, December 22, 2011) demonstrates some of the contemporary, contested terrain of canonization.

voice ringing through the hall when he described Ginsberg's book as a "time capsule of personal national consciousness during American war-decay recorded 1965 to 1971." Ginsberg, voiced by Orlovsky, took the occasion of the NBA to "call out the Fact: our military has practiced subversion of popular will abroad and can do so here if challenged." He cited Chile, Greece, Persia and Indochina as places where the US has "imposed military tyranny." Ginsberg, through Orlovsky, concluded with the assertion: "we have all contributed to this debacle with our aggression and self-righteousness, including myself," and "there is no longer any hope for the Salvation of America . . . all we have to work from now is the vast empty quiet space of our own Consciousness. AH! AH! AH!"⁶⁴¹ Sounding his barbaric yawp through Alice Tully Hall, Orlovsky voicing Ginsberg indicted United States militarism and imperialism.

Like Ginsberg, Rich's speech was also political. Rather than indicting militarism and imperialism, Rich, speaking on behalf of her compatriots and herself, voiced opposition to patriarchy. Although Walker did not attend the ceremony, Lorde did; she joined Rich on stage.⁶⁴² Rich read the collective statement. I include it here in its entirety:

The statement I am going to read was prepared by three of the women nominated for the National Book Award for poetry, with the agreement that it would be read by whichever of us, if any, was chosen. We, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker, together accept this award in the name of all the women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world, and in the name of those who, like us, have been tolerated as token women in this culture, often at great cost and in great pain. We believe that we can enrich ourselves more in supporting and giving to each other than by competing against each other; and that poetry— if it is poetry— exists in a realm beyond ranking and comparison. We symbolically join together here in refusing the terms of patriarchal competition and declaring that we will share this prize

⁶⁴¹ http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_aginsberg74.html.

⁶⁴² Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 133.

among us, to be used as best we can for women. We appreciate the good faith of the judges for this award, but none of us could accept this money for herself, nor could she let go unquestioned the terms on which poets are given or denied honor and livelihood in this world, especially when they are women. We dedicate this occasion to the struggle for self-determination of all women, of every color, identification, or derived class: the poet, the housewife, the lesbian, the mathematician, the mother, the dishwasher, the pregnant teenager, the teacher, the grandmother, the prostitute, the philosopher, the waitress, the women who will understand what we are doing here and those who will not understand yet; the silent women whose voice have been denied us, the articulate women who have given us strength to do our work.

In my imagination, Rich, a slight woman, a careful speaker, delivered the speech with a muted passion. I wonder, was she nervous? Did her voice crack? Did her hands sweat? Her knees shake? In my mind, the final words of the collective statement are met with silence—a silence filled with emotion: shock, awe, reverence, embarrassment, discomfort, pity, joy, glee. I suspect, though, that there wasn't silence. Rather rustling sounds from a large audience—shoes scraping the floor, chairs squeaking, the hack of a cough, the gasp of a dry throat being cleared. Then, tentative applause, growing more certain, more final. I imagine Rich and Lorde smiling as they left the stage together, pleased with the moment to speak truth to power, to critique as feminists a literary system that was shaping their lives and that they believed they would alter through their actions.

Organizing together to make a statement is a classic feminist intervention. The statement—and the organizing behind it—enacts feminist solidarity. It was an extraordinarily courageous act to organize the speech and to deliver it. A number of things are striking about the statement, beyond the feminist solidarity that Walker, Rich, and Lorde share by writing and delivering it at the ceremony. First, the statement sets up a series of binaries: women who are unheard/women who are heard but as tokens, supporting each other/competing with each other, women who understand/those who do

not yet, silent women/articulate women. The deployment of such a series of binaries strikes readers today as anachronistic, given the prevalence of deconstructionism, but in context it is deeply meaningful. Binaries are a powerful rhetorical construction. They define oppositional subjectivity; they enable organizing and mobilizing. While today we may understand the binaries as a sign of a naïve and earnest feminism later supplanted by more theoretical and nuanced apparatus, the binaries in the statement are neither. They signal an intervention: political mobilization. Lorde, Walker, and Rich highlight the challenges that women writers face to an audience who, individually and collectively, all contributed to the exclusions and mistreatments of women writers and who all had the power to make change.

The people in Alice Tully Hall that night did not include the women invoked in the statement: mathematicians, dishwashers, pregnant teenagers, waitresses. These women, however, were an audience for these three poets; they were women to whom they wanted—and did—speak with their work. Through the statement, Walker, Lorde, and Rich mobilize a readership for poetry that reaches beyond the gathered literati to their imagined readership, “all women, of every color, identification, or derived class.” This is the universal sisterhood of feminism in the early 1970s. Although both contemporaneous feminists and later feminists, in subsequent appraisals of the WLM, intensively critique the idea of a universal sisterhood, it is a rhetorical gesture with meaning in the early 1970s, and for these three poets in 1974. The idea of universal sisterhood in this statement is not devoid of meaning, nor is it one generated exclusively by white feminists. The statement, although delivered by Rich, was written collaboratively by the three, two African-American writers and a half-Jewish writer of European descent. The

statement and the action represent an interracial and interethnic collaboration of lesbian-feminists in support of a vision for feminist change. Like the binaries, as contemporary readers, we may find the allusion to universal sisterhood quaint, even dated, but universal sisterhood was an idea deployed in multiple contexts and, like binaries, it situates the authors' intent: to constitute and speak to women as a class.

The final significant element of this statement is the vision for poetry that the three articulate. The vision is both materialist and aesthetic. The three challenge the "terms on which poets are given or denied honor and livelihood in this world, especially when they are women." The authors make explicit how imbricated poets' economic livelihoods are with literary reception and literary appraisals. They affirm that they "can enrich ourselves more in supporting and giving to each other than by competing against each other." This statement is an early articulation of ideas that would be crucial to both Lorde and Rich in their later writing. Ultimately, the three want poetry to exist in a "realm beyond ranking and comparing." One way to interpret this realm is as an aesthetic realm. In this way, through the statement, the three poets indicate a rupture between the literary and the aesthetic where the literary is a site of ranking and comparing and the aesthetic is transcendent. Although I think that interpretation is congruent with how some critics think about the aesthetic in relationship to the literary, I do not think that was the intention of Walker, Lorde, and Rich. I think their imagined realm was one in which the individual and the communal commingled in a participatory and consensual fashion, through a process imagined by lesbian-feminists as central to creating a feminist revolution.

In many ways, this statement resists the entire premise of literary appraisals. To dwell on literary appraisals or aesthetic appraisals is to validate the patriarchal structures and give them new meaning and authority. Lorde, Walker, and Rich want to refuse “the terms of patriarchal competition” and share the prize together. They reject ranking organizations like the NBA. They envision a world in which value is not ascribed through competition, but rather through “self-determination.” It is a vision that expresses this particular moment in feminism, during which everything was examined, critiqued, and subject to recreation in a more egalitarian way. It is a vision that I embrace as a utopian ideal, even as the pragmatist in me seeks models for lesbian-feminist inclusion in patriarchal contexts.

There is an interesting backstory to the NBA statement. Rich approached Eleanor Lerman, the other woman nominee, to join them in the statement. Lerman says that she and Rich “had a big fight” because she “wouldn’t go along with them.”⁶⁴³ Lerman thought that “if we were going to make a statement it should be about the fact that poets can’t support themselves with their work and that writers, in general (except for the big, famous ones) had a hard time supporting themselves as writers.”⁶⁴⁴ Lerman’s vision for a political intervention, as she recollects is, is not about feminist analysis but rather about economic analysis. Lerman describes this as a “disconnect between the older, educated women and the younger ones like myself who had (in my case, for instance) barely made it through high school and really were living a kind of hippie lifestyle. I was working in a harpsichord kit factory, doing wonderful but manual labor and I thought that a bunch

⁶⁴³ Personal email communication with Eleanor Lerman, May 2011.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

of—in my mind—effete, snobbish, academic women had no business telling me about how hard it was to be a writer.”⁶⁴⁵ Lerman continues, “I thought those women were being intellectual bullies—they were older, smarter, better educated and supposedly, more politically informed than me—so they thought they could more or less issue orders about what I should do. I don’t know where I got the courage, but I was a stubborn kid. I had been living on my own since 18 and thought I knew just as much as they did about what it took to survive.”⁶⁴⁶ In her reflections, Lerman aligns the feminism of Lorde, Walker, and Rich with privileges from age and education.

Lerman’s minority report is significant for a number of reasons. It demonstrates that sisterhood as a concept, even at the height of its deployment in the WLM, is a fractured one, unable to contain the multiplicity of women’s lived experiences. Lerman believed that, if there was a statement to be made, it should be about the economic conditions of writers’ lives—regardless of gender. While Lorde, Walker, and Rich articulated gender as the primary lens of analysis in this particular moment, Lerman’s concerns were about class. By declining to join the other three women poets, Lerman resisted the primacy of gender to describe her material conditions, asserting instead the primacy of class. Lerman’s refusal to join Walker, Lorde, and Rich in the statement also demonstrates how generational fractures occur within feminism. Remembering earlier generational conflicts helps to contextualize later moments of generational conflict, including our own. Generational conflicts are not exceptional but rather a part of the fabric of our collective

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

lives. Lerman's refusal to join with the others in the statement and her reflections today on her refusal show that feminism was a contested space then, as it continues to be today.

W. W. Norton, Rich's publisher, issued the statement delivered at the awards ceremony as a press release the next day. The full statement was published in *off our backs*.⁶⁴⁷ Lesbian-feminists involved in poetry writing and publishing discussed the action with admiration and appreciation. Beth Hodges included the statement in the special issue of *Margins* that she edited on Lesbian-Feminist Publishing.⁶⁴⁸ Whether or not it was an effective intervention is difficult to assess. The statement demonstrates the significance of literary appraisals, even as it rejects participating in the system of literary appraisals. Lorde's nomination, in particular, had important material consequences for her literary career. The nomination was enough for Dudley Randall to order a second printing of *From a Land Where Other People Live* and emblazon the cover with 'Finalist for the NBA.' Moreover, Randall quickly signed a contract with Lorde for her next book, *New York Head Shop and Museum*.⁶⁴⁹ In 1976, her NBA finalist status contributed to Lorde's securing Charlotte Sheedy, a new feminist literary agent, as her agent. Although the relationship between Lorde and Sheedy was conflictual, Sheedy helped to further Lorde's literary career.⁶⁵⁰

In the official history of the NBA, Rich is recorded as a co-winner of the NBA in Poetry for 1974 with Ginsberg. Her statement, crafted with Lorde and Walker, is in the

⁶⁴⁷ *off our backs* 4, no. 7 (June 30, 1974): 20.

⁶⁴⁸ *Margins* 23, edited by Beth Hodges (August 1975): 23.

⁶⁴⁹ De Veaux, *Warrior Poet*, 141.

⁶⁵⁰ De Veaux, *Warrior Poet*, 157.

official NBA record.⁶⁵¹ Yet, Lorde, Rich, and Walker's hope for poetry to exist in a realm beyond ranking and comparison is not realized. Ranking and comparison continue today. The vision and practice of solidarity that Walker, Rich, and Lorde demonstrate through the statement is replicated in future feminist actions, as the three themselves replicated it from past actions. A more complex and nuanced understanding of the material conditions of women's lives replaces ideas like "universal sisterhood" and the binaries that the three invoked. Their gesture of donating money is repeated. The dream of women whose voices have gone and still go unheard is, still, a dream deferred. The action of Walker, Rich, and Lorde demonstrates solidarity and protest as important interventions and captures the spirit of feminism in 1974; however, when considered in tandem with the Ginsberg statement, their action also reflects a broader political milieu. Dissent was the tenor of the time; poetry the vehicle for its expression.

"Her subject is sexual love between women": Olga Broumas wins the Yale Younger Poets Prize, 1977

For his valedictory selection as the judge of the Yale Younger Poets Prize, Stanley Kunitz selected Olga Broumas's manuscript *Beginning with O* as the winner of the 1976 prize. Yale University Press published *Beginning with O* in 1977. *Beginning with O* expresses joy and exuberance in lesbian bodies and lesbian love-making; as a selection of poetry for a university press in 1977, it is stunning in its explicit lesbian eroticism. The content of *Beginning with O* alone makes it an interesting case to consider for lesbian-feminist encounters with power and literary institutions. In addition to the content of the collection, two other elements of this moment are crucial to thinking about lesbian-

⁶⁵¹ National Book Foundation website, http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_arich_74.html.

feminist encounters with power. First, the publication and circulation of *Beginning with O* validates the power of lesbian-feminism not only as an engine for generating poetry but also as a communications circuit for distributing poetry. Second, Kunitz's appraisal of Broumas's book in his introduction (itself a literary appraisal) offers a radical model that diverges from accepted literary truisms for aesthetic appraisals of lesbian-feminist work.

Broumas's selection was not Kunitz's first recognition of the merits of a poet who expressed feminism or lesbianism. Kunitz selected Carolyn Forché's book *Gathering the Tribes* in 1975 for the Yale Series of Younger Poets; Yale University Press published it in 1976. In his introduction, Kunitz singles out Forché's poem "Kalaloch" for its "faultlessly controlled erotic narrative" and its "boldness and innocence and tender, sensuous delight." Kunitz declares, not having read Broumas's manuscript, "It may very well prove to be the outstanding Sapphic poem of an era."⁶⁵² Kunitz quotes the concluding section of the poem to complete his introduction to the volume:

Flies crawled us,
Jacynthe crawled.
With her palms she
spread my calves, she
moved my heels from each other.
A woman's mouth is
not different, sand moved
wild beneath me, her long
hair wiped my legs, with women
there is sucking, the water
slops our bodies. We come
clean, our clits beat like
twins to the loons rising up.

We are awake.
Snails sprinkle our gulps.
Fish die in our grips, there is
sand in the anus of dancing.

⁶⁵² Foreword to *Gathering the Tribes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), xiv.

Tatoosh Island
hardens in the distance.
We see its empty stones
sticking out of the sea again.
Jacynthe holds tinder
under fire to cook the night's wood.

*If we had men I would make
milk in me simply. She is
quiet. I like that you
cover your teeth.*

In these stanzas, Forché crafts a world of only women where the natural world with flies, loons, and snails is intertwined with lesbian sexual desire and the consummation of lesbian sexuality. For a brief moment in the final stanza, a speaker acknowledges the role of heterosexual reproduction in the creation of milk from women's bodies; this observation causes the beloved other to become silent. Then, ignoring the intrusion of heterosexuality, the beloved returns the reader to a world of only women through a small affirmation of the beloved, "I like that you/cover your teeth." The presence of Forché and Broumas as winners of the Yale Younger Poets Prize with their poems that explicitly celebrate lesbian sexuality demonstrates how lesbian-feminist poetry entered discussions about American poetry broadly by the mid-1970s. This entry was not without controversy, however, but I will return to that.

Let me begin with some background on the Yale Younger Poets Prize. Yale University Press began its poetry publishing series in 1919. Between 1919 and 1932, Yale University Press published a series of books by younger poets. In 1933, Yale University Press instituted a first book prize for a poet under thirty (later under forty) under the editorship of Stephen Vincent Benét. Benét wanted the series to be a "coveted honor"; the series grew to fulfill Benét's wishes during subsequent decades. With

distinguished editors Archibald MacLeish, W. H. Auden, Dudley Fitts, Stanley Kunitz, Richard Hugo, James Merrill, and James Dickey, the Yale Series of Younger Poets grew to represent “the greater part of the varieties of verse practiced by American poets in the twentieth century.”⁶⁵³ While I don’t mean to single out the Yale Series as exemplary (certainly there are many other prizes for poets and publishers of note), the award to Olga Broumas in 1977 and the reputation of the series as a literary institution for poets leads me to consider not only the occasion of Broumas’s winning the prize, but also the broader question of when and where lesbian poets enter systems of literary appraisal.

Between 1919 and 1932, prior to the book prize, Yale University Press published thirty-one books of poetry. Of these, eleven (35%) were by women. In the fifty-seven years where one volume of poetry was published as a prize winner, from 1933 until 1989, for the purposes of my study, thirty-three women won the prize, or fifty-seven percent (57%).⁶⁵⁴ In total, of the 110 books published in the Yale Series, fifty-two are by women or forty-seven percent (47%). In short, the publication history of Yale University Press approaches gender parity. I recount these numbers even though gender is only one measure of diversity in poetry series; other measures include race, ethnicity, geography, aesthetic traditions and many others. Still, gender parity is an important strategy for

⁶⁵³ George Bradley, “Introduction,” *The Yale Younger Poets Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), ci.

⁶⁵⁴ In the twenty-two years since 1989, eight of the winners have been women (36%): Christiane Jacox Kyle, Jody Gladding, Valerie Wohlfeld, Ellen Hinsey, Talvikki Ansel, Jessica Fisher, Arda Collins, and Katherine Lawson.

feminists in relationship to literary appraisals.⁶⁵⁵ I recount these numbers as one way to think about how women are represented in poetry as a field of publication.

Two other women, who later became iconic lesbian-feminist poets, won the Yale Younger Poets Prize at different times and under different editorships: Muriel Rukeyser and Adrienne Rich. In 1935, the third year of Benét's editorship, Benét selected Muriel Rukeyser's collection *Theory of Flight* for the prize. Rukeyser had been second in Benét's mind for the 1934 award, which went to James Agee. In his introduction, Benét praised Rukeyser as having "remarkable power" for a poet who was only twenty-one years old. The poems of *Theory of Flight*, while deeply political, are not explicitly feminist or lesbian. In fact, for much of her career, Rukeyser was not open about being a lesbian.⁶⁵⁶ It was only after her death that she came to be regarded as a leading contributor to a lesbian-feminist poetic tradition.

Like Rukeyser, Rich was also twenty-one when she won the Yale Younger Poets Prize. Also like Rukeyser, Rich was not a lesbian at the time of winning, and her poems were not explicitly feminist or lesbian. Auden selected Rich's first collection *A Change of World* for the prize in 1951. According to Bradley, Auden's introductions as a whole "give a short course in poetry."⁶⁵⁷ In his introduction to Rich's book, Auden analogizes

⁶⁵⁵ Recently, the organization VIDA has released an annual count that examines women and publishing in a variety of venues; see www.vidaweb.org. Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young used this methodology in their recent influential article "Numbers Trouble" (Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, "Numbers Trouble," *Chicago Review* 53:2/3 (Autumn 2007): 88-111).

⁶⁵⁶ Rukeyser's relationship with May Sarton is documented in Margot Peters's *May Sarton: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). Rukeyser was scheduled to read as a part of a panel of lesbian poets at the 1979 MLA Conference, but she became ill, couldn't attend, and died a few months later.

⁶⁵⁷ Bradley, "Introduction," lix.

reading a poem to encountering a person. He asserts, “We would rather that our friends were handsome than plain, intelligent than stupid, but in the last analysis it is on account of their character as persons that we accept or reject them.” For Auden, this maps to poetry in which “truthfulness is an absolute essential, good manners of enormous importance.” Auden then concludes his introduction with brief words about Rich. He says that she “displays a modesty not so common at that age” and that her poems are “neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs.”⁶⁵⁸

Since neither Rukeyser nor Rich were open as lesbians when they won the prize, their winning does not suggest openness to work by lesbians, but it does demonstrate how different editors respond to political work in selecting the prize winner. Benét remarked in particular on Rukeyser’s politics in his citation for the award and praised her for her progressive political convictions. Auden on the other hand emphasized formality, austerity, and craft over political engagement. Auden’s comments on Rich’s poetry in his introduction represent not only his editorial aesthetic, but also a formalist manner of reading poetry, pervasive in the early 1950s, just as Benét’s remarks reflect not only his editorial aesthetic but also a way of reading from the mid-1930s that embraced the social and cultural. The history of the Yale Prize demonstrates how openness to politics in poetry changes over time. Benét’s stewardship, like Kunitz’s stewardship, valued the political meanings that poetry makes.

For both of these poets, the early designation as prize winners accompany them throughout their career. Walter Clemons quotes Auden’s words in a 1975 *Times* review

⁶⁵⁸ Alicia Ostriker’s account of the praise of modesty for women poets is useful to contextualize Auden’s comments. See *Stealing the Language*, 3.

of Rich's *Poems: Selected and New, 1950-1974*; Clemons notes continuity between Auden's praise and Rich as a "plain-speaker" who is "neither a maenad, an ecstatic, nor a flirt, the roles easiest available to women poets."⁶⁵⁹ Clemons's strategy in this review is to praise Rich for her exceptionality: she is not like other woman poets. He iterates aesthetic principles for Rich's poems. The continued reception of Rich as plain-spoken and the repetition of Auden's assignation of her as modest demonstrates how early reception shapes reception throughout one's career. As I have demonstrated, reception, both literary and aesthetic, is shaped in part by the social and cultural habitus. This fact supports the importance of advocacy for the positive reception of lesbian-feminist work.

Although the work of Rich and Rukeyser is framed differently by the judges of Yale Younger Poets Prize because of the different historical moments, for both poets, the selection of their work by the Yale Younger Poets Prize judge helped to build their careers. Both Rich and Rukeyser used the cultural and political capital they accrued from the prize and their subsequent successes on behalf of a range of political causes to be outspoken advocates for feminism and to further the keen political engagements of poets and poetry. Rich and Rukeyser both use their influence to benefit others. These actions illuminate their own ethical commitments, but also demonstrate how cultural capital accrues through systems of literary appraisals. Systems of literary appraisal do not dictate how cultural capital is used; that is an individual decision. I unpack some of the meanings of the Yale Poetry Prize in relationship to Rich and Rukeyser as a way to understand the

⁶⁵⁹ Walter Clemons, "Adrienne Rich: a retrospective," *The New York Times* (April 27, 1975), ProQuest Historical Newspapers New York Times (1851-2006) w/ Index (1851-1993): 288. I refrain from commenting on Clemon's descriptions of women poets.

contingencies of editorial decisions and to demonstrate the significance of prizes in the longer arc of literary history.

When *Beginning with O* was published, it was controversial at Yale. Bradley reports, “there were people on campus who considered the book the worst ever published in the series,” and the sentiment heightened “particularly after her reading at the press.”⁶⁶⁰ Although some at the university may have objected to Broumas’s poems, readers embraced them. *Beginning with O* sold over 18,000 copies. The only other book that sold more was Michael Casey’s poems about Viet Nam in *Obscenities*, the 1971 winner of the Yale Younger Poetry Prize. The strong sales of the book are not a result only of the power of Yale University Press or the patina of Broumas’s being a prize winner, but rather the increasingly organized community of lesbian-feminist readers. Newspapers like *off our backs*, periodicals like *The Advocate*, and the new journal *Christopher Street* all covered *Beginning with O* as a prize-winning book. The growing network of feminist bookstores delivered an audience to Broumas and to the Yale Poets Prize. In some ways the power of lesbianism and lesbian-feminism in relationship to poetry is not only the creation of poetry, as Moore and Reed suggest, but the creation of an audience to receive the poetry.

This audience received, in addition to the thirty-one poems in *Beginning with O*, an introduction by Kunitz. In the introduction, Kunitz artfully navigates gender conflicts associated with feminism and situates Broumas’s work as a lesbian-feminist poet as worthy of literary and aesthetic recognition. Kunitz does this in three ways. First, Kunitz addresses his own subjectivity as a man in encountering these poems. He writes, “As a

⁶⁶⁰ Bradley, “Introduction,” xxxvii.

mere male, I am conditioned to resist much that Broumas has to say about the gender of oppression and its opposite number, personified by the image of the stone Aphrodite.”⁶⁶¹

I hear humor in Kunitz’s dependent clause “as a mere male,” particularly in light of the Greek goddess imagery in Broumas’s poetry.⁶⁶² By directly addressing his gender, Kunitz acknowledges that in some ways he should be an oppositional reader of Broumas’s work, but he still finds it “impressive” and pleasurable.

Second, at every turn, Kunitz unites both the explicit lesbian content of Broumas’s work with language that solidly positions Broumas’s work as aesthetically worthy of consideration. Kunitz opens his introduction, “This is a book of letting go, of wild avowals, unabashed eroticism; at the same time it is a work of integral imagination, steeped in the light of Greek myth that is part of the poet’s heritage and imbued with an intuitive sense of dramatic conflicts and resolutions, high style, and musical form.”⁶⁶³ Note how Kunitz uses the connector phrase “at the same time” as opposed to suggesting that her work is powerful in spite of its eroticism. Moreover, the final clause enumerates the aesthetic work of the poetry—dramatic, stylized, and musical. In a later statement, Kunitz writes, “This is not idle feminist palaver. Her book is as much a political

⁶⁶¹ Stanley Kunitz, Foreword to *Beginning with O* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), xii.

⁶⁶² I want to acknowledge that I read Kunitz’s introduction as generous and significant, but at the time of publication it was met with skepticism by Ellen Frye. Frye reviewed *Beginning with O* for *off our backs* and noted that the “prestigious award assures her a position among contemporary poets” but that there are “dangers inherent in that position.” Frye ascribes titters to Kunitz in the introduction and suggests that he was titillated by her lesbianism. I don’t hear them.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, ix.

document as it is an impassioned lyric outburst.”⁶⁶⁴ Given the overall tone and engagement of Kunitz with Broumas’s work, I take the meaning of palaver in the first sentence to mean discussion and not to be dismissive or minimizing. The final sentence here unites the political work that Broumas’s poems do with the aesthetic as “an impassioned lyric outburst.” Kunitz consciously or unconsciously situates Broumas’s work in a space that straddles successfully both the political and the lyrical, the feminist and the aesthetic. It is a rare and important moment for a male writer at a university press.

Third, in addition to situating Broumas’s work individually, Kunitz examines the use of aesthetics in relationship to poetry by feminists and lesbians. Kunitz writes, “Now and then I detect a note of stridency in her voice, a hint of doctrinal overkill.”⁶⁶⁵ The words stridency and doctrinal are used regularly by critics to attack the political work of lesbians and feminists in poetry, but rather than a blanket dismissal Kunitz subtly acknowledges this tendency and ascribes to Broumas only “notes” and “hints.” Kunitz continues with what is almost a standard rebuke to lesbian-feminist poets, “I am tempted to remind her of Yeats’s dictum that we make out of our quarrel with others, rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”⁶⁶⁶ Kunitz references Yeats’s dictum, as others do, but he makes an extraordinary move that radically alters the reception of Broumas. In the next sentence he asks, “But is the Yeatsian dialectic universally applicable? In these poems the cause is the flame.”⁶⁶⁷ While many feminists and lesbian-feminists questioned

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., x.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., xii.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., xii-xiii.

the dialectics of patriarchal culture which separate the personal from the political, such questioning was not the norm for non-feminist critics. Kunitz is exceptional. In the selection of this volume of poetry and in his introduction, Kunitz questions this dialect between poetry and politics and invites readers to reconsider it. Perhaps, as Kunitz suggests, the appraisal of poetry as transcendent when it is a “quarrel with ourselves” is not universally applicable. Kunitz continues, “On the other side of the anger is an irresistible élan, an exultation—even an ecstasy—of the senses.”⁶⁶⁸ Kunitz guides readers to understand the political elements of Broumas’s poetry as central to the aesthetic appreciation of her work.

Winning the Yale Younger Poets Prize is an important moment of literary appraisal for Broumas and for lesbian-feminist poetry more broadly. For Broumas, the prize brought more attention to her work, not only the prestige but also the sales of the book. In 1979, Broumas received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) individual artist grant and in 1981 she received a Guggenheim fellowship. Since her first book, Broumas has published six additional books of poetry and three books of English translations of poems by Odysseas Elytis. Two of Broumas’s subsequent books of poetry are collaborative projects, *Black Holes*, *Black Stockings* with Jane Miller and *Sappho’s Gymnasium* with T. Begley. These books as well as her translations demonstrate an important and continuing aesthetic innovation in lesbian-feminist poetry: collaborative writing. For lesbian-feminist poetry, the prize, and more particularly Kunitz’s introduction and its intervention in literary and aesthetic reception, provided an alternative mode of critical reception from an authorized location.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., xiii.

Contesting and Promoting ‘Artistic Excellence’

Ellen Marie Bissert, the publisher and editor of *13th Moon*, was a fierce advocate for the inclusion of women in a variety of institutions of literary power. She publicly highlighted sexist exclusion at the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM), a New York-based non-profit that supports literary magazines through technical assistance and grant making. She also spear-headed feminist advocacy, targeting the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).⁶⁶⁹

Bissert had a strong analysis of the economic forces shaping the small press movement, most particularly from her vantage point as a publisher of a periodical. Bissert and co-editor, Kathleen Chodor, founded *13th Moon* as a student publication at City College of New York in 1973.⁶⁷⁰ In the first issue, about 90% of the work came from students in the creative writing program at CCNY, though the inaugural issue also contained work from Adrienne Rich and Eve Merriam. The printing of this issue was funded by a \$500 grant from the student government at CCNY. Bissert funded the second issue of the journal with a small research grant she secured. From 1973 through 1981, *13th Moon* grew from a staple-bound, student journal produced at The Print Center to a perfect-bound, glossy journal with a national readership. By the late 1970s, *13th Moon* had nearly 700 subscribers and printed 1,500 copies of each issue.⁶⁷¹ *13th Moon*

⁶⁶⁹ CCLM and the NEA have a close relationship; shortly after the creation of the NEA, magazine editors founded CCLM as a regranteeing organization for the NEA.

⁶⁷⁰ Chodor departs as editor of *13th Moon* beginning with the second issue and Bissert remained the sole editor until the end of her editorship in 1981.

⁶⁷¹ Folder CCLM Editors’ Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

published a wide array of feminist work, including poems by June Jordan, Marge Piercy, Mary Ellen Solt, Cynthia MacDonald, Marilyn Hacker and others.⁶⁷² The growth of the journal happened through the hard work of Bissert and a small cadre of women, including June Rook, Bissert's lover from 1976 until 1979, and Judith Stivelband, who was responsible for the scrupulous copyediting of the journal. Dissatisfied with the quality of labor and production, Bissert and Rook learned paste up, design, and how to produce the mechanicals for the journal. In addition, they also undertook an ambitious direct mail campaign to promote sales and build subscriptions. In 1975, when *13th Moon* incorporated as a nonprofit and could mail at reduced rates, Bissert sent out 14,737 flyers announcing their newly published double issue. The labor for this mailing was substantial, "considering the fact that most of the lists we used were neither in zip-code order nor on pressure-sensitive labels."⁶⁷³ Three years later, in early 1978, *13th Moon* mailed over 27,000 flyers to a variety of lesbian and feminist mailing lists soliciting subscriptions. These labor-intensive direct mail campaigns enabled substantial subscription growth for *13th Moon*. Grant-seeking, however, securing money from public institutions, was the biggest financial support for the journal.

⁶⁷² *13th Moon* and Bissert have a vexed relationship with the word feminist. The masthead for *13th Moon* evolves during Bissert's publishing. In the first issue, the journal asserts that it is "a literary magazine publishing work by women"; later this is amended to say "publishing work by women—whoever we choose to be." In the late 1970s, the editorial statement is amended to include the word feminist; Bissert wrote, "*13th Moon* is feminist in the general sense of being concerned exclusively with the work and viewpoint of women. Although the staff recognizes the interdependence of politics and culture, *13th Moon* places primary emphasis on the writings of women rather than on political issues."

⁶⁷³ Folder CCLM Editors' Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

During the 1970s, the CCLM offered a variety of support services to small publishers, including direct grants of support to journals and a variety of fellowships and awards.⁶⁷⁴ Bissert organized feminists to confront the CCLM about sexist exclusion of women journal editors on two occasions: the Fels grant in 1975 and then the CCLM Editor's fellowships in 1979. The Fels grants were a program supported by the Philadelphia-based Fels Foundation; it recognized excellence in literary publishing with a cash prize to both the editor and the writer. In 1975, Bissert, joined by Louise Simons of *Painted Bride Quarterly* and Anne Pride of *Know, Inc.*, "protested the all white male make-up of the Fels Awards panel which awards its prestigious prizes to mostly white male editors and authors."⁶⁷⁵ Bissert sent out fifty-three letters to feminist editors and CCLM members urging them to vote as a block to elect two feminists, Romaine Murphy of *Gravida* and Polly Joan of *Women Writing*, to the grant committee. In addition, she issued an open letter about organizing a women's caucus to make CCLM and the NEA "more responsive to our needs as editors, publishers, and writers."⁶⁷⁶ This flurry of letter writing articulated a need for the organizations to be responsive to feminist concerns and for women to organize as a constituency to change the organization. In 1976, CCLM awarded *13th Moon* a Fels grant for publishing work by conceptual artist Amelia

⁶⁷⁴ The work of CCLM continues today, though now the organization is called the Council for Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP). Under the leadership of Jeffrey Lependorf, the non-profit organization continues to be a vital source of technical assistance for small magazines and publishers as well as an advocate for small magazines and publishes in government and in the marketplace

⁶⁷⁵ Folder CCLM - Fels Award, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Etlinger. Etlinger and *13th Moon* both received a cash prize in conjunction with this award. Organizing and advocacy on behalf of women editors worked, but the results did not last.

In 1979, the CCLM announced a new program: CCLM Editor's fellowships. Editor's fellowships came with a \$5,000 grant. Members of the literary community nominated editors to CCLM for the award. Adrienne Rich nominated Bissert and Mab Segrest, editor of *Feminary*, for the award. In 1979, the inaugural year of the prize, among the ten winners, not one was a woman. Bissert was one of three honorable mentions. Bissert rejected the distinction in a public letter to Maureen Owen, the only woman on the CCLM board of directors. Bissert deplored "the sexism inherent in the panelists' decisions."⁶⁷⁷ Several feminist publications reprinted Bissert's letter while "the male small press gave it scant coverage." As a result of Bissert's objections, CCLM released the application statistics: 225 people were nominated, forty of whom were women, fifteen, non-white men. Of the 124 people who completed the applications, twenty-three were women and eleven were non-white men. There were thirty-three semifinalists, five women and four non-white men.

These numbers shocked and outraged not only Bissert but other feminists. Adrienne Rich wrote to Maureen Owen, "I am appalled by the blatant sexism evidenced in the Council's decision to fund ten male editors."⁶⁷⁸ The attention that Bissert brought to the grant process resulted in a special meeting of the CCLM board to "discuss the

⁶⁷⁷ Folder CCLM Editors' Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

⁶⁷⁸ Rich letter to Maureen Owen, August 7, 1979, Folder CCLM Editors' Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*, The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

controversy” and the awards.⁶⁷⁹ The next year, the CCLM Editor’s fellowships went to five women and five men; one of the winners of the \$5,000 award in 1980 was the editorial collective of *Conditions*.⁶⁸⁰ Maureen Owen acknowledged the importance of Bissert’s protests, saying it “strengthened my position on the board at CCLM & the position of women editors & writers in general. She who shouts, get heard!”⁶⁸¹

Bissert spear-headed similar advocacy efforts on behalf of women targeting the NEA. In October 1976, speaking on a panel on “Women’s Problems in Publishing” at the Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSMEP)/East Conference, Bissert said, “Grant committees are dominated by the very male editorial sensibilities from which we and our contributors have fled.” This conference led Bissert, Louise Simons of *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and Mary MacArthur, editor of *Gallimaufry*, to organize a letter writing campaign to “get more women on the Literature Panel of the NEA.” At the beginning of their campaign in the late spring of 1977, there were four women on the twenty-three member panel responsible for awarding grants to literary magazines. Formerly, there were only two. Bissert, Simons, and MacArthur queried a group of women writers to make suggestions for feminist panelists; then they directly solicited the recommended women to submit their credentials to the NEA for consideration. The three approached a wide range of women to self-identify as interested in serving on a NEA panel, including Tillie Olsen, Elaine Gill, Audre Lorde, Bertha

⁶⁷⁹ Letter from Bissert, 28 June 1980, Folder CCLM Editors’ Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*, The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

⁶⁸⁰ CCLM Press Release, Folder CCLM Editors’ Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

⁶⁸¹ Letter from Maureen Owen, Folder CCLM Editors’ Grant 1980, Box 6, *13th Moon Records*. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division.

Harris, June Arnold, Louise Bernikow, Ann Tyler, Lucille Clifton, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, Alix Kates Shulman, Rita Mae Brown, and Robin Morgan.

Discussions about the credentials and qualifications for service on the NEA panel reveal some of the challenges feminists faced in changing the NEA. The challenges highlight institutional sexism. It was difficult to find feminist writers with a high enough profile to be accepted by the NEA and with time to dedicate to the project. Alix Kates Shulman remarked to Bissert “that there weren’t all that many women with lots of prestige around.”⁶⁸² Certainly, while we may recognize the women from the Bissert list now as women with formidable stature, for many of them, their careers were just beginning in 1977. In addition, Bissert confided to MacArthur, “My perception of the ones that have it [prestige] is that they do because they have managed to assert their right to do their own work and not others.”⁶⁸³ This insight highlights the need for writers to devote time to their own work. While Bissert’s advocacy work is important, it is also time consuming and takes time and energy away from creative work. Bissert continued, “I really envy this quality in them that asserts their work as first priority. I must admit that as *13th Moon* grows I find it increasingly difficult to get myself to do creative work. There is a part of me that feels what I do is housework—this *13th Moon* work.”⁶⁸⁴ This tension between different forms of work in both literary communities and feminist communities is crucial; it demonstrates how closely connected material conditions,

⁶⁸² Bissert letter to Mary MacArthur July 7, 1977, Box 6, Folder Mary MacArthur, *13th Moon* Records. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscript Division.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

particularly time and money, are to the production of creative work—and the bind many women writers find themselves in.

In spite of the difficulties of identifying prestigious panelists with enough time to serve, Bissert, Simons, and MacArthur suggested to Leonard Randolph, the Literature Program Director in 1977, a number of feminists for appointment to the panel, including Louise Bernikow, Elaine Gill, editor at The Crossing Press, Tillie Olsen, and Frances Whyatt. In addition, they circulated a fact sheet and instructions on how to submit as a potential panelist to over two dozen feminist writers. In August 1977, three more women were appointed to the panel: Muriel Rukeyser, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Frances McCullough. In a letter to MacArthur and Simons, Bissert noted that although initially she was “thrilled with the news” in looking at it closely it is a very small victory: women now were 17.39% of the panel, not “really a significant improvement percentage-wise.”⁶⁸⁵ The letter continues with Bissert’s commitment to continue to write letters complaining about the situation and to secure additional resumes from feminist women to be submitted for the NEA grants panel.

In 1979, Audre Lorde was appointed to the NEA panel, in what many saw as a huge victory for feminists and for third world writers, who were also advocating for greater inclusion in the NEA.⁶⁸⁶ Bissert’s engagement with advocacy for the inclusion of women on these panels was in many ways relentless. She greeted successes initially with

⁶⁸⁵ Bissert letter to Mary MacArthur July 7, 1977, Box 6, Folder Mary MacArthur, *13th Moon* Records. The New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscript Division.

⁶⁸⁶ See Alexis DeVeaux’s discussion of the National Association of Third World Writers (NATTW) in *Warrior Poet*, 264-6.

cheers, but then dove deeper into the data and, distressed by the continued inequality, redoubled her efforts.

Public grants from organizations like the CCLM and federal grants from the NEA were vital to the growth and diversity of literary periodicals during the 1960s and 1970s. Another program, CETA, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which began in 1973 and continued through 1982, provided support to small publishers. *13th Moon* received two CETA grants. One was for a researcher to produce a bibliography of American Women Poets born before 1830; the second supported the production of a series of poetry readings. Although the CETA-funded workers could not work directly on the magazine, their labor contributed overall to the magazine. Feminist publishers in the 1970s relied on public support for literary projects, whether through arts funding or economic development programs. The loss of this public support in the 1980s during the Reagan administration is one of the reasons that lesbian and feminist print culture waned.

Even though public support was crucial for *13th Moon* to continue publishing, Bissert was critical of the entire grant funding system for publishers. She viewed reliance on grant support as a form of “welfare” administered by different literary bodies, particularly the CCLM and the NEA, two organizations she was most closely involved with. Bissert recognized both the value of grant funding and the limits of this funding. While Bissert’s critique focuses on how the CCLM and the NEA administer grant funding, in particular the power relationships between magazine editors and funders, it foreshadows future debates to limit public support of the arts. In spite of these critiques, inaction was never part of Bissert’s repertoire. Her analysis of funding, coupled with her political analysis of small presses, led to her advocacy campaigns to ensure the presence

of more women on the NEA panels and more women grant recipients. In 1982, Bissert resigned as editor of *13th Moon*; she went to work in the financial services industry in New York. Bissert left with a great deal of bitterness and anger about feminism and small press publishing. Today the landscape is quite different; although Bissert may not know it, the story of the inclusion of women in the NEA Literature Program is more positive.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and its advisory board, the National Council on the Arts, was established by Congress in May 1966. An initiative in President Johnson's plan to build a 'great society,' the NEA is a national agency charged with supporting the arts as a vibrant part of American culture. At the suggestion of four members of the National Council on the Arts—Ralph Ellison, Paul Engle, Harper Lee, and John Steinbeck—the NEA established a fellowship program for artists in 1966. The first year, a committee of the NEA selected fellows, including artists from a variety of disciplines. In 1967, the NEA formally began giving grants to individual writers. The NEA appointed Carolyn Kizer as the first NEA Literature Director to oversee the program in 1968.⁶⁸⁷ Throughout the forty-five year program, grant-making evolved based on both budgetary constraints and political controversies.⁶⁸⁸ Today, it is, in the words of the NEA, “a competitive fellowship program based on artistic merit.”⁶⁸⁹

Since 1985, the NEA has awarded annually individual grants of \$20,000 to approximately fifty writers a year. A panel of independent judges determines the winners

⁶⁸⁷ Since 1968, there have been nine NEA Literature Directors; two of whom were women (NEA Literature Fellowships, 9).

⁶⁸⁸ For a fuller discussions of NEA controversies, see in particular Miranda Joseph's work in *Against the Romance of Community*.

⁶⁸⁹ NEA Literature Fellowships: 40 years of Supporting American Writers, (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts Office of Communications, March 2006), 6.

each year. The NEA notes that the “Literature Fellowship is arguably the most egalitarian grant program in its field. The \$20,000 fellowships for general writing-related costs are highly competitive, but unlike most other literary awards, they are selected through an anonymous process in which the sole criterion for review is artistic excellence.” The NEA further states that the diversity of writers is possible through a different panel of judges each year. The judging process is “double blind,” that is, judges do not know the author of the manuscripts reviewed and the names of the judges are confidential until after the process is complete. The NEA hails its judging process as open and inclusive, with a “fundamental emphasis. . . on artistic excellence.”⁶⁹⁰

Chairman of the NEA, Dana Gioia, recognizes the importance of these fellowships, which bring “significant attention” to the winners, often resulting in “publication opportunities, critical reviews, job offers, academic tenure, and especially added self-confidence.”⁶⁹¹ The NEA boasts that “The Endowment has had an outstanding track record of finding and supporting talent” and then notes that “forty-six of the seventy recipients of the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and Fiction since 1990 were previous NEA Fellows.”⁶⁹² Clearly, it is an award that matters; it is a literary appraisal that makes a difference to writers in both their careers and their material conditions.

To celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Literature Program, the NEA released a report detailing the 2,756 writers and translators who had been funded by the NEA

⁶⁹⁰ NEA Literature Fellowships, 4.

⁶⁹¹ NEA Literature Fellowships, 1. I note that the final item in the list seems incongruent with earlier items.

⁶⁹² NEA Literature Fellowships, 4.

between 1966 and 2005. Of the fellowship winners, 2,572 were individual writers; the balance of the awards were translation grants.⁶⁹³ Of the 2,756 writers who received individual awards between 1966 and 2005, 939 of them were women, or 36.5%.⁶⁹⁴

Within the report, diversity of grant recipients is a central message. For the NEA, diversity includes “geography, ethnicity, gender, age, aesthetics, and life experience.”⁶⁹⁵ In the narrative about the history of the Literature Fellowships, wherever individual artists are named, there is, within each list, a conscious enumeration of diversity. For instance, in 1967, twenty-three grants were awarded; the report lists them as given to “such writers as William Gaddis, Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, May Sarton, Richard Yates, and Isaac Bashevis Singer.”⁶⁹⁶ Three white women and three white men.⁶⁹⁷ Later, describing the time in 1995, when Congress threatened to cut funding for the NEA, “representatives from literary organizations. . . brought writers to Capitol Hill to meet

⁶⁹³ For the purposes of my analysis, I consider the fellowships awarded to individual writers to support their creative work, not translation grants.

⁶⁹⁴ I calculated this number by analyzing the names of individuals from the “NEA Literature Fellowships: 40 Years of Supporting American Writers” report. I reviewed each name to determine the gender of the recipient, looking up names that appeared to me gender-neutral. I expect there is some error in this calculation given the source of the data and the method. I queried the NEA and received an electronic file of the award winners from 1984 through the present, but the NEA does not have an electronic file of all of the award winners. The NEA does not capture demographic data, other than city and state, for award winners. I did not analyze the racial-ethnic backgrounds or the sexual orientation of individual grant recipients. This would be an interesting, though time-consuming, analysis.

⁶⁹⁵ NEA Literature Fellowships, 4.

⁶⁹⁶ NEA Literature Fellowships, 5.

⁶⁹⁷ I recognize that I am flattening the diversity mandate of the NEA to only race and gender here to serve my analysis. Others may wish to examine facets such as geography, age, ethnicity, and aesthetics. Such analysis may lead to different conclusions.

with Congressmen [sic], writers such as E. L. Doctorow, Wendy Wasserstein, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Walter Mosley.” Two men, two women, one person of color. Within the report, the NEA profiles thirty-three past winners of the NEA Fellowship with a brief description of their careers and a quotation about what the fellowship meant to them. Of these thirty-three profiles, sixteen (48.5%) of them are women and twelve (36.4%) are people of color. I enumerate these examples because the NEA sends a crucial message about the importance of the inclusion of women and people of color through these textual strategies. The NEA consciously constructs diversity, including gender and race/ethnicity, in their public communications. While some might read this as “politically correct” window-dressing for a national organization, I am less cynical. I believe that the NEA, both its administrators and its judges, conceive and execute the Fellowship program to be inclusive, to be an award system that recognizes the excellent work of women writers and writers of color.⁶⁹⁸ And yet.

The overall data for the program suggests that women still remain a paltry thirty-seven percent (37%) of the award recipients, though further analysis suggests that in recent years the program approaches gender parity. Based on all fellowships from 1966 through 2005, women are thirty-seven percent (37%) of the award recipients; analysis of more recent annual data tells a slightly different story. Citing the 2004 award cycle, the NEA Literature Fellowships reports says that the forty-two prose Fellows “hailed from 22

⁶⁹⁸ I am mindful of Jane Ward’s work in *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008). She argues that diversity has been co-opted in service to a variety of liberal and neoliberal formations. Her argument may very well be the case at the NEA as well.

states; 43 percent of them were women; and they ranged in age from 27 to 58.”⁶⁹⁹ The most recent two years of data are even more heartening. In 2011, of the forty-two poetry Fellows, thirty (71.4%) were women and twelve were men; in 2010, of the forty-two prose Fellows, nineteen (45.2%) were women and twenty-three were men.⁷⁰⁰ Given this data, during the past two years, the NEA Literature fellowship achieved gender parity.⁷⁰¹

Certainly, the NEA’s public focus on the diversity of its grant recipients is one of the legacies of feminism and the civil rights movement in the United States. In addition, sustained, feminist advocacy efforts, including those of Bissert, Lorde, and many others, had an effect on the agency and its current funding patterns. But, what about lesbians? A number of lesbian writers who began publishing in lesbian print culture received NEA awards, including Jan Clausen, Gloria Anzaldúa, Irena Klepfisz, Beth Brant, Michelle Cliff, Alexis DeVeaux, Janice Gould, Jewelle Gomez, Judy Grahn, Marilyn Hacker, Susan Griffin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Audre Lorde. The 40th Anniversary Report features Kay Ryan, an out lesbian, as one of the grant recipients. Unfortunately, there are no explicit references to lesbian writers in the report. To understand the substantial effects of the NEA on lesbian literature, one must decode the sexual orientation of fellowship winners.

It cheers me to see gender parity and solid representation of people of color in the NEA fellowship program today. I do not want to underestimate the significance of the

⁶⁹⁹ NEA Literature Fellowships, 4. I note that statistics about the racial-ethnic background of the writers is not included.

⁷⁰⁰ The NEA awards poetry and prose fellowships in alternate years.

⁷⁰¹ There is a striking disparity between prose writers and poets, which deserves further investigation.

achievement—and the work of lesbian-feminists in making it a reality. I do, however, want to reflect on one of the unanticipated effects of this work as it relates to nationalism. The NEA is a federal agency; its work represents a nationalist project. Lesbian-feminist writers and activists, including those advocating inclusion in the NEA, critiqued the United States as a nation vigorously. For example, Minnie Bruce Pratt notes in her essay “Identity: Skin Blood Heart” that “today the economic foundation of this country is resting on the backs of women of color here, and in Third World countries” and that the “foreign policy of the Reagan administration is being shaped by evangelical Christian beliefs that hold the U.S. has a divine calling to “protect the free world from godless, evil, ‘perverted’ communism.”⁷⁰² Audre Lorde connected the growing anti-apartheid movement in South Africa with the treatment of African-Americans in the United States, writing that “stock in Black human life in the U.S.A., never high, is plunging rapidly in the sight of white american complacencies.”⁷⁰³ She then noted, “no matter what liberal commitments to human rights is mouthed in international circles by the U.S. Government, we know it will not move beyond its investments in South Africa unless we make it unprofitable to invest there.”⁷⁰⁴ Jan Clausen wrote about United States militarism for *off our backs* in 1981.⁷⁰⁵ Clausen also wrote about her Central American solidarity work and the “fate” that the United States inflicted on Nicaragua “at gunpoint, land mine-

⁷⁰² Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Identity: Skin Blood Heart,” in *Yours In Struggle* (Brooklyn, Long Haul Press, 1984), 54-55.

⁷⁰³ Audre Lorde, “Apartheid U.S.A.,” in *I am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷⁰⁵ Jan Clausen, “Women and Militarism: Some Questions for Feminists,” *off our backs* 9, no. 1, (January 1981).

point, bayonet-point, International Monetary Fund-point.”⁷⁰⁶ These writers, who represent the broader field of lesbian-feminist authors, are critics of both United States policies and the broader nationalist project of the United States.

Lesbian-feminist activists and writers did not see their work as advocating for the inclusion of women or lesbians in nationalist projects. Rather they saw themselves as advocating to end sexist exclusion. Their intention was never to bind feminism, or lesbianism, to nationalism. Nevertheless, in hindsight, this work can be understood as a nationalist project. To advocate for lesbian-feminists on a national literature panel, to work for lesbian-feminist publications to be funded with federal tax dollars, to secure fellowships for lesbian writers from a federal agency is all work that binds lesbians to a national project, supporting and promoting it even as they critiqued it. Ultimately, advocacy within the NEA helped to interpellate lesbian as a citizen-subject in the nation. This literary work isn't exceptional; much work in both the lesbian-feminist movement and the gay and lesbian movement during the 1970s and 1980s made lesbians legible as citizens of the nation.

One of the effects of this advocacy work is the successful creation of a linkage between lesbian as an identity category and discourses about citizenship and nationalist inclusion. The success of this work and the new legibility of lesbian in the nation is one of the factors that causes the lesbian and gay movement in the 1990s to turn to issues even more centrally imbricated with the state, particularly military service and marriage. Although these issues were rarely supported by lesbian-feminists and lesbian-feminists

⁷⁰⁶ Jan Clausen, “In Pieces: A Feminist in the Central American Solidarity Movement,” in *Books & Life* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 198.

were some of the strongest critics⁷⁰⁷ and although it was never the intention of lesbian-feminists to support an explicitly nationalist project, the extraordinary success of the NEA advocacy campaign set the stage for continued engagement by queer and feminist advocates in nationalist projects.

Pratt Wins an Academy Award

On May 1st, 1989, Nancy Bereano of Firebrand Press called Minnie Bruce Pratt at her home in Takoma Park, MD. Pratt and her companion of nearly eight years, the photographer Joan E. Biren (JEB), lived in “a big old house with rosebushes in the backyard and an apple tree and a crabapple.” Pratt confided to Dorothy Allison, “Miz Harris, next door, approves of me because I get down on my knees in the yard and ‘work hard.’” On this Monday in May, Pratt wasn’t on her knees working the earth, planting crops of okra, tomatoes, and squash;⁷⁰⁸ she spent most of the day on the telephone. Bereano called to tell Pratt that she had won the Lamont Prize from the American Academy of Poets. The Lamont Prize, now renamed the James Laughlin Award, is awarded to a poet for her second book of poetry. While feminist poets had received the prize, including Ai in 1978, Carolyn Forché in 1981, and Sharon Olds in 1983, Pratt was the first out lesbian to win the Lamont Prize.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ Paula Ettelbrick’s work remains some of the strongest feminist critiques of different gay and lesbian activist campaigns in the 1990s,

⁷⁰⁸ Letter to Dorothy Allison, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷⁰⁹ Marilyn Hacker won the Lamont Prize in 1973 when it was a first book prize; at the time of the prize Hacker was known in lesbian and feminist circles and married to Samuel L. Delany.

Pratt recorded her reaction in her journal as “pandemonium, disbelief, shock.” She spent the next few days talking to friends about the award. Almost everyone’s first reaction was “oh my god.” Then they affirmed that “there’s hope in the world,” and “something good is going on out there.” Many believed that the award is “only because of political movement.” For Pratt and her friends, the feminist movement and the lesbian-feminist movement contributed to the environment in which Pratt’s book won the prize. Pratt recorded, “Unalloyed this is a triumph for one of us.”⁷¹⁰

Pratt’s selection by the Lamont panel of Alfred Corn, Marvin Bell, and Sandra McPherson was a big event for lesbian-feminist print culture, not only because Pratt was out as a lesbian and part of the lesbian-feminist print movement, but also because the poems of *Crime Against Nature* were about lesbian experience. The twenty-seven poems of *Crime Against Nature* explore the narrative about how Pratt lost custody of her children when she came out as a lesbian and divorced her husband in the 1970s. The selection committee wrote about the poems, “In spare and forceful language Minnie Bruce Pratt tells a moving story of loss and recuperation, discovering linkages between her own disenfranchisement and the condition of other minorities. She makes it plain, in this masterful sequence of poems, that the real crime against nature is violence and oppression.”⁷¹¹ Pratt’s selection for the prize was an affirmation of her power as a poet, voicing an important political message.

The title of Pratt’s prize-winning book is grounded in the political moment. In 1989, sodomy laws were legal and enforced in many states in the United States. People

⁷¹⁰ Folder 6, Box 8, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷¹¹ Lamont citation in *Crime Against Nature* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1989).

called sodomy laws colloquially “crime against nature laws.” In 1986 in the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision, the U. S. Supreme Court affirmed the rights of states to criminalize sexual expression between two people of the same sex. As a result of this decision, lesbian and gay activists targeted sodomy laws as an important site for community mobilizations for gay and lesbian rights; the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force organized an initiative to repeal sodomy laws.⁷¹² Pratt’s poems in *Crime Against Nature* animate the consequences of sodomy laws for her individually and articulate the larger stakes of the gay and lesbian community in these laws.

The recognition of Pratt’s work and its political valence was significant. In a letter to Pratt, Adrienne Rich heralded the award, “I’m glad it has won this prize for so many reasons: the uncompromising beauty of your work; that that work will reach new audiences, because I know poems can change consciousness when allied with other kinds of statements; because your voice will have to be heard tonight in a place where I’ve stood feeling lonely & isolated; because this prize should be a lever for opportunities for you to write more.”⁷¹³ Rich articulates the many values of winning prizes. For Pratt as an individual poet, for lesbian-feminist poets more broadly, and for gay and lesbian activists, the prize validated Pratt’s work and the political injustice of state-sanctioned harassment and prosecution of queer people for sexual expression.

⁷¹² The 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision was overturned by the Supreme Court with the 2004 *Lawrence v. Texas* decision.

⁷¹³ Folder Rich, Adrienne, 1981-1992 (folder 1), Box 57, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Rich continued, “I don’t underestimate the feelings of responsibility you must be carrying. But I join you in celebrating all the opportunities this means—.”⁷¹⁴ Rich’s private comments to Pratt demonstrate a continued commitment to poetry as a tool for social change. Rich writes that “poems can change consciousness when allied with other kinds of statements,” a formulation Rich articulates often in her work. Rich’s earlier resistance to systems of literary appraisal is tempered in her letter to Pratt. 1989 is a very different political moment for lesbian-feminists than 1974. Nine years of Republican Presidential administrations, combined with an extraordinary backlash against feminists, had narrowed the spaces for radical statements and actions.

Although Pratt recorded herself as “elated” and “excited,” she was also “disbelieving” and “suspicious.” She wanted the event to be a “huge reunion, a kind of jubilee with lots of foreigners among old antagonists” and to relish “the joy of all my friends.” although she realized that the entire event “seems like someone’s sitcom plot on how to watch the most incongruous people in a formal setting.”⁷¹⁵ In the days leading up to the event, the feelings of disbelief and suspicion continued for Pratt. The recognition from the panel brought up Pratt’s “old conflict with authority” and the dynamics of Pratt “on the outside” and “the judges on the inside” was an “all too neat a reversal of the judges/judging that went on when I lost the children.” She noted it felt like “a brick, a trip” and “a bitter cosmic joke.”⁷¹⁶ To receive acceptance and accolades from an

⁷¹⁴ Folder Rich, Adrienne, 1981-1992 (folder 1), Box 57, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷¹⁵ Folder 6, Box 8, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁷¹⁶ Folder 6, Box 8, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

institution for poems that are at their core about exclusion from full access to society was an irony not lost on Pratt.

In preparing for the ceremony, though, Pratt affirmed her commitment to make visible the lesbian-feminist movement that brought her to write the poems and to nurture the movement through the prize. Like Lorde, Rich, and Walker in 1974, Pratt donated the \$1,000 from the prize. She selected four organizations, “that nourish us all”: the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Sisters in South Africa, a self-help organization of women living under apartheid, and the Second Encuentro of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbians, which convened in 1990 in Peru.⁷¹⁷ Pratt announced this publicly at the award ceremony. Her speech celebrated both the activists in the room and also the movement that supported her, making her life and her work as an artist possible.

The award ceremony was May 16, 1989, at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Presiding over the event at the museum, which Pratt described as “a rather cold forbidding place—nothing homey about it!,” was Mrs. Edward T. Chase, the President of The Academy of American Poets.⁷¹⁸ That evening, the American Academy of American Poets honored two other poets: Martin Greenberg, who won the 1989 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award, and Martha Hollander, who won the 1989 Walt Whitman Award. Friends and supporters of Pratt filled the room including her publisher Nancy Bereano, Adrienne Rich, who was celebrating her sixtieth birthday, Barbara Smith,

⁷¹⁷ Text of Minnie Bruce Pratt’s Lamont Acceptance Speech, *Gay Community News* 16, no. 46 (June 11-18).

⁷¹⁸ Pratt letter to her mother, Folder ““On Accepting the Lamont Award for Poetry, As a Lesbian at the Guggenheim,” 1989 May 16 (folder 1),” Box 35, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

publisher of *Kitchen Table*: Women of Color Press, Joan Nestle, Jewelle Gomez, Judith McDaniel, and Elly Bulkin.

The experience at the event, however, was not the jubilee that Pratt imagined. Pratt's award was presented after Greenberg's award and prior to Hollander's award. Her speech began, "The gay bar that I went to in 1975" and according to most accounts of the evening, discomfort on the stage began with those words. Judith McDaniel describes it best in a letter to the Director of the Academy of American Poets. She writes,

only a few moments into Ms. Pratt's presentation, John Hollander began looking at his watch, fidgeting in his chair, whispering audibly to James Merrill and distracting the audience. His behavior made it clear that he was not interested in what Minnie Bruce Pratt had to say, nor in hearing her read her poetry, and he began these interruptions long before he could have known whether she would speak for the same amount of time as the previous recipient, Martin Greenberg, to whom Mr. Hollander listened with attention and respect.⁷¹⁹

Pratt split the time for her reading in honor of the award between her statement, which lasted eight minutes, and her reading of two poems from the collection, the first poem and the final poem. Pratt did read longer than the other two award recipients. Greenberg read for twelve minutes and Hollander read for fourteen minutes; Pratt's reading was twenty-seven minutes. Presumably, award recipients were told to read for twelve to fifteen minutes. When Pratt finished reading her first poem and announced that her final poem would be a multi-part poem, she said "This final poem is in six parts; you might want to move around in your seat a little bit." At this point, Hollander verbally told Pratt that her time was up. Pratt replied, "I know, I know," and then began to read the final

⁷¹⁹ Folder "McDaniel, Judith and Maureen Brady, 1980-1992," Box 56, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University

poem of *Crime Against Nature*. Pratt's refusal to comply with Hollander's direction and her conviction to complete her reading as planned is palpable—even in audio only.⁷²⁰

The President of the Academy replied to McDaniel, “We are all exceedingly sorry that the deportment of anyone on the platform should have caused distress or provoked offense. The Lamont Poetry Selection is a major prize with a distinguished thirty-five year history; I would hereby like to reaffirm the Academy's congratulations to Minnie Bruce Pratt on receiving the 1989 Selection for *Crime Against Nature* and reassure you that the Chancellors' only intent in presiding was to offer formal recognition to all three of the award-winners.”⁷²¹ Hollander's behavior was a source of pain and anger for Pratt and for many of her friends and colleagues in the audience.

While McDaniel only describes the behavior of Hollander and Merrill in her letter to the Academy President, overall, the event celebrated heterosexuality and highlighted the ways that heterosexuality is privileged in society. Pratt's award was literally sandwiched between two performances of heterosexuality. While, most likely, these performances of heterosexuality were illegible to the heterosexual event organizers and attendees, they would have been profoundly legible to the lesbian-feminists in the audience. The first award, the Harold Morton Landau Translation Award, was given to Martin Greenberg for his translation *Five Plays* by Heinrich von Kleist. To read the plays, Greenberg and his wife, Paula Fox, came to the stage and read together. The readings amused some lesbian-feminist members of the audience; their laughter, when

⁷²⁰ An audio recording of the poetry reading and awards presentation is in the Poetry Room of Harvard's Lamont Library.

⁷²¹ Folder ““On Accepting the Lamont Award for Poetry, As a Lesbian at the Guggenheim,” 1989 May 16 (folder 1),” Box 35, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Fox reads “took every liberty with you a husband is permitted,” joyfully pierces the silence in the room during the reading. Nevertheless, the performance of heterosexuality through the acceptance of the award with Greenberg and his wife team-reading is painfully clear.

The final award, given immediately after Pratt’s reading, was for the Walt Whitman Award for a first book of poetry. In 1989, Martha Hollander, John Hollander’s daughter, won the award. While not meaning to diminish the work of Martha Hollander, the notion of a heterosexual, family dynasty in the poetry world titillates the audience in the presentation of this award. W. S. Merwin was the judge for The Walt Whitman Award in 1989, but could not present the award because he lived in Hawaii; James Merrill presented the award on behalf of Merwin.⁷²² After reading portions of Merwin’s citation, Merrill notes that Merwin wanted to know, after selecting the manuscript, if this Martha was “John and Ann Hollander’s daughter who I knew as a very little girl.” With a flourish, Merrill tells the audience that Martha is the daughter of John and Ann. Again, I do not want to diminish the strength of Martha Hollander’s poetry or the pride of her parents, but the performance of this familial relationship, a relationship that is authorized by the state and treated with great affection and admiration by all who spoke that night and presumably by many in attendance, further highlights the struggle, alienation and pain that Pratt experienced. Even as an insider winning an award, she was marked as an outsider: interrupted during her reading and forced to watch the affectionate and jovial performance of state-sanctioned and universally recognized relationships during the

⁷²² Of course, Merrill was well-known for being in a long-term, companionate relationship with David Jackson, but at this even, presenting the award to Martha Hollander, he performed a function that privileged and celebrated heterosexual families and excluded homosexuals through silence.

award presentation for both of the other award winners. This unspoken, unuttered, and unacknowledged heterosexual framework further alienated Pratt and other lesbian-feminist attendees.

Gay Community News wrote about the awards ceremony under the headline, “Lesbian Poet Harassed at Award Ceremony.”⁷²³ In the article, Hollander, interviewed by the *GCN* reporter, maintained that “his actions during the ceremony were not an expression of his displeasure with the content of Pratt’s speech or poetry”; rather, he was simply monitoring time as the event’s president.⁷²⁴ He explained, “I think that was taken ill by some of the people she had brought with her who didn’t know that that was the convention.”⁷²⁵ For Pratt, however, this was an example of people using “the format to harass you.”⁷²⁶

Marilyn Hacker, another attendee that night, recalls it as a “very painful evening” as well, but for her it was not “queer sexuality” but “bringing politics into the academy. . . that made those gentlemen fidget.”⁷²⁷ These reports of that night in May 1989 demonstrates the potency of the encounter of Pratt and the array of grass-roots, activist women engaged in the lesbian-feminist print movement with the Academy of American Poets, a membership organization that speaks for the poetry establishment. Pratt and her

⁷²³ Jennie McKnight, “Lesbian Poet Harassed at Award Ceremony,” *Gay Community News* 16, no. 45 (Jun 4-Jun 10, 1989): 3.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁷ Richard Tayson, “Poets Are Out in the Presses,” *Gay and Lesbian Review* (November-December 2004): 24.

comrades understood the experience as an encounter with power and as a demonstration of how institutions silence those without power. The Academy understood it as a single event in a long history of events and resisted inflecting it with particular political meanings.

Pratt told *GCN*, “It was the most public, formal, prestigious situation that I have ever been in with someone who tried to silence me.”⁷²⁸ For a lesbian, being silenced by a public institution in 1989 was fraught with meaning. Naming a system of silencing and demonstrating an example of how lesbian-feminists are silenced by institutions was a potent critique with multiple valences. Being silenced resonated both with AIDS activists, who proclaimed, Silence = Death, and with lesbian-feminists, as suggested by the words of Lorde, “Your Silence Will Not Protect You.”⁷²⁹ Pratt took the discomfort of Hollander, however, as an affirmation that she is “on the correct path in terms of trying to challenge entrenched power structures.”⁷³⁰ As a follow-up to the article, *GCN* printed the entire text of Pratt’s acceptance speech.

Even though Pratt’s poems had been lauded by the Academy, for the lesbians and feminists in attendance that evening, the Academy had treated Pratt as a human, as an open lesbian, with contempt. A month later, Pratt wrote in her journal for the first time since the Lamont ceremony. She connects her experience at the Lamont ceremony with

⁷²⁸ McKnight, “Lesbian Poet,” 3.

⁷²⁹ The sentence is from an essay titled, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” It was first used by Lorde in a paper delivered at the Modern Language Association’s Lesbian and Literature panel, Chicago, IL, December 28, 1977; the speech was published in *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978) and then in Lorde’s book *The Cancer Journals* (San Francisco Spinsters, Ink, 1980).

⁷³⁰ McKnight, “Lesbian Poet,” 3.

an exercise she used in Introduction to Women's Studies, her class at the University of Maryland. After watching a Maya Angelou film, she asked students, "Write about a time you lost your voice, couldn't speak." Pratt writes in her journal that she "couldn't write - from the Lamont until now, a month." She was "conscious every day that I'm not writing in this journal." She continues, "Certainly the events at the Guggenheim (now documented in *GCN*, letter to me) were not an unambiguous—that's not it—the rudeness, interruptions, fear, antipathy from Hollander and Merrill—enough of a public trial and humiliation to make me fear again the consequences of revealing my life." This private reflection demonstrates how profoundly personal Pratt's poetry is and how difficult it was to make these revelations—being a lesbian, being judged unfit as a mother by the state—in 1989. Pratt continues, "Though Adrienne said, 'You did everything just right.' How many people, women, lesbians would feel ridiculed, wounded beyond all criticism by that...?" Even though Pratt felt "frozen at the core," she also noted that it was "—a great victory, the boys shining," and a large group of friends celebrating. Afterward, she was "exhausted in some deep way - sick for three weeks."⁷³¹ The conflicting emotional realities of winning the award—on one hand, unabashed support for her work as a poet, and, on the other hand, disrespectful treatment at the award ceremony—demonstrate the deep conflicts of public recognition. While Pratt, like many other lesbian-feminists, wanted her work to be publicly recognized, the recognition came with consequences, both public and personal. Recognition from mainstream institutions like the Academy of American Poets implied a type of co-optation that lesbian-feminists fiercely critiqued. The experience of living in a world with unrelenting sexism and homophobia creates

⁷³¹ Folder 6, Box 8, Minnie Bruce Pratt Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

suspicion and dis-ease with recognition; moreover, in this case the very institutions that recognized Pratt's work also perpetuated these harms as they recognized her. As Rich noted in her letter to Pratt, being the first _____ (woman, lesbian, person of color) or the only _____ (woman, lesbian, person of color) is isolating and often harmful.

Finally, I share a quotation from John Hollander about Pratt's work when he introduced her at the award ceremony. Hollander's introduction was, in general, *pro forma*. He described the Lamont Prize, awarded for a second book of poetry, as revealing "great knowledge of and sensitivity to a question of deep significance for all artists: Well, now, what about the next one?"⁷³² He proceeded to describe the selection process and the mechanics of the award, including recognizing the panel of judges. He gave a brief biographical introduction of Pratt and read from the judges' citation. The judges described *Crime Against Nature* as telling "a moving story of loss and recuperation" and making "it plain in these masterful sequences of poems how the real crime against nature is violence and oppression." These words from the judges' panel emphasize the emotive power of the poems as well as describing them as "masterful," suggesting the recognition of their technical accomplishments within poetry. Hollander then said, "I should only add that her chronicles and epistles speak of pain and dislocation with all the force of the literal and with the special candor of the unadorned."⁷³³ This single sentence, Hollander's only appraisal of Pratt's work, demonstrates the diminishment of lesbian poets in the realm of the aesthetic. By describing Pratt's poems as "chronicles" and "epistles," Hollander suggests that they are not quite poems; rather, they are stories or letters.

⁷³² Poetry Reading and Awards Presentation (New York: Academy of American Poets, 1989), Woodberry Poetry Room, Harvard College Library.

⁷³³ Ibid.

Further, he suggests that they are “literal” and “unadorned,” that is, they are not crafted, not transformed, through the artifice of poetry. While this statement is a small one amid a flurry of words that evening, it demonstrates a strategy to dismiss and minimize the poetic contributions of lesbians. Rather than simply letting the judges’ citation stand, Hollander inserted his assessment of the work in a way that appears laudatory initially but serves to undermine the craft of the poems as works of art.

Pratt received the Lamont Award in 1989, the boundary of the time period of my study. Firebrand Press published *Crime Against Nature* in 1990. In 1990, the NEA awarded Creative Writing Fellowships to three openly lesbian writers, including Minnie Bruce Pratt.⁷³⁴ That year, in response to the rhetoric of Senator Helms (R-NC), legislation was passed to prevent the NEA funds from using its funds “to promote, disseminate, or produce materials which in the judgment of the NEA. . . may be considered obscene, including but not limited to, depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts.” The NEA was able to amend the legislation to include this phrase, “which when taken as a whole, do not have serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value,” to give them some flexibility in the arts funding program. As a result of this legislation, the NEA required writers to affirm that they would not generate “obscene” work with the NEA funds. Pratt, Lorde, and Chrystos all signed the statement—the value of the fellowship was too great for them to decline the fellowship—and all three of them publicly protested the censorship that the NEA was supporting. Also that year, chair of the NEA, John Frohnmayer, vetoed four grants to

⁷³⁴ Creative Writing Fellowships is the name used for the individual writer fellowships in 1990; today the name is Literature Fellowships. The two other NEA Creative Writing Fellowship recipients were Audre Lorde and Chrystos.

performance artists.⁷³⁵ Performance artists Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Karen Finley were all recommended for individual artist grants by the independent reviewers. They were also all openly gay and lesbian performance artists or included gay issues centrally in their work. Frohnmayer vetoed the grants to avoid controversy, an action which spawned even more controversy and backlash from artists and activists. Hughes, Miller, Fleck, and Finley, calling themselves the NEA 4, sued. They eventually won in court and received the grants as a part of a settlement. I append this history to the discussion of Minnie Bruce Pratt to demonstrate how the NEA continues to be a site of activism for lesbian-feminists and gay activists.

As the Yale Younger Poets Prize opened doors and new opportunities for Broumas, so the Lamont did for Pratt. It brought her work to a major university publisher (Pittsburgh University Press) and ensured broader circulation of *Crime Against Nature* and more speaking engagements.⁷³⁶ Like the Yale Younger Poet's Prize, the Lamont reflects the tastes and attitudes of different judges to political themes of the prize winning books. For lesbian-feminist poets, deeply committed as a group to advocacy for recognition and inclusion of lesbian-feminism in systems of literary appraisals, the Lamont Award was a vindication of their advocacy work within literary institutions. For Pratt, the award was also a vindication—of her work as an advocate for lesbian poets and also of her work as a poet; the Lamont affirmed the poetic value of her work by an institution held in the highest regard in poetry. Yet, the award is also a reminder that

⁷³⁵ The funding program for performance artists is a different funding program than the Literature Fellowships.

⁷³⁶ Speaking engagements have been an important source of economic support for Pratt who hasn't held a long-term institutional appointment.

public validation is a source of conflict. The promise of feminism is not happiness, but solidarity—and energy to continue the struggle.

Conclusion

Why are literary appraisals important to lesbian writers? Each of these stories illuminates a range of answer to that question. Rich, Lorde, and Walker in a display of feminist solidarity rejected the power of the NBA to name a winner and highlighted the plight of women writers in literary appraisals. Kunitz provided a new way to understand the aesthetics of political—and lesbian-feminist—poetry, using his position as the judge of the Yale Poetry Prize. Bissert organized women to challenge the NEA for greater inclusion of feminist writers with both immediate and lasting success. Minnie Bruce Pratt challenged her silencing at the Lamont Poetry Prize in the public forum of *GCN*. All of these stories explore the contours of power in literary engagements.

Literary appraisals are individual and community encounters with power, and they have material consequences. My interest in this history of lesbian-feminist encounters with power is to understand how literary appraisals shape what we read. By analyzing institutional power structures, we can develop strategies to intervene and change them. The stories in this chapter examine how people, individually or in groups, made lesbian writing more visible to and more appreciable by readers. The activist interventions of lesbian-feminists in literary institutions during these two decades interest me as a political strategist. I want to know: how do we make lesbian writing more visible, more appreciated, and more engaged in broader literary conversations?, and how do we ensure the continued and on-going inclusion of lesbian-writers in all aspects of literary life?

I have another interest in these stories. This interest is also polemical, activist, and deeply personal. It stems from my habits as a young reader. When I was eleven years old, I discovered the poems of May Sarton at the Waldenbooks in the mall in Saginaw, MI. Reading her poems, I knew that I shared something with her. At the time, I couldn't name what it was we shared, but her poems were life-giving to me. How did Sarton's book of poems, *Halfway to Silence*, end up on that shelf so that I could pick it up? And, four years later, how did the Naiad Press edition of *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* end up on a nearby shelf?⁷³⁷ What contingencies bring books to bookshelves for sale? What contingencies keep books off bookshelves in bookstores and in libraries? Exposing the material conditions behind the circulation of books is one way to begin to change what books are available, with the hope that other young women, other girls like me, reading alone or furtively at the mall, have books to sustain them. Thus, there are many stakes in literary appraisals for lesbians and for feminists. Lesbian-feminist interventions into literary appraisals create new possibilities for the recognition of lesbian-feminist writers, and they have material consequences for economic support for lesbian-feminist writers. Literary appraisals also affect readers, including young girls alone at the mall.

Literary appraisals, particularly the ability for individuals and groups of jurors to recognize creative work by lesbians as excellent and worthy, have significant economic consequences for writers and for small publishers. Recognition by literary institutions was crucial to the livelihoods of writers. Writers as diverse as Rita Mae Brown, Jewelle Gomez, Olga Broumas, Chrystos, Adrienne Rich, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Audre Lorde benefited from fellowships administered by the NEA as well as other funding institutions.

⁷³⁷ Although in my mind I remember clearly the Naiad Press edition of *Lesbian Nuns*, it is more likely that it was the mass market Warner Books edition.

Accolades such as the NBA nominations and the Lamont Prize supported the sales of books for small publishers. Lesbian-feminists recognized that engaging in the field of literary appraisals to shape the positive reception of lesbian-feminist work not only brought more political, social, and cultural capital for lesbian-feminist writers, but had economic consequences for lesbian-feminist writers as well.

Lesbian-feminist investments in literary appraisals expressed the broad transformative agenda of the WLM. The interventions of Bissert and other feminists on behalf of greater inclusion of women and feminists in government-sponsored literary institutions may appear to be liberal feminist interventions into systems of power; that is, they may seem to have simply reformist intentions for the inclusion of women. In fact, however, this advocacy work is informed by a variety of feminist theories, not only liberal feminism. Moreover, it has profound economic implications for individual lesbian-feminist poets and writers and for the periodicals that were crucial to publishing their work. Liberal feminism informs these interventions, certainly, but so do theories from radical, socialist, and cultural feminism. By recounting these stories of lesbian-feminists engagement with the power of literary institutions, I have outlined how different strands of feminism informed the interventions and explore the material consequences of appraisals by literary institutions. While these interventions have a liberal feminist component (ensuring that women are represented and involved in literary institutions such as the NEA and CCLM), there is also a radical feminist component evident in the belief that feminist engagement will have a role in transforming institutions. These examples of feminist and lesbian-feminist interventions into systems of literary appraisal demonstrate the ways different feminist theories and ideologies

manifest themselves in the material practices of writers, editors, and publishers. Within the same field of influence, lesbian-feminists invoked different feminist theories of change and embraced a variety of strategic interventions.

During the 1970s, two elements defined lesbian-feminist poetics. First, a woman who identified as lesbian-feminist wrote the poetry; this authorial inscription is important to lesbian-feminist readers.⁷³⁸ For instance, while the poetry of Carolyn Forché in *Gathering the Tribes* is lesbo-erotic, it was not lesbian-feminist for readers in the 1970s the same way Olga Broumas's work was.⁷³⁹ The other element is the presence of lesbian content in poems. Each of these issues had to be addressed and overcome in order for lesbian-feminist work to gain recognition through systems of literary appraisals.

The emergence of lesbian-feminist poetics corresponds with developments in contemporary United States poetry at the time. In the second half of the twentieth century, one strand of lyric poetry turned to confessionalism. Confessionalism, beginning with the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) and W. D. Snodgrass's *Heart's Needle* (1959),⁷⁴⁰ converged with the social and political movements of the

⁷³⁸ I am mindful of Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author," but for the readers of lesbian-feminist poetry in the 1970s, in particular, this analytical framework was not for them a meaningful one.

⁷³⁹ Although in this discussion, I fix the identity of being lesbian, during the 1970s women understood that the identity of lesbian is mutable. While the promise of becoming a lesbian was more celebrated, as in Alix Dobkin's lyrics *Any woman can be a lesbian* (Alix Dobkin, *Lavender Jane Loves Women*, 1973), women also understood that women could be lesbians for a period of time and then return to relationships with men and a heterosexual identity.

⁷⁴⁰ I consciously use a genealogy for confessionalism here with two white, heterosexual, male poets. Often Plath and Sexton are the genealogy given for confessionalism, with Plath's first book *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), particularly in relationship to the feminist poetry of the 1970s, but Plath's *Ariel*, first published in 1965, is a more accurate benchmark, and confessionalism

1970s and 1970s—the civil rights movement, the WLM, and the gay liberation movement. Lesbian-feminists, authorized by a social and political context, wrote poems within a broader aesthetic movement in poetry that profoundly validated the exploration and transformation of personal experience into art. As a result of the convergence of confessionalism in poetry and a number of social change movements in the United States, lesbian-feminist poets wrote and circulated powerful poetry that foregrounded lesbian experience and explicit lesbian sexuality. Consider a genealogy of this poetry, beginning with the poems of Judy Grahn’s *Edward the Dyke* (1970) and including Rich’s *Twenty-one Love Poems*, Broumas’s *Beginning with O*, Pratt’s *We Say We Love Each Other*, Lorde’s *Our Dead Behind Us*, and Hacker’s *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*. These works explicitly write lesbian bodies and lesbian erotics into late-twentieth century poetry. In addition, each of these writers—as well as many others—lived openly as lesbian. Yet, few literary appraisals interpellated lesbian poets as lesbian. With the exception of Broumas’s *Beginning with O*, none of these works received high-profile literary prizes. While the advances that lesbian-feminists made with literary appraisals provided much needed economic and cultural capital, they did not establish lesbian-feminist poetics in the minds of readers and critics as a powerful mode of poetry. Although central to the art and craft of poetry, neither lesbianism nor lesbian-feminism became recognized as a significant literary or aesthetic innovation in poetry.

Today, lesbian poets hold some of the most prestigious positions in the poetry world and garner some of the most important literary prizes. In 2009, the poet laureates

was well underway by the publication of *Ariel*. While I do not want to diminish the significance of women in confessionalism, I do want to highlight that it was a strand of contemporary poetic engagement that initially was not gendered female.

of the United States and the United Kingdom were both queer women. Poet Laureates are appointed by the government and charged with representing poetry nationally. The United States Librarian of Congress appointed Kay Ryan poet laureate in the United States in July 2008.⁷⁴¹ Of the forty-nine Poet Laureates (or Consultants in poetry as the position was titled between 1937 and 1986), twelve have been women, or twenty-five percent (25%). Ryan is the first out lesbian to occupy the post.⁷⁴² Although Ryan's poetry is muted on questions of sexuality and sexual orientation, she was open about her long-term partner, Carol Adair, whom she married in California in 2007, shortly before becoming United States Poet Laureate.⁷⁴³ In May 2009, Queen Elizabeth II appointed Carol Ann Duffy as Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. Duffy is open as a bisexual woman. In addition to these public appointments, lesbian poets have been recognized with significant awards in poetry. Recently, Ryan won a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, a fellowship referred to as a "genius" prize. Joan Larkin won the Academy of American Poets 2011 Academy Fellowship, with a stipend of \$25,000; Eleanor Lerman won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011. Moreover, the best-selling American poet is Mary Oliver; Oliver came out a decade ago and wrote openly about her long-term relationship with Molly Malone Cook. Oliver's openness about her lesbianism has not affected the sales of her books of poetry and prose.

The prominence of lesbian poets today is in part a result of both the poetry published and circulated by lesbian-feminists in the 1970s and 1980s and the

⁷⁴¹ Ryan's term extended through July 2011.

⁷⁴² Elizabeth Bishop was the Poetry Consultant from 1949-1950; she was not open about being a lesbian reflecting the conventions of the time.

⁷⁴³ Adair died in January 2009, during Ryan's tenure as Poet Laureate.

interventions of lesbian-feminists in systems of literary appraisal. Institutional recognition is awarded not only on artistic merits, but on a complex habitus of social, political, and economic forces. This habitus was altered by lesbian-feminist publishing and political interventions during the 1970s and 1980s. Lesbian-feminists spoke truth to power at award ceremonies like the NBA and the Lamont, in advocacy work for inclusion at the NEA, and in defining the MLA as a significant site of power. Allies such as Stanley Kunitz also aided in transforming the habitus for lesbian-feminist poets and writers. Lesbian-feminist engagement in literary appraisals is successful—the quality of literary appraisals changes. Throughout the subsequent twenty years lesbian writers are recognized more by established literary prize committees. This is not, of course, entirely due to these moments of contesting power. The social and political landscape of the United States changes as well between 1969 and 1989 and between 1989 and today. The open acceptance of gay and lesbian people in United States society today is unprecedented, but part of the new acceptance of lesbian and gay people is a result of the literary activism of lesbian-feminists from 1969 until 1989.

In spite of this work, today, the term lesbian-feminist sounds like an anachronism. Few poets or activists use it as a primary location to identify a set of practices—political or literary. In reports of the achievements of Ryan, Duffy, Oliver, and Larkin, the description ‘lesbian-feminist’ does not appear. In the field of contemporary poetics, like the contemporary political and social fields, there is a field of feminist and a field of lesbian. Although the two overlap, they do not unite in the same potent ways they did during the 1970s and 1980s. Although there has been progress for lesbian and feminist poets, this is not a progressive narrative. Rather, it is a mapping of these two terms,

lesbian and feminist, and the contours of the work they generate between 1969 and 1989. I indicated at the beginning of this chapter that I am optimistic about literary appraisals for lesbians and I affirm that. Literary appraisals discussed in this chapter and literary appraisals conducted during the subsequent decades demonstrate the strides of lesbian-feminists in securing recognition from literary institutions. At the same time, the work of lesbian-feminists poets and writers from the 1970s and 1980s—not so long ago—are being erased quickly and lost to new generations through editorial practices. The struggle for literary appraisals of lesbian-feminist work continues.

Finally, I offer this critique. While lesbian poets have made substantial strides during the last two decades and enjoy prominence today, they have done so on terms to conform to existing heterosexual and patriarchal values. Work by openly lesbian poets today often is not explicit about lesbian sexuality and does not push boundaries of poetry to examine non-normative experiences. Mentioning this critique feels crucial to honor the persistent analyses and critiques of the lesbian-feminists of my study. Although I do not explicate the critique, I can imagine many compelling arguments to support it. It merits further consideration.

While literary and aesthetic appraisals often present themselves as separate from economic realities of art, the two are deeply imbricated, as I have demonstrated in this chapter. Lesbian-feminism invited women to think about a multiplicity of lenses and frames for its work. In the same way, assessing the effects of lesbian-feminist interventions on literary institutions depends on which lens to use. Twenty or more years later, the results of lesbian feminist interventions are both dramatic and insignificant. Remembering them is one way to be reminded that the work must continue.

In the next chapter, I explore aesthetic appraisals as a related, and still material, aspect of the parallelepiped. One argument I make throughout this book is that for lesbian-feminist poets, the aesthetics of their work is defined, in part, through their publishing and distribution practices. The objects themselves—books, chapbooks, journals—are an aesthetic object created for the delight and enjoyment of other lesbian-feminists. The recognition of this aesthetic connection between the physical books and the language of the books is not appreciated broadly. I examine the aesthetics of lesbian print culture and consider the effects of lesbian-feminist print culture in the 1970s and 1980s on the literary and aesthetic landscape of the 1990s and 2000s.

/Interlude 6/Granite Press

Offset printing, the transfer of type from a photographic plate to a rubber blanket and then to paper, is a technological innovation from the beginning of the twentieth century; offset made printing easier and more accessible. In the last three decades of the twentieth century new types of printing technology—photocopying, laser printing, inkjet printing, and digital printing—displaced offset printing. Many lesbian-feminist publishers simply wanted to use the cheapest and most efficient printing technology to create books and distribute them to readers. The book arts captured some lesbian-feminists, however, like Bea Gates, and they remained loyal to letterpress printing. Letterpress printing, the direct impression of inked moveable type onto paper, originated with Gutenberg and continues to have devotees to this day. During the 1970s and 1980s, letterpress printing was as much an art form as writing itself. With a letterpress press, printers created beautiful printed objects—books and broadsides—with time and attention to the labor and craft.

Bea Gates is a poet and activist, deeply committed to the revolutionary potential of language. During the 1980s, Gates owned and operated Granite Press, a commercial letterpress print shop and small publishing company. Gates discovered poetry as a teenager living in Cambridge, MA. The Boston area offered Gates some of the finest bookstores in the country; she spent days in the poetry aisles learning intuitively about the different means of production for books. Gates remembers, “New Directions had poems from the Chinese and City Lights had little books, like one of the Pocket Poetry Series, HOWL!. . . There were things called broadsides that were beautiful poems with woodcut illustrations. There were books printed only in black and red with classic

typography. I didn't even know the word typeface, but [I recognized] the beauty of the whole presentation. I thought, this is cool."⁷⁴⁴ From those early experiences reading and encountering poetry, Gates spent a lifetime investigating "the space for poems" and creating space for poetry in the world.⁷⁴⁵

As a college student at Antioch/West, Gates moved to the San Francisco bay area where she "dropped into Cranium Press and just hung around with Clifford Burke." One day, Burke told her, "If you sort this typeface, you can have the type." Gates sorted the 'pied' font and acquired her first font, Deepdene, cementing her love affair with printing and typography. Gates slowly acquired many skills in the bay area; she learned how to set type, met people who made paper and learned the intricacies of letterpress printing with different types of paper. After college, she moved back east and built her own print shop first in the Berkshires, her second, for a short time in Hancock, ME, and her third, long-term location as Granite Press in Penobscot, Maine in 1977.

During the 1970s, Gates learned the art of bookmaking. She created a chapbook of her own poetry, *native tongue*, from her Antioch senior thesis, and printed it on letterpress with her own font of type. She remembers, "I had to rewrite one poem because I didn't have enough letters. I had to break down and reset the page each time. I would do two poems and print them two up. I printed *native tongue* in different colors, which was untraditional. . . . I loved the effect." After printing *native tongue*, she learned how to create a binding for the book from her old friend, binder Gray Parrot, as well as from

⁷⁴⁴ Interview with Bea Gates, November 28, 2011.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

books about binding. Gates printed two editions, “One had handmade paper with a very few bound in half leather and marble paper, and a few were bound in buckram.”

Gates subsidized her letterpress printing with commercial work; she also worked a variety of other jobs—cocktail waitress, hardware store clerk, librarian. In 1981, Gates left Maine and entered the MFA program at Sarah Lawrence College, where she studied with Grace Paley, Jean Valentine, and Jane Cooper. Gates published her own chapbook, *Shooting at Night: Poems*, and Rosa Lane’s chapbook, *Roots and Reckonings: Poems*, under the Granite Press imprint in 1980.

While studying with Paley, Gates, tipped off by Jane Cooper, suggested that she publish a broadside of one of Paley’s poems. Paley agreed, and in 1982, Granite Press published, “Goldenrod.” Gates and Paley continued to talk about Paley’s poetry, and Gates persuaded Paley, who was shy about her poems, to agree to have Granite Press publish her first collection of poetry, *Leaning Forward*, in 1985. Gates published *Leaning Forward* in two editions: a letterpress edition that sold primarily to collectors and libraries and a trade edition. In 1986, Gates published a trade paperback of Joan Larkin’s collection, *A Long Sound: A Book of Poems*, which explores Larkin’s own recovery from alcoholism.

In 1986, Gates began working on the book that would be her greatest accomplishment as a publisher and also the book that put Granite Press out of business. *Ixok Amar-Go: Poesía de Mujeres Centroamericanas por la Paz /Central American women's poetry for peace* is a bilingual anthology of Central American women’s poetry with fifty contributors and fifty, largely North American women poets/translators.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁶ *Ixok Amar-Go* is a word the editors invented that combines Mayan, Spanish and

Gates worked with translator and editor Zoë Anglesey on the project, which was released in 1987. The bilingual book is a mammoth collection of poems by women in every country of Central America. *Ixok Amar·Go* represents an important political engagement of some lesbian-feminists: solidarity work with revolutionaries in Central America and includes a significant contribution by many lesbian poets.

Granite Press published *Ixok Amar·Go* right as television networks aired the Iran-Contra hearings. *Ixok Amar·Go* sold out right away. Reprinting immediately for the burgeoning women's studies and Latina/Latino studies courses as well as activists communities and readers of poetry in translation was an obvious need, but Gates held back due to the pressure of the IRS audit and threatened fines. Shortly after *Ixok Amar·Go* published, the IRS audited the tax filings of Granite Press. Gates believes that the audit of Granite Press, as “a hobby, not a business” was motivated by the political content of the book and by her activist work challenging United States policy in Central America. The result of this audit, which consumed Gates’s time and financial resources, was the end of Granite Press. Subsequently, however, the IRS acknowledged that Granite Press was a business and issued a refund to Granite Press. By that time, Gates was teaching and doing freelance editing, public relations, and design work in New York City.

Throughout the 1980s, Granite Press operated as a small publisher of fine letterpress editions of poetry as well as commercial books. Granite Press stopped operating as a publisher in 1989 during the IRS audit. The blending of different means of producing texts—letterpress as well as offset printing—highlights the changing industry

English and means women going forward in love without bitterness.

and the flexible ways that lesbian publishers and printers responded to these changing conditions.

Most important to Gates, always, was book design. She told *Feminist Bookstore News*, “It’s important that the books are a whole thing. —That something happens to you when you pick it up, as well as what happens to you when you read it. . . .It has a different feel [and impact] if it’s **designed**.”⁷⁴⁷ This attention to beauty, not only within the text itself, but in the appearance of the book as an object, was crucial to Gates and her work with Granite Press—and for many other lesbian-feminists during the 1970s and the 1980s. Gates’s work at Granite Press, particularly her letterpress printing, demonstrates a different type of publishing from other lesbian-feminist publishers considered herein, but Gates’s political commitments and her attention to the aesthetics of books resonates with the attentions and concerns of many other lesbian-feminist publishers.

⁷⁴⁷ “Granite Press: Penobscot, Maine,” *Feminist Bookstore News* 8, no. 5 (April/May 1986): 23.

Chapter 6

Aesthetic Appraisals

on the other side of the rainbow

I invite you to return to another bar. A women's bar, or in the parlance of some lesbian-feminists, a wimmins/womyns/womons bar. The alternate spellings of women suggest the significance of attention to language as a source of revolutionary transformation; wimmin eliminates the presence of men in the word women. It is December 1974. Your destination is The Bacchanal at 1369 Solano Avenue in Albany, California. Albany is a suburb of San Francisco, north of Berkeley, south of El Cerrito. To get there from the south, take the 580 north and exit at Buchanan Street; it's just a short drive from the freeway.

Proprietors Sandra Fini and Joanna Griffin opened The Bacchanal just this year. Already it is becoming a destination and a gathering place for lesbian-feminists. At the Bacchanal, "a bar for and by women," women gather to play games—scrabble, backgammon—, listen to poetry readings, and see art exhibits.⁷⁴⁸ Tonight, there is a performance. Poetry. Dance. Someone gave you a flyer about it. You walk in. The lights are dim. Inside, women. A dozen and a half. You grab a beer from the bar. Take a seat. You have arrived just in time. The show is beginning. Five women take the stage. You don't know them. Later you will recognize Ntozake Shange as the ascribed author. Later you will know that Joanna Griffin, one of the owners of The Bacchanal, the publisher at

⁷⁴⁸ "Lesbian Bars in the East Bay Owned By Women For Women" by Barbara Hoke, <http://www.cappellettidesigns.com/tellherstory/Bars.htm>.

Effie's Press and a poet herself, is involved. You may come to know Paula Moss and Elvia Marta from Raymond Sawyer's Afro-American Dance Company. You may learn Nashira Ntosha and Jessica Hagedorn are the other two women performing tonight. For now, you watch the show. They "dance, make poems, make music, make a woman's theater." It is "raw, self-conscious, & eager." You don't know it, but what they are "discovering" in themselves "had been in process among us for almost two years."⁷⁴⁹

You don't know it, but next year, the show will be performed in New York, first at the Rivbea, then at the Old Reliable on East 3rd Street, and then at another bar, DeMonte's.⁷⁵⁰ It will be published as a book by alta's Shameless Hussy Press in 1975. The title from a line in the first five minutes of the performance: *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*. It will move to the Booth Theatre on Broadway in September 1976.⁷⁵¹ It will be defined as a "choreopoem"—a brave assertion of a new genre to express the experience of African-American women. It will be a great success on Broadway. The book will be republished by Bantam and reprinted and reprinted and reprinted. The Literary Guild will republish *for colored girls* and reprint it and reprint it and reprint it. This is one beginning. Here. Tonight. At The Bacchanal.

Introduction

If lesbian-feminists made great progress in literary appraisals, that is, in how literary institutions receive lesbian writers, contemporary aesthetic appraisals of lesbian

⁷⁴⁹ *for colored girls*, xiii.

⁷⁵⁰ *for colored girls*, xviii-xix.

⁷⁵¹ *for colored girls*, xx.

print culture are dismissive at best and derisive at worst.⁷⁵² This is ironic; aesthetics motivated lesbian-feminist publishing. Publishers wanted to create books that were beautiful—both as objects and as containers for beautiful works. Yet, aesthetics are used today to diminish the work of lesbians; critics suggest lesbians’ work is not good quality, not aesthetically satisfying, not worthy of continuing engagement. By resituating aesthetics as a category of analysis produced by material power structures, aesthetics becomes a category both to understand lesbians’ creative work and to blunt critiques. During the 1970s and 1980s, lesbians understood the aesthetics of both lesbian-feminist publishing and lesbian work through shared experiences within communities that trained them to apprehend and appreciate the aesthetic aspects of the work; today, the aesthetics of lesbian-feminist publishing and lesbian-feminist work are not embedded in the same communities. These works have not been explicated by critics in order for them to be appreciated by contemporary audiences. Part of my work in this chapter—and throughout this book—is invoking the sensorium through which readers experienced lesbians’ work at the time of its production. In addition, by interrogating the aesthetics of lesbian print culture in this chapter, I expand the aesthetic appreciation of lesbian-feminist cultural production. By engaging lesbian print culture in discussions about aesthetics, I transform the contours of how we understand lesbian aesthetics in literature and in popular culture.

First, what are aesthetics? I take my definition from Jacques Rancière, who defines aesthetics as “a specific form of sensory apprehension”⁷⁵³ and as “a regime of the

⁷⁵² The most recent diminishment of lesbian culture generally and lesbian print culture is in Terry Castle’s *The Professor and Other Stories*.

⁷⁵³ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 29.

functioning of art and a matrix of discourse, a form for identifying the specificity of art and a redistribution of the relations between the forms of sensory experience.”⁷⁵⁴ In other words, aesthetics are both a way of perceiving artwork through the sensorium (literally, the human nervous system, including the mind) and as a way of understanding artwork within the embedded power structures of discourse and distribution. Rancière’s project in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* demonstrates “how aesthetics, as a regime for identifying art, carries a politics, or metapolitics, within it”⁷⁵⁵ Rancière elucidates the co-constitutive relationship between aesthetics and politics as “linked, beneath themselves, as forms of presence of singular bodies in a specific space and time”⁷⁵⁶ From Rancière, I take an imperative to reclaim two words, aesthetics and politics, in relationship to lesbians and lesbian print culture. Rancière defines the relationship between aesthetics and politics as “the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration, in which they distribute spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular.”⁷⁵⁷ In previous chapters, I have demonstrated how lesbian print culture distributed books physically through lesbian communities and beyond. In this chapter, I use this embodied and material definition of aesthetics to demonstrate how lesbian print culture distributed aesthetics, or “sensory apprehension,” throughout the broader United States culture. In addition to explicating the aesthetics of lesbian print culture, in particular its reliance on situating bodies in

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

specific spaces and times, I also reclaim the words aesthetics—and aesthete—as a vital form of engagement for lesbian print culture.

Aesthetics are a mode of discerning sensory experiences in the world and sharing those experiences with others. Aesthetic appraisals are judgments that invoke standards of excellence in relationship to the sensorium as the basis of judgment; historically, aesthetic appraisals focus, in particular, on questions of beauty, transcendence, and sublimity, but from Rancière, aesthetics seeks to elaborate the ways that art intervenes in the reconfiguration of how we experience the world, in how texts—novels, poems, plays—reconfigure the distribution of spaces, times, subjects, and objects—common and singular—to make lesbian visible and central. Three questions shape this exploration of lesbian-feminist aesthetics. How does lesbianism, both the author’s lesbianism and lesbianism within in a text, relate to the aesthetic reception of work? How did lesbian print culture create an aesthetic, and how has that aesthetic been adopted in other locations? How do lesbian-feminist writers enter aesthetic discourses in literature and in popular culture, and how do lesbian-feminists transform aesthetic discourse through issues important to lesbians and feminists?

Given my materialist concerns in previous chapters, two terms of aesthetic appraisal are particularly important in this analysis: middlebrow and highbrow. Middlebrow and highbrow are terms that are used colloquially to suggest measures of aesthetic value, and they are used by literary critics in materialist analyses of book history. Joan Shelley Rubin’s *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* traces the construction of middlebrow culture in the United States through the publication and circulation of two book series: the “Great Books” and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Janice Radway’s *A*

Feeling for Books narrates further a history of the Book-of-the-Month Club, particularly thinking about the construction of middlebrow books in relationship to highbrow literature. Moreover, the terms middlebrow and highbrow make visible the co-constitutive relationship between aesthetics and politics and suggest the material facets of both.

To define these two aesthetic designations, highbrow and middlebrow, I look farther back in literary history than Rubin and Radway. I turn to Virginia Woolf. In the essay, “Middle Brow” from *Death of the Moth*, Woolf writes an extended response to an editor about a review of her work. Woolf objects rigorously, and with her tongue firmly planted in her cheek, to the elision of the word “highbrow” from the review. She says, “To be a highbrow, a complete and representative highbrow” like Shakespeare, Dickens, Hardy, Flaubert “is of course beyond the wildest dreams of my imagination.”⁷⁵⁸ By demurring about the attainability of highbrow status for herself, Woolf explicates the difference between highbrow and lowbrow as a ‘disinterested’ observer. Woolf defines highbrow as “the man or woman of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea,” while lowbrow is “a man or woman of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life”⁷⁵⁹ Woolf substitutes the mind for the body in definitions that are otherwise equivalent. The mind is the province of highbrow; the body, the province of lowbrow. This emphasis on class reflects the world Woolf observed; for the upper class, those living in Kensington, as she painfully points out she does, the life of the mind is available, but for the lower

⁷⁵⁸ Virginia Woolf, “Middle Brow” in *Death of the Moth*, 177.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

classes, it is the body that is most central, most necessary. Woolf maps class as a rigid, economic construct onto literary aesthetics. While Woolf's definitions appear to discipline the meaning of highbrow and lowbrow, I read Woolf as always highly ironized, including in these definitions. Woolf's definitions reflect her observations, spiked with venom. The venom and irony invite readers to question the rigidity of Woolf's definitions.

Woolf reserves most of her derision for middlebrows. Woolf says that the middlebrows are "the go-betweens; they are the busybodies who run from one to the other with their tittle tattle and make all the mischief."⁷⁶⁰ Middlebrows mediate between the minds of the highbrows and the bodies of the lowbrows and in doing so create problems for both. She continues, "They are neither one thing nor the other. . . . Their brows are betwixt and between. . . . The middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily with money, fame, power, or prestige."⁷⁶¹ Woolf imbricates middlebrow with "money, fame, power, or prestige." This is highly ironic and a key element of Woolf's definition of middlebrow. Woolf herself was a strong advocate for the importance of money for women, as she demonstrated in both *A Room of One's Own*, where money was a key to women's success as writers, and *Three Guineas*, where money was a way for women to leverage power in key political and social spheres. Yet, Woolf seemingly derides this key characteristic, the hallmark of the middlebrow, the

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., 179.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., 180.

acquisition of “money, fame, power, or prestige.” Middlebrow, for Woolf, is both inside and outside of the mind and the body, and mediating between the mind and the body is “money, fame, power, or prestige.” In short, from Woolf’s configurations, middlebrow becomes a site to contest economic and cultural power.

Woolf cedes that she couldn’t imagine the assignation of highbrow for herself, thus the space for conflict and change is in the middle. Like Woolf, lesbian-feminist writers think about these aesthetic categories of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow, and like Woolf, they understand the role of economic and cultural power in each of these designations. Lesbian-feminists made important contributions to culture—highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow. Within these contentious categories, I examine how lesbian print culture during the 1970s and 1980s produced both highbrow and middlebrow books. The producers of lesbian print culture envisioned themselves creating an alternate world for lesbian. This alternate world would need literature of all types—high-, middle-, and lowbrow. For lesbian-feminist publishers, everything produced expressed the revolutionary potential of the moment.

By considering highbrow and middlebrow together in this chapter, I map the effects of lesbian print culture on a broad field of influence which does not prescribe either highbrow or middlebrow but recognizes both as fields of influence for lesbian print culture. Recognizing the multi-focal influences of lesbian print culture on contemporary literature and contemporary popular culture, I demonstrate the many ways that aesthetics operate in our contemporary culture.

In this chapter, I make five arguments. Each argument elucidates a different register for engaging aesthetics in relationship to lesbian print culture. First, I consider

twentieth century literary history and the bifurcation of lesbian and aesthetic as a phenomenon that emerges during the 1970s and 1980s. During the earlier decades of the twentieth century, lesbians—and texts produced by lesbians—were central to what is received as aesthetic innovation. Second, I examine the canonization of lesbian writers during the twentieth century in contemporary anthologies from the 1970s and 1980s. Work by lesbian authors is included in some of these anthologies, but more advocacy and scholarship is required to ensure the continued canonization of lesbian literature. While I view canonization as a deeply material practice, the patina of canonization is aesthetic excellence; thus, engaging aesthetics as a term to describe and appraise lesbians' work is a crucial strategy to ensure continued presence of lesbians' work in literary canons. Third, I outline the aesthetic principles of lesbian-feminist print culture as the creators understood it. I explore how they imagined themselves making aesthetic interventions as well as assess what interventions they made. Fourth, I examine the career of Rita Mae Brown to consider how a writer central to lesbian print culture in the 1970s became a middlebrow author in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Using Rita Mae Brown's career, I think about the economics of highbrow and middlebrow in relationship to lesbian writers both in the contemporary moment and in history. I argue that the WLM created an opportunity for lesbian writers to be middlebrow, to have their work taken up by a broader public, and to make money. This seemingly economic and material argument about Brown's career is significant in relationship to aesthetics because it exposes the materiality of aesthetics and the manner in which being placed as middlebrow obscures highbrow aesthetic contributions. Finally, I examine the ways that lesbian feminist print culture has been taken up by popular culture post-1989, looking in particular at the work

of Ntozake Shange, Sapphire, and Dorothy Allison. Lesbian-feminist presses originally published the work of all three authors, and in recent years their novels have been adapted into major motion pictures. Each of these cases demonstrate how lesbian-feminism has been both commodified and ideologically adopted in contemporary United States culture, making a unique aesthetic contribution that extends the politics and ideology of lesbian-feminism.

Together these histories invite a reconsideration of lesbian print culture as a site of aesthetic intervention. During the 1970s and the 1980s, some lesbian-feminist critics and writers associate judgments of quality with adherence to patriarchal standards. Other lesbian-feminists believed that appraising lesbians' work in relationship to quality and aesthetics was a crucial strategy for ensuring longevity of the work. Rather than reconciling conflicting ideologies, lesbian-feminist critics tended to appraise the work on its own merits, as Adrienne Rich and many others advocated, or avoid the conversation. Even more recent critics have eschewed conversations about aesthetics and quality in relationship to lesbian literary work. For instance, Bonnie Zimmerman considers the quality of lesbian fiction in a lengthy exegesis in *The Safe Sea of Women*. She acknowledges that the criticism of lesbian writing originates within the community itself; women asked "whether or not lesbian fiction is 'good' enough to merit serious attention from literary critics, or to satisfy the common reader."⁷⁶² Zimmerman observes that "while the lesbian community has developed alternative standards of content—standards based upon honesty and fidelity to the range of lesbian lives—it has yet to redefine artistic quality." Ultimately, Zimmerman elides questions of quality by saying, "The

⁷⁶² Zimmerman, *Safe Sea*, 17.

purpose of this writing—self-aware or not—is to create lesbian identity and culture, to say, this is what it means to be a lesbian, this is how lesbians are, this is what lesbians believe. Whatever their aesthetic value, lesbian texts are ‘sacred objects’ that bind the community together and help express—by which I mean both reflect and create—its ideas about itself.”⁷⁶³ I am extremely sympathetic to Zimmerman’s handling of the issue of quality, as she defines it, but I am frustrated by her elision. Lesbian print culture did redefine artistic quality. Certainly, sexism and homophobia inform judgments of quality, or appraisals of the aesthetic quality of work, as lesbian-feminist critics have discussed, but to avoid discussions of quality, to refrain from making aesthetic judgments, is to consent to the exclusion of lesbian-feminist writing from broader literary discussions and from canonization.

Not only did lesbian print culture define and redefine artistic quality, through lesbian print culture, lesbian-feminist aesthetics emerge as both recognizable and widely influential. Lesbian print culture aspired to fostering excellence, and both publishers and writers wanted recognition for excellence in external appraisals. Rather than eliding questions about aesthetics and the aesthetic appraisal of lesbian writers, I address these questions directly. Aesthetics are a key aspect of canonization and therefore vital to the long-term survival of lesbian literature. Stories in this chapter recount important histories about aesthetic appraisals, but, more importantly, they invite us think about the broader stakes of lesbian print culture of the 1970s and 1980s.

One of the most common questions people asked me while conducting this research was, “But is any of it any good?” This chapter endeavors to provide two

⁷⁶³ Ibid., 21.

responses to that question. First, I want to undo the simplicity with which we understand aesthetic appraisals. I want us to think complexly about how we come to conclusions about quality as individual readers and as literary communities. Second, though, I want to answer the question directly. Yes, some of it is good; some of it is excellent; some of it is sublime; some of it is dreadful. It is like all literary output. “Is it good?” is a question that needs to be unpacked in thoughtful ways, but it is also a question that needs to be answered, directly, clearly, frankly. We avoid the question at our peril—risking the loss of both the past and the future of lesbian-feminist literature.

Aesthetics, Lesbians, and Poetry

A bifurcation between lesbian and aesthetic emerges in the 1970s and 1980s. In earlier decades of the twentieth century, lesbian poets were central to aesthetic innovation; in contemporary poetry, lesbians are recognized as some of the finest poets in English. In this section, I offer a brief exegesis of lesbians and aesthetics in twentieth century poetry; I then explore how and why a bifurcation between lesbian and aesthetic emerges during the 1970s and 1980s.

There are many strands of poetic engagement in the twentieth century. Different groupings of poets, or “schools of poetry,” characterize the century as well as different formal engagements and different modes of circulation. This is not a comprehensive overview of poetry in the twentieth century, and lesbians have not been central to all of the strands of poetic engagement. Lesbian poets, however, are significant in three strands of poetic engagement in the twentieth century, and lesbian poets are crucial to aesthetics and aesthetic innovation during the twentieth century. Lesbian poets play significant roles

in imagism, modernism, and what I call, after Ron Silliman, mid-century, School of Quietude poetics.⁷⁶⁴

Imagism is a poetic movement in the 1910s. The focus of imagism is on a single image in a poem and the deep engagement with that image. Imagist poems are often brief and highly charged with emotion that derives from a central image. The beginning of Imagism is often credited to Pound, who marked up a poem by H.D. and labeled her “Imagiste”⁷⁶⁵ This is one origin story, and one that situates H.D., an openly bisexual poet, as central to Imagism. The strongest advocate for Imagism, however, was Amy Lowell. Lowell used her personal wealth and charisma to spread the ideas of Imagism and the poetry of Imagist poets. Lowell was an aggressive and unrelenting champion of imagism. Lowell is also open about her lesbianism throughout her life. If H.D. was the aesthetic innovator of Imagism, Lowell was the material advocate and popularizer of the movement. Both Lowell and H.D. organized their intimate and erotic lives with female partners at the center. Lesbianism and bisexuality are important aspects of their biography and, particularly for Lowell, of their artistic expression. Yet rarely is the story of Imagism a story of the contributions of queer women to literature or literary history.

⁷⁶⁴ Silliman uses “School of Quietude” on his blog as a way to examine power in literary history. Silliman attributes the embrace of the poets of the School of Quietude to the erasure of innovative and experimental poets including the Objectivists. A succinct definition of “School of Quietude” and how Silliman uses it to analyze power is here: <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2010/07/i-know-whenever-i-use-phrase-school-of.html> (accessed 5 January 2012). Lesbians also play an important role in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, an important consideration that I regret is outside of the parameters of my study.

⁷⁶⁵ See for example the website of the American Academy of Poetry, <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5658>.

Similar to Imagism, Modernism is framed in origin stories that identify Pound and Eliot as its leading practitioners.⁷⁶⁶ In fact, lesbians are involved centrally in the writing, production, and circulation of Modernist texts. Gertrude Stein understood both her poetry and her prose as a part of the Modernist project. Eliot recognized Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* as a "great achievement of a style, the beauty of phrasing, the brilliance of wit and characterisation, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy."⁷⁶⁷ Virginia Woolf is recognized, after many years of obscurity, as a significant innovator of modernist novels. Although Woolf spent her adult life married to Leonard Woolf, she had significant emotional and erotic relationships with women. Origin stories about Modernism often elide the literary contributions of Barnes and Stein as well as the contributions of other lesser recognized poets and novelists, including Gale Wilhelm, Mina Loy, and Angelina Weld Grimke.

In addition to writing Modernist texts, lesbians were critical to the publication and circulation of Modernist texts. Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap edited the influential journal, *The Little Review*, which played a vital role in defining and promoting Modernism.⁷⁶⁸ Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare and Company, who lived her life with her companion, Adrienne Monnier, published Joyce's *Ulysses* and promoted the book

⁷⁶⁶ See for example the website of the American Academy of Poetry, <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5664> (accessed 5 January 2012).

⁷⁶⁷ T.S. Eliot, "Introduction," *Nightwood*, (New York: New Directions, 1937), xvi.

⁷⁶⁸ See Anderson's Autobiography, *My Thirty Years' War* (New York: Horizons Press, 1969).

extensively to ensure its wide circulation.⁷⁶⁹ Lesbians played a prominent role in the curation of Modernism and provided sustained material support of time and money in its promotion and dissemination. In these ways, lesbians were deeply involved in both the aesthetic and material aspects of Modernism.

While Imagism and Modernism were two striking innovations in poetry in particular and literature more broadly, the period after World War II was hardly barren for lesbian writers. Harper & Brothers published a popular trade novel, *Wasteland*, by Jo Sinclair, the pen name of lesbian writer Ruth Seid, in 1946; *Wasteland* was the winner of the Harper Prize. *Wasteland* delves into the “new” study of psychoanalysis through the main character, Jake Brown. Through the novel, Brown struggles to understand his life as a working-class Jewish immigrant and to reconcile himself to the unconventional life of his sister, Roz, and her close, affectionate relationships with other women. While *Wasteland* isn’t itself aesthetically innovative, it is a mainstream novel about lesbianism in the post-war period. During the next two decades lesbianism continues to be an important theme in literature, though not in highbrow or middlebrow literature. Rather, lesbianism figures prominently in popular literature: pulp novels and mass market paperbacks. Lesbian narratives in pulp novels and mass market paperbacks were scandalous, titillating, and part of a complex morality tale for popular consumption.

Mid-century, lesbianism as a theme was not confined to pulp novels, however, nor were lesbian writers confined to obscurity. Lesbianism for mid-century poets was quite ordinary—as long as it did not enter the poetry. The School of Quietude included two

⁷⁶⁹ See Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959) and Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983).

prominent lesbian poets: Elizabeth Bishop and Muriel Rukeyser. The lives of Bishop and Rukeyser are strikingly similar. They were born within two years of one another, Bishop on February 8, 1911 and Rukeyser on December 15, 1913. Rukeyser's first book, *Theories of Flight*, won the Yale Younger Series Prize in 1935, selected by Stephen Vincent Benet. Houghton Mifflin published Bishop's first book of poetry, *North & South*, in 1946. Bishop and Rukeyser died within six months of one another. Bishop died on October 6, 1979; Rukeyser died less than six months later on February 12, 1980. Since their deaths, their work has had very different critical responses.

Both Elizabeth Bishop and Muriel Rukeyser were lesbians; both women's primary physical and emotional relationships and attachments were with other women. Born in the 1920s, how they lived as lesbians was shaped not by the energy of the WLM or the Gay Liberation Movement, but rather by a set of standards for homosexuals shaped by the post-World War II era. Two recent scholarly books illuminate frameworks for thinking about homosexuality in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Margot Canaday traces the crystallization of homosexual identity in the U. S. as concurrent with modern definitions of citizenship and argues that "homosexuality and citizenship are both a type of status that is configured (even, to some extent, conferred) by the state."⁷⁷⁰ Canaday examines how federal bureaucracies of welfare, immigration and the military define homosexual personhood beginning in the 1930s and extending through the 1990s. Rather than embracing a gay liberationist analysis of the closet as a location from which homosexuals must liberate themselves, Canaday asserts that "The closet, after all, was a deliberate state strategy that became increasingly explicit toward

⁷⁷⁰ Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 255.

the end of the century.”⁷⁷¹ The closet emerges as a trope toward the end of the twentieth century; prior to gay liberation, the closet was more amorphous, less certain. Canaday notes, “Its brilliance was in inviting people to pass and then suggesting that they suffered no harm because they could hide.”⁷⁷² For Bishop and Rukeyser, in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, “hiding” their lesbianism had less valence; neither of them hid their intimate relationships with other women. While Canaday examines federal policies in relationship to homosexuals, her work suggests ways that definitions and expressions of homosexuality change during the second half of the twentieth century. How Rukeyser and Bishop lived as lesbians—openly in their personal lives, but in the case of Bishop, muted in her poems—reflects a broader identity construction of homosexuality mid-twentieth century.

Like Canaday, Michael Sherry examines homosexuality in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Sherry considers the presence of gay male artists, particularly musicians and composers, in the U. S. mid-century. Sherry argues that a vast “homintern,” an imagined homosexual international conspiracy in the arts rose in conjunction with America’s global conflicts—World War II and the Cold War—which magnified and defined the contributions of queer artists. . .and shaped a Lavender Scare in the arts.”⁷⁷³ When the Cold War abated, scrutiny of gay men also abated. Focusing on a different field of influence than Canaday, Sherry explores both the openness of homosexuality in the arts mid-century and the anxieties of the broader culture, expressed

⁷⁷¹ Canaday, *Straight State*, 256.

⁷⁷² Canaday, *Straight State*, 256.

⁷⁷³ Michael Sherry, *Gay Artists in Modern American Culture: An Imagined Conspiracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1.

in particular in the media, about homosexuality. These public and private realities about homosexuality shaped how gay men and lesbians lived their lives and negotiated their sexualities in the public sphere. Bishop, even living abroad in Brazil, and Rukeyser witnessed and experienced these evolving anxieties about homosexuality and their consequences on both of them as queer women. Although the poetry of both Bishop and Rukeyser is muted on questions of lesbianism, especially in comparison to poetry from the 1970s and beyond, both of them lived openly as lesbians, particularly by mid-century standards.

The posthumous reception of each could not be more different. Bishop emerged as a beloved poet; Rukeyser teeters toward obscurity. Bishop's work is paltry compared to Rukeyser's; the slim volume of Bishop's complete poems can be read in an afternoon; Rukeyser's *Collected Poems* fill nearly 600 pages. Rukeyser was keenly political, from her first book which won the Yale Younger Poets Prize to her final collection of poems. Bishop eschewed politics in her poetry, and in her correspondence with friends. Since their deaths, Bishop has become revered by contemporary poets and Rukeyser nearly forgotten. Scholarship on Bishop pours out (a quick search of scholarship databases on Bishop's name returns over 4,700 results; Rukeyser returns 1,722) while scholarship on Rukeyser remains thin. Bishop's greater circulation after her death is related to the aesthetic of her work in which her lesbianism is deeply subsumed, while the lesser circulation of Rukeyser's work is a result of the way that her leftist politics, not her lesbianism, are foregrounded. On one hand, this is a simple literary study of posthumous circulation of two poets' work, but the different types of posthumous reception for

Bishop and Rukeyser offers a model to think about how politics and poetry work together in aesthetic and literary appraisals in lesbian-feminist print culture from 1969 until 1989.

This brief narrative about poetry during the twentieth century suggests two things. First, throughout the twentieth century, lesbians were aesthetic innovators. Certainly, lesbians were not the only innovators, but writers such as Lowell, H.D., Stein, Barnes, Rukeyser, and Bishop are all significant canonical figures in American literature; all lived their lives openly as lesbian or bisexual women. Each of these writers innovated differently; more importantly, how they lived their lives as lesbians or bisexual women varied according to their historical and material conditions. This is not surprising; the construction of lesbian public identities is historically contingent. In spite of these different identity constructions, it is important to establish the presence of lesbian poets and writers in literary history and to recognize their aesthetic contributions.

Second, open lesbianism influences literary and aesthetic reception. Narratives about Imagism and Modernism that privilege white male founders secure more currency in literary history than narratives about queer, white female founders. While both Rukeyser and Bishop were open about their lesbianism, given the standards of the time, the leftist, socialist, and political elements of Rukeyser's work marginalize her contemporary reception. Literary critics receive Bishop on the other hand as a master, in part because her work eschews politics and includes very few references to lesbianism and lesbo-eroticism. Thus, to be understood as a lesbian in one's work is to be received over time as lesser than, not important, and/or marginal.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, lesbian-feminists recognized these facts keenly and critiqued the systems of canon-formation for their sexist and homophobic exclusions. On

the whole, they did not want to participate in the systems of canon-making, in the conferral of power and prestige, in aesthetic appraisal. Lesbian-feminists wanted to work in “a realm beyond ranking and comparing.” While the principles of this position are important and must be honored, at the same time, the principles create an ideological double-bind. Participating in the system acknowledges and validates its power; refusing to participate in the system relegates one to the dustbins of literary history. Within the context of lesbian-feminism, women created their own histories and literary icons, embracing early work by Renee Vivien, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and a host of other lesbian writers. On one hand, the bifurcation between lesbian and aesthetic is one that lesbian-feminists themselves advocated as a strategy to highlight the patriarchal underpinnings of literary studies. On the other hand, this bifurcation compromises the future reception of lesbian-feminist poets. Two interventions offer a path out of this double bind: recast literary history with an eye to the significant aesthetic and material contributions of lesbians, a strategy that I have engaged in this section and which I continue in the next sections by examining anthologies and recovering the aesthetic contributions of lesbian-feminists.

Reading the Norton Anthologies

Anthologies are one important site of literary canonization.⁷⁷⁴ To examine how lesbian-feminists and lesbians fare in contemporary canonization, I examined three Norton anthologies: *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, and *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*.

⁷⁷⁴ Paul Lauter, among many others, interrogates the process of canon building as well as the role of anthologies in numerous articles, many of which are collected in the Part I of *Canons and Contexts*, “The Canon and the Literary Profession,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Teachers use a wide array of introductory anthologies; I selected Norton Anthologies because they are recognized as the most influential and widely used literature anthologies in undergraduate education. To ensure that I examine a range of modes of canonization, I include three anthologies. Two anthologies, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* and *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, are devoted exclusively to poetry in English, each with different time frames shaping the selection of the materials. Both of these anthologies include poetry from a variety of countries, though the bulk of the poets are from the United States. One anthology, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, is devoted to American writers; it engages in nationalist work to define an American canon. While these three anthologies provide only a slice of data about the canonization of lesbian and lesbian-feminist poets, I believe that the conclusions drawn are representative.

The process of selecting work to include in anthologies is challenging. A number of factors constrain what ultimately appears in an anthology. Anthologies draw on the expertise of the editors: a single editor, a small group of editors, or a larger editorial board. Literary scholarship informs editors' selections, both their own scholarship and the body of scholarship available and in circulation. While technology makes scholarship more widely available, it also creates additional challenges. The availability of a large body of scholarship creates new constraints, particularly individual's time and attention to attend to it. For some lesbian writers, the dearth of scholarly attention to their work renders them less visible for consideration for inclusion in anthologies. There are also constraints on anthologies outside the control of the editor or editors. The budget allocated by the publisher for permissions influences not only which authors editors

include but also which works editors include by an individual authors. In addition, rights to reprint work can be difficult or impossible to secure, particularly in the twentieth century while subject to copyright. In short, I do not wish to suggest that editors of these anthologies make conscious sexist, racist, or homophobic exclusions. Rather, this analysis provides data to think critically about how lesbians and lesbian-feminists fare in contemporary canonization processes.

First, a word about methodology. For each anthology, I counted the total number of authors included in the volume; I then counted how many of them are women, how many of them are people of color, and how many of them are queer.⁷⁷⁵ I did not count or consider the number of individual works representing writers or the number of pages devoted to each writer. While these may provide more granular analysis about overall representation, I do not wish to count the number of angels on the head of a pin. I am interested in representation broadly. For lesbian poets, I examine what poems are included and what poems are excluded as a way to think about how work that deals explicitly with lesbianism and lesbian sexuality is included or excluded.

The editors of the largest anthology, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, organize it into five volumes.⁷⁷⁶ I examined only *Volume E: American Literature Since 1945*, given the chronological parameters of my concern.⁷⁷⁷ *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* includes a wide range of literary writing—poetry, fiction, drama,

⁷⁷⁵ I use queer to include lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgender people.

⁷⁷⁶ Nina Baym and Robert S. Levine, general editors, Wayne Franklin, Philip F. Gura, Jerome Klinkowitz, Arnold Krupat, Mary Loeffelholz, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, and Patricia B. Wallace, editors, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Eighth Edition, New York: W. W. Norton, 2011.

⁷⁷⁷ An analysis of the full collection certainly would yield interesting data.

public speeches, and personal writing. All of the volumes are organized chronologically by the birth year of the author. *Volume E* begins with Stanley Kunitz, born in 1905, and ends with Junot Díaz, born in 1968. In addition to the presentation of individual authors with a selection of work by each author, there are two special sections in *Volume E*, one on “Postmodern Manifestos” and the other “Creative Nonfiction.”

Of the ninety-five authors included in *Volume E*, thirty-five are women (36.8%) and of those, eight are lesbians or bisexual women (8.4%). Thirty-two of the authors are people of color (33.7%), with four openly gay male authors among that cohort. Within the “Postmodern Manifestos,” of the eight excerpts, two are by women (25.0%) and one is by a person of color (12.5%). Within the “Creative Nonfiction” section, of the seven authors, four are women (57.1%) and three are people of color (37.5%).

Many of the women poets in this anthology were published early in lesbian-feminist print culture, including Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sharon Olds, Alice Walker, Joy Harjo, and Ursula K. LeGuin.⁷⁷⁸ Bishop makes a prominent appearance with eleven poems, including her most anthologized poems, as does Gwendolyn Brooks; Muriel Rukeyser is not included in this anthology. The two new women poets added to this edition of the anthology are Sharon Olds and Kay Ryan. Olds published in feminist periodicals early in her career, and, although Kay Ryan did not publish in lesbian-feminist periodicals, she was the first openly lesbian United States Poet Laureate. The selections from both Rich and Lorde elide the explicit lesbian sexuality of their work. The editors include two poems from Rich’s earlier work, “Snapshots of a

⁷⁷⁸ The appearance of an author in lesbian-feminist print culture is not an indication of the author’s sexual orientation. Lesbian-feminist publications published work by women of all sexual orientations. The appearance is indicative of an author’s alliance with feminism.

Daughter-in-Law” and “Diving into the Wreck,” as well as more recent work, but most of her explicitly lesbian work, like “Twenty-One Love Poems,” is not included. Lorde’s work emphasizes her intersectional identities as an African-American woman and mother.

The second anthology I examined is the fifth edition of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*.⁷⁷⁹ This anthology covers poetry from “Caedmon’s Hymn” and *Beowulf* to contemporary poems by Glyn Maxwell, Simon Armitage, and Greg Williamson. This anthology has 335 individual authors.⁷⁸⁰ Of these there are seventy-one women (21.2%). I wondered if the anthology included more women writers from the twentieth-century. It does not. In the anthology, 168 authors were born in the 20th century; thirty-eight women of them are women, or 22.6%. Thus, there is not a significant increase in women poets represented when examining only the twentieth-century. Women are represented at just over twenty percent throughout the anthology. The representation of women writers in earlier time periods in this anthology is a testament to the work of feminist literary critics in recuperating women writers from a wide range of historical periods in United States literature.

The Norton Anthology of Poetry includes a selection of work by both Elizabeth Bishop and Muriel Rukeyser as well as May Swenson. Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde are the only contemporary lesbian-feminist poets included, though other feminist poets

⁷⁷⁹ Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Full Fifth Edition, New York: W. W. Norton, 2004.

⁷⁸⁰ I excluded unattributed selections in the anthology such as Riddles and Anonymous Lyrics.

are included, like Margaret Atwood, Jorie Graham, Carol Ann Duffy, Fleur Adcock, and Eleanor Wilner.

The third anthology I examined was *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*.⁷⁸¹ This anthology focuses on poetry in English.⁷⁸² The anthology offers a wide selection of each poet's work and is divided into two volumes, *Modern Poetry (volume 1)* and *Contemporary Poetry (volume 2)*. I examined *Contemporary Poetry (volume 2)*. The volume contains 124 poets; forty-one of the poets are women (33.0%) and thirty-one are people of color (24.8%). There are fourteen poets (11.3%) in the anthology who are openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In particular in this volume, there are substantial selections from Elizabeth Bishop, May Swenson, Muriel Rukeyser, Adrienne Rich, including "Twenty-one Love Poems," Audre Lorde, and Marilyn Hacker, though not her most erotic poetry.⁷⁸³

The paltry representation of women in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* gives me pause. What message do the editors transmit to students and scholars in a collection that is less than twenty-five percent women writers? Perhaps Woolf's observation in *A Room of One's Own* is accurate, "if we live another century or so. . .and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own. . .then the opportunity will come and the dead poet

⁷⁸¹ Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Claire, editors, *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, Third Edition, New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.

⁷⁸² I note that, while not part of my project, an analysis and critique of this volume through the lens of the national origin of poets included would be an interesting and rich examination.

⁷⁸³ The first volume contains a robust selection of poems by Gertrude Stein, including some of her most lesbo-erotic poems.

who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down."⁷⁸⁴

But we are inching to her imagined future, and while recent achievements by women poets are proving Woolf's prescience, the representation in anthologies like *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* demonstrate more absence than presence. Moreover, I find it striking that two of the three contemporary anthologies include women as one-third of the overall anthologized authors. It seems uncanny. I do not know if W. W. Norton as a publisher has a policy about the overall inclusion of women and people of color in their anthologies, but the recurrent percentage of women included, one-third, seems too convenient.

This observation drove me back to my own college textbooks from the late 1980s. I examined the second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, published in 1988.⁷⁸⁵ The second edition is a single volume. I examined both the full volume and half of the volume, beginning with Olson, to have an accurate comparison with the third edition which is expanded to two volumes. In the second half of the second edition, there are eighty-one poets, of whom thirty are women (37%). There are more women in the third edition, forty-one, than in the second edition, thirty, but women represent a higher percentage, thirty-seven percent (37%) in the second edition than in the third edition (33.0%). Before Olson, there are sixty-eight poets; nine of whom are women (13%). Thus, the overall book contains 149 poets, thirty-nine of them are women (26%). The expansion of *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* into two

⁷⁸⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1928, 1957), 117-118.

⁷⁸⁵ Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, editors, *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988). This is a text I used as an undergraduate.

volumes for the third edition brings more poets—and more women poets—into the collection, but the overall percentage of women *decreases* by four percent (4%). While this decrease seems small and may be invisible to readers who only note that there are more women in the new edition, it raises the question, when will we have anthologies with gender parity?

What do these anthologies tell us about lesbian poets? Lesbian poets are included—and some of their most lesbo-erotic poetry is also included. Moreover, the biographical entries of the poets included details that make the lesbian poets visible and recognizable; this is particularly important for young students newly encountering the material. Although lesbian poets and writers are represented in the anthologies, including some writers whose work first circulated publicly through lesbian print culture, some of the most beloved poets to lesbian readers during the 1970s and 1980s are excluded. As just one example, the absence of any selections from Judy Grahn’s work in any of these anthologies is palpable; Grahn may be one of the most powerful voices not only of feminism and the WLM but of working people. The omission of Grahn, and other poets whose work came into prominence through the WLM, including Joan Larkin, Susan Griffin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Pat Parker, Stephanie Byrd, and Cherrie Moraga, demonstrates the rapidity with which lesbian writers are forgotten. Honor Moore’s new anthology from the Library of America, *Poems from the Women’s Movement*,⁷⁸⁶ returns many of these poems to print and provides their work with greater circulation, but they still remain excluded in basic classroom texts, an important tool of canon-making.

⁷⁸⁶ Honor Moore, *Poems from the Women’s Movement* (New York: Library of America, 2009).

Reading to find lesbians in general anthologies is daunting work. General literature anthologies are not conceived or designed for reading with granularity and particularity on any issue. Anthologies are designed by editors and publishers to expose students to broad traditions of genre and national literature. Although anthologies introduce diversity, in the broadest sense of the word, they also organize and regularize the cacophony of voices within them through both the broader intellectual narratives of the anthology and through typography, design, and presentation. In spite of this, finding lesbians and lesbian poetics in contemporary anthologies is possible. Moreover, anthologies change over time and through new scholarly attentions. Yet, from my analysis, changes in regard to the inclusion of women writers are not dramatic. Given that feminist literary criticism has been a significant engagement of literary scholarship for the past forty years, and that women writers are still only a third of the authors in anthologies, at best, literary criticism may not be enough. The data of this anthology analysis suggests that we need a barricade moment in literary studies to bring gender parity to anthologies. One-third—or less—is simply adequate. The paltry representation is a failure of editors and publishers and a disservice to students and scholars.

Lesbian-Feminist Aesthetes

Imagine a middle-aged white man, between forty-five and fifty-five, about five feet, four inches tall, weighing about 125 pounds. He stands before you in brown Bruno Magli shoes; he is wearing slighted faded Levis that fit his frame perfectly and a pressed, buttoned-down, lilac shirt. His hair is coiffed, treated with a small amount of “product,” but it ripples when he passes his fingers through it. If you speak to this man, he may talk

about fashion or modern dance or contemporary art. Is the man who stands before you, whom you certainly recognize as a gay man, an aesthete?

Imagine a young Latina, between twenty-five and thirty, about five feet tall, lithe, with the frame of a dancer. She stands before you in a warm-up suit, fire engine red, with worn sneakers. She spends much time in silent reverie, but occasionally the ideas and energy burst forth: the last choreographer she worked with, a new project she is working on with a small dance collective downtown, the first time she went to the ballet as a young child. She tells you about a poetry reading she went to last week at a dingy coffeehouse in the neighborhood where she lives. *It was alive, I tell you, alive! One woman in particular, she was fierce and angry and tender. I want to take those poems and set them in motion. I want to make a dancer out of her; I want to make a dance from her words.* Is this woman who stands before you, whom you certainly recognize as a lesbian, an aesthete?

Imagine a young African-American woman, between thirty and forty, almost six feet tall; she may tower over you. She wears a small gold stud earring in her nose and a gold loop pierces the top of her ear; beyond these markers, though, she dresses conservatively: a tailored, pinstriped suit, black pumps with a low heel. Today, she is tired from the two hundred young children who visited the library this afternoon where she works. First, story hour for the youngest ones, then crafts for the third and fourth graders, then a book-making class for middle schoolers. She is too tired to speak to you—the children, the activities, the long day. She pulls out a book from her leather satchel. It is old, not quite tattered, but delicate. She holds it carefully. Is it? Could it be? A first edition of *Annie Allen*? Would she carry a book that valuable in her bag? Take it out to

read in a quiet moment at the end of the day? Yes, you nod, yes, quite possibly, it is. Is this woman who stands before you, whom you certainly recognize as a lesbian, an aesthete?

Imagine an older African-American man, between seventy and eight. He stands before you with a black enamel cane. He is wearing a brown suit. A silk cream, collarless shirt beneath the double-breasted blazer. Beneath his sleeve, a gold watch; beneath his pants, silk socks. He is happy to discuss the recent death of Derrick Bell or the news of that young man, Eric Michael Dyson, teaching a class at Georgetown about Jay Z. He would also be happy to discuss the music of Ella Fitzgerald or his recent trip to Israel and the Wailing Wall. Is this man, whom you clearly recognize as gay, an aesthete?

Now imagine a middle-aged white woman, somewhere between forty-five and fifty-five, about five feet, four inches tall, weighing about 175 pounds. She stands before you solid in Birkenstock sandals; she is wearing billowy purple cotton pants and a navy blue long-sleeve t-shirt. Her hair is closely-cropped to her head, or it is long and tied back in a single pony tail. She is wearing two or maybe three silver rings. She doesn't wear make-up or contact lenses, preferring somewhat thick plastic glasses with an extra pair of readers hanging around her neck. She carries a fabric bag filled with books and random papers, it has the logo of an environmental or human rights non-profit organization on it, but it is fading from many cycles through the laundry. If you speak to this woman, she is as likely to discuss human rights in China, the outsourcing of labor for the construction of electronics, a recent novel by Sapphire, or *The Book of Mormon* on Broadway. Is the woman who stands before you, whom you certainly recognize as a lesbian, an aesthete?

When I say aesthete, what image comes into your mind? How is it gendered? How is it racialized? What, if any, is the sexual orientation of the person in your mind's eye?

All of these imagined people are aesthetes. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an aesthete is “one who professes a special appreciation of what is beautiful, and endeavours to carry his ideas of beauty into practical manifestation.”⁷⁸⁷ This definition certainly describes many of the lesbians who were publishers and promoters of lesbian print culture from 1969 until 1989. Individually and collectively, they professed a special appreciation for what is beautiful; they worked to manifest beauty in the everyday lives of the women around them.

Our contemporary notion of who is an aesthete—and of what are aesthetics—is narrowly defined by a set of issues and concerns deeply entwined with what Woolf calls highbrow and with what Rancière identifies as a “specific regime for the identification of art.”⁷⁸⁸ These myopic definitions of aesthetics—and of aesthetes—exclude the very actors that I care about the most. In fact, the meanings of aesthete and of aesthetics are expansive. They suggest the ability to apprehend through objects (books, poems, visual art, performance art) experiences in the world. The labels, aesthetes and aesthetics, like all labels, are significant. Rather than eschewing these labels, I am interested in the bold reclamation of them as a strategy to create more space for aesthetic appraisals and appreciations of lesbian print culture. Lesbian-feminist writers and publishers in the 1970s and 1980s were aesthetes. Moreover, lesbian-feminist publishing made a number

⁷⁸⁷ Second edition, 1989; online version September 2011. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3236>>; accessed 31 October 2011. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1884.

⁷⁸⁸ Rancière, *Aesthetics*, 8.

of important aesthetic interventions. Lesbian-feminist writers and publishers understood their work in relationship to the sensorium, including, but not limited to beauty and sublimity. Seeing lesbian-feminists as aesthetes engages a different type of appreciation for their work. In addition to seeing the work as political and having material impacts, for which I have argued rigorously in previous chapters, seeing lesbian-feminist work as aesthetic engages in a long artistic tradition of understanding the effects of the work on the sensoria of viewers. Finally, understanding the aesthetic contributions of lesbian-feminist writing and publishing opens more possibilities for the work produced by lesbian writers to engage in systems of canonization. Appreciating the aesthetics of lesbian print culture and making the aesthetics of the work visible in a greater sphere makes the work of lesbian print culture more apprehensible to a broad group of readers.

The aesthetic innovations of lesbian print culture fall into three categories. First, lesbian writers and publishers defined a lesbian-feminist aesthetic through what was published. Second, lesbian-feminist publishers articulated an aesthetic through the books themselves. Third, the circulation of the books and objects of lesbian print culture was itself an aesthetic intervention. Lesbian-feminists invested in aesthetic standards that they created in order to engage the sensoria of lesbian-feminist readers. Ultimately, the aesthetics of lesbian print culture have been adopted and circulated outside of lesbian print culture—a phenomena I discuss in the final two sections of this chapter.

Three lesbian-feminist aesthetics emerge from material published by lesbian print culture from 1969 until 1989: accessibility, writing explicitly about lesbian sexuality, and using experience as a strategy to develop lesbian-feminist theory. Each of these characteristics are not merely descriptive of the work from lesbian print culture, but are

aesthetic markers that emerge from the work to reorder the sensible and rewrite notions of place and space through artistic media.

Lesbian-feminist publishers valued clear, accessible language. Accessibility, however, does not mean plain, or simple, language. Sometimes accessible language is plain, reflecting the diction and structure of language spoken among women gathered together. Accessibility, however, did not mean language denuded of the complexity and beauty that characterizes literature. The language of Pat Parker's poetry or Judy Grahn's poetry or Stephanie Byrd's poetry is language that might be overhead by women speaking casually among one another, but it is also language that is artfully crafted to give this illusion.

Accessibility also refers to accessing feminist consciousness. When lesbian poets and critics write about accessibility in the 1970s and 1980s, they reference the ideas of breaking down barriers to reveal a new consciousness that would transform the world. Lesbian-feminist writers and theorists believed that, through feminist work, readers could access difficult and complex visions of a new feminist work. For example, throughout *The Cook and the Carpenter*, June Arnold employs a new system for pronouns in the text, the ungendered words "na" and "nan."⁷⁸⁹ These new pronouns interrupt language and invite readers to reflect on how hegemonic gender is in our most basic forms of thinking and writing. These new pronouns create challenges for readers encountering *The Cook and the Carpenter*. For readers, it is unsettling to integrate these pronoun appellations. The text is not easy to read and understand, but for lesbian-feminists in the 1970s it was accessible; it allowed them to access a new, feminist consciousness.

⁷⁸⁹ Marge Piercy created a similar set of ungendered pronouns in her 1976 novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

Unfamiliarity makes *The Cook and the Carpenter* difficult and even at times unclear; in spite of this, the novel is not inaccessible. For contemporaneous readers, the novel was accessible; it enabled them to access feminist consciousness.⁷⁹⁰

Sally Miller Gearheart's *The Wanderground* is another book that forges feminist consciousness.⁷⁹¹ *The Wanderground*, subtitled *Stories of the Hill Women*, is a futuristic novel that is both fantasy and apocalypse. The fantasy is the world of the Hill Women, a separate, woman-only community; the apocalypse is the city, from which the women have retreated, which is devastated from war or an environmental catastrophe. The Hill Women retreat because it is their only chance for survival. The Hill Women have special powers of intuition and healing. Gearheart animates these special powers in two ways: she tells stories about relationships between and among the women and she describes the special characteristics of the community through compound words: mindchannels, listenspread, frostbreaths, and fallaway, to give a few examples. These compound words have simple, common words as their root, but when combined together they elicit new meanings that correspond with the benefits of a feminist, separatist utopia. The compound words in the text are not limited to the special powers of the Hill Women.

⁷⁹⁰ I note here that many lesbian-feminists believed that feminist, or lesbian-feminist consciousness, was something that could be accessed through the imaginative creations of language acts. In some ways, these women understood feminist consciousness as already always existing and facilitated into being through language acts. I state this in Butlerian, post-modern language, although they did not understand it in that way. Many lesbian-feminists believed that the literary creations of women like Arnold in *The Cook and the Carpenter* accessed an existing feminist world as opposed to creating a feminist future through the experience of readers encountering the text. It seems to me that lesbian-feminists beliefs during the 1970s and 1980s, the sinuous relationship between the past, present, and future, and the theoretical insights of post-modernism offer dynamic but not irreconcilable tensions as they reside restively together.

⁷⁹¹ Sally Miller Gearheart, *The Wanderground* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1978).

Gearheart uses compound words throughout the text to describe landscapes, experiences, directions, and feelings. The effect of this language is a layering of meaning which sometimes creates more specificity and other times creates confusion. Similar to reading *The Cook and the Carpenter*, entering the world of *The Wanderground* requires readers to engage with Gearheart to create imaginatively the women-only community. In *The Wanderground*, the work of accessing the future feminist world is shared work between Gearheart as the author and individuals as readers. Thus, while I describe clear, accessible language as an aesthetic principle of lesbian print culture, accessible language is rich with complexity and multiple meanings, and it is rooted in a vision of feminist social change.

The second aesthetic value that emerges from lesbian print culture is the primacy of lesbian bodies, lesbian sexuality, and lesbian eroticism to aesthetic experience. Explicit writing about bodies and sexuality had different meanings. Educational and political intentions are common in publishing explicit work about women's sexuality. For instance, Joani Blank's book, *The Playbook for Women about Sex* (Down There Press, 1975), educated women about sexuality with an explicitly feminist political message. Aesthetic meanings were as important as educational or political meanings, particularly in relationship to lesbian sexuality. Writers and publishers profiled lesbians' writing and art about lesbian bodies, lesbian sexuality, and lesbian eroticism. In 1976, *Sinister Wisdom* featured a photograph by Tee Corinne of two nude women with one in a wheelchair; they reprinted the image as a poster which became a best-seller in a variety of feminist bookstores. Similarly, Corinne's *The Cunt Coloring Book*, a series of line drawings of female genitalia, was a success for Corinne. *The Cunt Coloring Book*, which

literally provided templates for women to color on and explore the many varieties of female genitalia, is one example of how lesbians explored lesbian sexuality through book arts. The purpose of this publishing was not to titillate lesbian readers, though certainly sometimes it did, but to present lesbian sexuality as a subject worthy of consideration in high art.

Poets wrote about explicitly about lesbian sexuality throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Two examples demonstrate how lesbians used the traditional sonnet form—with all of its aesthetic associations with male/female dyads and courtly love—to create space within traditional poetic forms for lesbian sexuality and desire. For example, consider Joan Larkin’s “‘Vagina’ Sonnet” published in her first book, *Housework*:

Is “vagina” suitable for use
in a sonnet? I don’t suppose so.
A famous poet told me, “Vagina’s ugly.”
Meaning, of course, the *sound* of it. In poems.
Meanwhile, he inserts his penis frequently
into his verse, calling it, seriously, “My
Penis.” It is short, I know, and dignified.
I mean of course the sound of it. In poems.
This whole thing is unfortunate, but petty,
like my hangup concerning English Dept. Memos
headed “Mr./Mrs./Miss”—only a fishbone
in the throat of the revolution—
a waste of brains—to be concerned about
this minor issue of my cunt’s good name.⁷⁹²

Larkin addresses both political and aesthetic issues in the poem in deeply entwined ways. The central trope of the suitability of the word vagina for a sonnet alludes to the aesthetic question of what is appropriate to write about in poetry. Larkin then puns on the visuality and sonic qualities of the vagina, juxtaposing it literally and metaphorically with penis. The volta in this poem is at the beginning of the final sestet when Larkin declares, “This

⁷⁹² Joan Larkin, *Housework* (Brooklyn: Out & Out Books, 1976), 70.

whole thing is unfortunate, but petty.” She turns her attention then to the question of “English Dept. Memos” and their language of formal address. She describes both the language of formal address, aligned with the use of the word vagina in a sonnet, as “a fishbone/in the throat of the revolution,” suggesting that there are bigger changes afoot for women than their formal appellations and vaginas. This tongue-in-cheek suggestion ends with Larkin’s minimizing the central question, in a Woolfian ironic move, as a “minor issue of my cunt’s good name.” In the conclusion, Larkin substitutes “cunt” for “vagina,” employing a word considered even more vulgar and ugly by some. This substitution asserts Larkin’s power as a poet to name herself and her body parts, both in the sonnet and in the world. By employing a sonnet, Larkin asserts her power as a woman to engage in broader aesthetic questions that include and celebrate women’s bodies.

While Larkin’s sonnet commingles politics and aesthetics, in Hacker’s novel in sonnets *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*, politics are more tangential. The narrative focuses initially on the lust and desire of the lovers. Hacker writes,

Hey, listen, the day when it’s you and me
heart to cunt to heart to cunt, all clear
for me to call and say, ‘Get over here
now, girl!’ and you would with your own key.”⁷⁹³

With these lines, Hacker creates a visual image of lesbian sex, “heart to cunt to heart to cunt,” reusing the reclaimed vulgar word “cunt” to express a visual image of physical lesbian desire. This visual image is animated with the urgency of sex begin new lovers, “Get over here/now, girl!” Hacker reinforces the centrality of lesbian sexuality and the beauty of it through the rhyme scheme in this quatrain. The ABBA rhyme scheme pairs

⁷⁹³ Marilyn Hacker, *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), 19.

the words “me” and “key” in the first and fourth lines and the words “clear” and “here” in the second and third lines. The quatrain resists the end stop of each line; the energy runs through linear enjambment, mimicking the energy of the two new lovers to assume the position of their lust and desire. Through form and craft, Hacker situates lesbian sex within the aesthetic convention of the sonnet as a way to claim the space for lesbian sexuality.

In a later sonnet in the collection, Hacker writes,

First, I want to make you come in my hand
while I watch you and kiss you, and if you cry,
I'll drink your tears while, with my whole hand, I
hold your drenched loveliness contracting. And
after a breath, I want to make you full
again, and wet. I want to make you come
in my mouth like a storm. No tears now. The sum
of your parts is my whole most beautiful
chart of the constellations—your left breast
in my mouth again. You know you'll have to be
your age. As I lie beside you, cover me
like a gold cloud, hands everywhere, at last
inside me where I trust you, then your tongue
where I need you. I want you to make me come.⁷⁹⁴

In this sonnet, Hacker describes lesbian love-making within the constraints of the sonnet form. She describes not only manual and digital stimulation of her lover's vulva and vagina, but also oral stimulation, “I want to make you come/in my mouth like a storm.”

Using the Shakespearean sonnet form to shape her evocation of the action, Hacker also uses the common tropes of literary sonnets: storms, constellations, clouds. Hacker weaves these canonical allusions into her description of lesbianism to demonstrate how lesbian bodies and lesbian sex and desire operate within the registers of human experiences.

⁷⁹⁴ Hacker, *Love, Death*, 21.

From the Hacker and Larkin sonnets, the project of lesbian-feminists to write lesbian bodies and women's bodies with defiant specificity. The effect of this is to situate lesbian bodies as both perfectly ordinary and transcendently aesthetic. Hacker, Larkin, and a host of lesbian-feminist poets work to make space in poetry for lesbian bodies and lesbian sexuality. This content choice, while crucial for both political and personal reasons to poets, is also an aesthetic choice—and an aesthetic intervention into the field of poetry. The explicit presence of lesbian bodies and lesbian love-making also sets the stage for the resistance of receiving lesbian-feminist poetry as aesthetically significant. In the dichotomy that Woolf observes, the body is reserved for the lowbrow; thus, poetry that concerns itself centrally with the body is received as lowbrow. Explicit descriptions of the body in all of its glory cues readers that the work is lowbrow. Woolf's observation that highbrow is yoked to the mind, while lowbrow is yoked to the body, illuminates one of the barriers lesbian-feminist writers from the 1970s and 1980s experience in the aesthetic reception of their work. By unpacking and challenging that dichotomy, lesbian-feminist poetry can be recuperated and appreciated for its aesthetic value.

The third aesthetic value that emerges from lesbian print culture is using personal experience as an aesthetic object and as a site to build lesbian and feminist theory. Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Minnie Bruce Pratt are all classic examples of writers whose work in both poetry and prose explores the nexus of personal experience and theory building with aesthetic intentions.⁷⁹⁵ Since their work has been treated extensively by

⁷⁹⁵ Stacey Young examines Minnie Bruce Pratt in relationship to autotheoretical texts in *Changing the Wor(l)d*; Alexis De Veaux situates Lorde's biography in relationship to her creative output and the generation of feminist and lesbian-feminist theory; Rich's *Of Woman Born* is an example from her *oeuvre* of how her prose used personal experience to build feminist theory.

scholars, I turn to the poetry of Stephanie Byrd, published in two chapbooks, *A Distant Footstep on the Plain* and *25 Years of Malcontent*, to explore this value. Byrd, an African-American poet based in Boston, MA, published these two chapbooks in 1976 and 1981, respectively. Byrd writes forcefully about her experiences as an African-American lesbian exploring many issues and themes similar to those of Lorde and Parker in her work. Byrd's poetry is the site of much theorizing, particularly about the legacies of slavery, the diasporic nature of the African people in the United States, and her intersectional subject position as a woman, African-American, and lesbian. In "Quarter of a Century," Byrd reflects on naming. The poem opens, "I'll never know my real naming/ Never know its origin."⁷⁹⁶ Byrd continues that she was "born into uncertainty and schizophrenia" and "a place where I have no say."⁷⁹⁷ She says she lives "with the ghosts of slaves" and her "body aches from unseen beatings."⁷⁹⁸ She cries "tears of blood" and works

Tilling a field of my brother's
And sister's
Bleeding bodies
And all in the while searching for a naming⁷⁹⁹

She explores the naming through her grandmother, who tells her that "her grandmother's mother was called Smothers."⁸⁰⁰ After exploring the absence of names, Byrd affirms that she has sought names "in strange women's breasts/and between their legs." Byrd posits

⁷⁹⁶ Stephania Byrd, *25 Years of Malcontent* (Boston: Good Gay Poets, 1976), 20.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

that she names herself through the act of lesbian sex. Like Larkin and Hacker, the carnality of the body resonates beyond the physical. The bodies of “strange women” become a corporeal realization of naming oneself as a woman and as a lesbian.

At this point in the poem, Byrd seeks “naming in bones,” which becomes the guiding image of the remainder of the poem. Byrd gathers “bones of past and present/carving them with knives/reading them with bibles/pounding them in rhythms” until she stands up “hoping to be Ezekiel.” In the final stanza, Byrd writes,

Bones say seek my naming in the East
swollen cracked lips tell me to turn home
grandmothers warn me to turn away the alien ways of
what is white
For when these things are connected
Winding serpentine in hieroglyphs and
language
a name long evasive wanderer and prophet
will be written on the stone⁸⁰¹

Throughout this poem, Byrd theorizes naming from the experience of being unnamed as a legacy of racism and slavery and from the experience of being a lesbian. She concludes that she is a wanderer and a prophet, but that her name will ultimately be “written on the stone.” The sonic resonance of stone and bone, the image that dominates the final stanza of the poem, demonstrates permanence, bodily and metaphorically. Byrd theorizes using metaphor, imagery, and allusion in this poem. Her personal voice, grounded in her individual experience, transforms through the poem to a poetic voice, a communal voice, that offers theoretical insight.

In “The Earth’s Poor Relations,” Byrd theorizes the relationship between class and race in the United States. The poem opens:

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

All these maladjustment problems
add up
to one thing
work will get you money
but I seems
to find
that this
this receipt
of pay
isn't enough⁸⁰²

The title sets the intention for the poem, to speak about “poor relations,” and the selection of “the earth’s” poor relations suggests the broad emotional and intellectual reach of the poem, even as it opens with the very particular plight of the speaker of not having enough money. After this opening, the speaker reflects on how there isn’t enough money and “we always feudin” about small amounts of money that are “totally unrelated” when the “need for not 10’s or 20’s/but thousands.”⁸⁰³ Through these lines, the speaker locates herself in a particular place and excavates the conflicts that emerge about money. Someone reminds the speaker of the poem about “how cousin allie/made do on \$40/a month,” which she refutes as being “40 or more years ago.”⁸⁰⁴ Byrd grounds this poem in both a general and a specific location as well as in a particular historical moment. The poem continues, referencing “Andrew Young or Cicely Tyson/ they making baskets of dough,/even millions.”⁸⁰⁵ While many of Byrd’s poems explore the tension between white people and African-Americans, in this poem she excavates class conflicts within the African-American community, using dialect to represent ironically the voice of poor African-

⁸⁰² Stephania Byrd, *A Distant Footstep on the Plain*, 45.

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

American women and demonstrating how these conflicts are both interracial and intraracial.

“The Earth’s Poor Relations” concludes with this stanza:

just to give niggers like me
the chance to print up my own words
but the folks don’t know that
you gots to pay somebody
just to learn to ask right or
you gots to screw and I ain’t talking messing
it’s about your whole body and mind
and I don’t whore for art or money
and I don’t like giving them any more
than I have to to survive
but some how the fights
they break out and we cry
the animals howl along in tune
and my mind can only reach towards
thousands because
the millions would cost us too much⁸⁰⁶

Questions of scale are central to this poem, from the scale of Byrd’s particular location to the earth overall, from the question of \$40 a month forty years ago or \$400 a month today, from “reaching towards/thousands” or “the millions.” The question is: what is the scale, or register, to understand these economic questions.

Byrd’s theorizing through her personal experiences and the personal narratives of the other characters that she introduces in her poems are one dimension of lesbian-feminist aesthetics. The aesthetic elements of her work—the presentation on the page, the use of language that is both direct and to some readers shocking, the imagery and allusion, all work together to create the aesthetic experience of the poem, one which is grounded in Byrd’s personal experience and builds theoretical interventions that explicate

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

her subject position as an African-American lesbian and to explore the production of her art.

In addition to the aesthetic values that emerge from the work of lesbian print culture, two other arena for aesthetic expression emerge: the books themselves and the mechanisms of distribution. Books were aesthetic objects in lesbian-feminist communities. Lesbian-feminist publishers created books that were by their own estimation and by the estimations of their readers beautiful. Perhaps the strongest measure of this beauty was the physical appearance. This beauty was achieved through the combination of visual representations with language. Grahn articulated this as a central value of the Women's Press Collective. While Grahn's words echo Marxist rhetoric about the value of art and literature in revolutionary work, over time, the combination of visual art and language together becomes an aesthetic hallmark of lesbian-feminist print culture. Particularly for publishers of poetry chapbooks, combining art and poems became *de riguer*. The earliest chapbooks of poetry anthologies, *Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution*, *We Are All Lesbians*, and WPC's *Woman to Woman*, begin this dialogue within books between visual art and poetry. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, chapbooks continue to include art and poetry, including books by Susan Sherman, Willyce Kim, and Pat Parker. In the 1980s, publishers like Firebrand Books and Naiad Press value the art and design of their books, with particular attention cover art. Publishers Nancy Bereano and Barbara Grier note that book covers have important marketing value; quite simply, books with better covers sell more. This attention to book covers, however, is also a continued enactment of the lesbian-feminist aesthetic of creating dialogue between words and images in lesbian print culture.

What constitutes beauty in the physical appearance of books, however, operated on two seemingly contradictory registers. On one hand, books that appeared handmade, feminist, woman-made were particularly admired exactly for their rejection of traditional standards in book arts. On the other hand, books that appeared as good as or better than trade publishing books were equally hailed as vital to the lesbian-feminist aesthetic. This dynamic tension shaped the publishing activities of lesbian print culture and enabled a multiplicity of practices. Some publishers worked to “outdo” the patriarchal publishing houses through women’s labor. Other publishers rejected the slick production of commercial publishing and promoted a handmade aesthetic that celebrated and affirmed women’s actions as the creator of the object. Both tendencies are aesthetic values of lesbian print culture.

These two aesthetic tendencies join together to create an ethos that defined the lesbian community as being “by, for, and about women.” This phrase is repeated on multiple flyers describing aspects of lesbian print culture as well as other cultural objects and activities that emerge from lesbian-feminism. The phrase is later adapted by *Lesbian Connection* to define businesses as LOO, Lesbian Owned and Operated. This value of women’s being responsible for all aspects of an object’s production is rooted in economics. Emphasizing something as “by, for, and about women” (or lesbians) suggests building an alternate economy in which women are central and can eschew the patriarchal economy. The phrase worked in both political and economic registers. It was also an aesthetic statement. By suggesting that this idea—by, for, and about women (lesbians)—is an aesthetic principle, I do not diminish the economic aspects of the principle. Rather it is a principle that is both economic and aesthetic; the concatenation of

the two amplifies how this value operated in lesbian-feminist communities. Being “woman-made” and using woman-owned resources through the entire development and supply chain was a point of pride for many lesbian-feminists, including those in book publishing. While many publishers found the model unsustainable over time (both Naiad and Firebrand books used non-woman-owned printers, for example), it is a principle that was significant and has lasting meaning. As an aesthetic principle, describing something as “woman-made” or “lesbian-made” did not simply evoke economics. It stated something about the nature of the object itself. It implied a particular type of beauty. It suggests, like Kantian definitions of beauty, that beauty cannot be understood simply by understanding the tools that create art or the elements within the art, rather, it suggests that beauty is apprehended through the combination of all of these elements.

Finally, lesbian print culture built communities to distribute books, journals, and other objects of lesbian print culture. These communities included bookstores, coffeehouses, conferences, feminist celebrations such as International Women’s Day and other formal and informal lesbian and feminist gatherings. While these communities were an economic engine for lesbian print culture, they were also an aesthetic intervention. For lesbian-feminists, community was an aesthetic object, that is, it was an object and an experience to be constructed in an artful way. Characteristics of the aesthetics of communities include the conscious construction of the community, particularly thinking intensively about who was included and who was excluded; open and transparent decision making processes in which all decisions for the community, and in many cases for the individual, were discussed, debated, and critiqued; and a blend of culture and commerce. The spaces in which lesbian-feminist communities existed—coffeehouses,

bookstores, community gatherings—were arranged in particular aesthetic ways that were collages and mosaics of a larger imagined community. Thus, the distribution communities of lesbian print culture were aesthetic objects of lesbian-feminism. They defined beauty for women through the physical space they created, the affective experience they offered, and the imagined environment of support, nurturance, and solidarity for one's being. Certainly, community as an aesthetic object was not always realized; perhaps more often it existed only as an ideal. Miranda Joseph critiques the fetishization of community, which is an element of community for lesbian-feminists. For Joseph, community is fetishized as a construct that exists outside of the constraints of commodity capitalism; Joseph's work demonstrates the internecine relationship between community and capitalism.⁸⁰⁷ While Joseph's critique is crucial to understanding how community operates in the imaginary realm and how community materializes through economic constraints and contingencies, it is also important to recognize the creation of community as an aesthetic object for lesbian-feminists. For lesbian-feminists, communities, or intentions for communities, are an important aesthetic characteristic of lesbian print culture.

In reading these multiple sites of aesthetic interventions by lesbian print culture, I have mapped many engagements of lesbian-feminists with aesthetics, with the sensorium. These aesthetic engagements offer a way to appreciate lesbian print culture and to recognize the contributions that lesbian print culture made to feminism and to United States culture broadly. This examination also illuminates where and how aesthetics connect with materiality, including material culture, politics, and economics.

⁸⁰⁷ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Rita Mae Brown

In the first chapter, I described Rita Mae Brown as a “chanteuse” of the lesbian-feminist movement. In addition to being enchanting, Brown artistic production and circulation offer one lens for mapping lesbian-feminist aesthetics. In her memoir, *Rita Will*, Brown describes her intellectual foundations, forged at New York University in the English Department and Classics department. She studied classical Latin, Greek, Shakespeare, and Chaucer.⁸⁰⁸ In her writers’ manual, *Starting from Scratch*, Brown provides “An Annotated Reading List” that extends from Caedmon to Anthony Burgess and includes Beade, Malory, More, Donne, Behn, Rosetti, Wilde, Christie, Woolf and scores of other writers.⁸⁰⁹ Brown situates herself as an heir to a long tradition of Western literature and philosophy. Brown also forged herself intellectually through lesbian-feminist activism. These two traditions define the aesthetics of Brown’s work. Brown engaged with material universally hailed as highbrow to adapt and extend it on behalf of lesbian-feminism as a theory, practice, and epistemic position. Brown recognized lesbian-feminists as part of elite, Western intellectual traditions. The subject position of lesbians and feminists, however, marginalized their intellectual engagements. Nevertheless, I argue that Brown’s work in the 1970s situates her—and her intellectual and political comrades—in the aesthetic milieu of high art. The political realities of publishing situate Brown as a middlebrow author. During the 1970s, Brown was an iconic writer in lesbian-feminist communities, known for her beloved books that were a sensation among small presses. Brown’s early poetry, novels, and essays demonstrate her intellectual

⁸⁰⁸ Rita Mae Brown, *Rita Will* (New York: Bantam, 1997), 202.

⁸⁰⁹ Rita Mae Brown, *Starting From Scratch: A Different Kind of Writers’ Manual* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 215-253.

engagements and her easy charisma, inviting in readers from around the United States to her books. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Brown's work moved from independent lesbian-feminist presses to mainstream, commercial presses. Brown's presence in commercial publishing validated the concept of lesbian-feminist publishing: there was an audience and a market for books by and about lesbians. Commercial publishing extended Brown's influence to a much wider audience, but it labeled her work as middlebrow. Epistemologically, it was impossible for a lesbian in the late 1970s and early 1980s to be perceived as part of the intellectual and social elite; lesbians could not be highbrow; they were not vibrant contributors to highbrow culture. Thus, Brown settled quite happily for commercial success and popularity. The commingling of these various aesthetic designations demonstrates how the designation of lesbian influences aesthetic appraisals.

In the late 1960s in New York, Brown was the editor of the newsletter of the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). Brown was one of many lesbians in the organization raising questions about the inclusion of lesbians in NOW's agenda, organizing which prompted Betty Friedan to describe lesbians as a "lavender menace" within NOW. Brown left NOW frustrated with its lack of action to address issues of concern to lesbians. In 1971, Brown moved to Washington, DC, and shortly after the move she met Charlotte Bunch and other feminist activists in Washington. Brown, Bunch, and other women founded The Furies, a lesbian-feminist collective. The Furies published a newspaper in which they articulated many ideas central to lesbian separatism. In her memoir, Brown describes lesbian feminism as "a harebrained idea" that "if women were lesbians, their best energy would go to women; they would become woman-identified instead of identifying with men, who clearly did not have their best

interests as a class at heart.”⁸¹⁰ The Furies were a short-lived formation—active for about eighteen months. The collective lived and acted in accordance with its name. Through the intellectually vibrant and politically active environment of The Furies, Brown formulated many ideas that connect lesbian, feminism, and socialism. In 1976, Diana Press published Brown’s political essays in the book, *A Plain Brown Wrapper*. This collection demonstrates the formative power of lesbianism, feminism, and Marxism on Brown politically and socially.

In addition to how lesbianism and feminism shaped Brown intellectually, her early career as a writer was nurtured by lesbian-feminist publishing, both in journals and in the small press movement. Brown’s work was published in *The Ladder*, *Amazon Quarterly*, and *Sisters*. Her novels were reviewed and she was interviewed when they were released by a variety of publications across the United States and Canada, including *Lesbian Tide* (Los Angeles, CA), *Body Politic* (Toronto, ONT), *So’s Your Old Lady* (Minneapolis, MN), and *Sojourner* (Boston, MA). Lesbian print culture was crucial to the marketing and promotion of Brown’s books; it highlighted Brown as an author and helped her to connect with communities of readers for her creative work. After the success of *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Brown published one other novel with Daughters, *In Her Day* (1976). Brown’s career then moved to commercial publishing, where she was an extraordinary success. Brown has published consistently—novels, memoirs, mysteries, and writing manuals—since the late 1970s. She is a best-selling author of both novels and more recently mysteries, co-authored with her cat, Sneaky Pie Brown. In addition to “chanteuse,” Rita Mae Brown has earned many other monikers: popular author, middlebrow author, and

⁸¹⁰ Brown, *Rita Will*, 265-266.

icon of popular culture. While I do not want to diminish Brown's talents and hard work in relationship to her success, lesbian print culture provided a foundation for Brown's success and her work, even when published by commercial publishers, is one of the legacies of lesbian print culture from the 1970s.

The narrative of Brown's journey from lesbian separatist to popular culture icon is dramatic and embodies the dispersal of lesbian-feminism in broader United States culture. Brown's transformation from lesbian rabble rouser to popular author mirrors some of the political, social, and economic transformations of the past forty years. Two factors shape Brown's career: her writing and her charisma. Clear, easy to read, and engaging prose characterize Brown's writing from her first book of poetry in 1970 to her most recent holiday mystery. From her earliest poems in *The Hand That Cradles the Rock* to her recent Sneaky Pie mysteries, the voice of Brown's writing is chatty and accessible, as well as quirky and offbeat.

To read Brown's entire *oeuvre* is to see the mind of a lesbian-feminist at work. Her feminist commitments, her convictions as an open lesbian, her belief in an economic system that benefits all people, not just the elite, are present throughout her books, though at different registers. Through all of Brown's books is a sensibility about the world, a sensibility shaped by being an outsider who becomes an insider and by being a person born to low-brow circumstances who comes to bask in celebrity and money from personal success. While lesbian-feminists criticized Brown ferociously as the star of her celebrity ascended, notably when she purchased a Rolls Royce and talked about its pleasures to the magazine *Saveur*, Brown continued to speak out and write about the same issues that she began writing about in the early 1970s. Brown writes—and thinks—

as a lesbian-feminist whether she is living in a collective, lesbian separatist house in Washington, DC or a horse farm in Virginia.

Brown's indelible charisma infuses all aspects of her life and career. Early descriptions of Brown as "appealing and vibrant"⁸¹¹ and a person with "ease and wit"⁸¹² continue to be apt. In 2008, *Newsweek* writer Andrea Sachs said of Rita Mae Brown, "No one could ever accuse Rita Mae Brown, 63, of having lived a boring life."⁸¹³ Brown speaks and writes passionately. Early in her life, Brown's politics captured the mind and attention of lesbian-feminist communities, communities she helped to create. As her life unfolded, she continued to write, publish, and garner media attention. Brown's charisma and hard work carried her through a variety of social and political environments, from working for the lesbian-feminist revolution to being an Emmy-award winning writer in Hollywood with Norman Lear, from traveling around the country to sell *Rubyfruit Jungle* to describing her relationship with Martina Navratilova to newspaper reporters and the general public. More than Brown's changing over the course of her public life, the world around her changed.

As much as Brown's career has been driven by her writing and her charisma, the social and political environment has been transformed during the past forty years. Brown helped to create and benefited from these changes. From her earliest days as an activist, Brown openly expressed her lesbianism. Brown's platform changed, particularly in the

⁸¹¹ Ellen Loughlin, "An Army of Lovers," *Lesbian Tide* (April 1973): 11.

⁸¹² Aleida Rodriguez and Claire Krulikowski, "Portrait of Woman as Artist," *Lesbian Tide* (June 1974): 6.

⁸¹³ Andrea Sachs, "Rita Mae Brown: Loves Cats, Hates Marriage," *Newsweek* (Tuesday, March 18, 2008,) <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1723482,00.html#ixzz1w5eDS6h2>.

years between 1972 and 1982. Brown went from speaking out in the NOW newsletter to being interviewed by *The Washington Post* about her relationship with Martina Navratilova. By the mid-1980s, media outlets like *People* and *Time* regularly covered the release of Brown's new books. Brown's willingness to be out as a lesbian is a part of what changed the contemporary reception of lesbians in the United States.

Brown matters to lesbian-feminist aesthetics. Her work—*The Hand that Cradles the Rock* (1971), *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973), *Songs for a Handsome Woman* (1973), and *A Plain Brown Wrapper* (1976)—helped to define lesbian-feminist aesthetics. Brown's bold, defiant presentation of lesbianism influences profoundly how lesbianism is written about by lesbian-feminist writers in the 1970s. *Rubyfruit Jungle*, a classic of popular lesbian literature, provides a template for lesbian writers to respond, rework, and reimagine in subsequent decades. Books like Jeannette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1987), Emma Donoghue's *Stir Fry* (1994) and Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2005) all respond directly and indirectly to the quest of Molly Bolt in *Rubyfruit Jungle*.

I am not arguing that Brown is an authorial candidate for entry into the bastion of high-brow art, into the world where aesthetic appraisals deem her art of the highest form, though I do think that *Rubyfruit Jungle* deserves more examination by literary critics rather than just attention in LGBT Studies and Women's Studies. I am arguing, however, that Brown's career is a consequence of what aesthetic space was available to lesbian writers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The contingencies of commercial publishing shaped Brown's career and reputation as a result of where, when, and how lesbian writers enter publishing. Brown is an example of an open lesbian writer who achieved recognition outside of the literary and aesthetic fields of lesbian-feminism. She is a writer

who has supported herself consistently for four decades by publishing highbrow and middlebrow books. From 1997 through July 2011, *Rubyfruit Jungle* sold 36,619 copies according to Bookscan; Brown's more recent books, *The Purrfect Murder*, sold over 31,000 copies from its release in January 2009 until July 2011, and *Santa Clawed* sold 31,000 copies between November 2009 and July 2011. She has lived simultaneously inside the lesbian-feminist revolution that Arnold, Bowman, Reid, Czarnik, and Bunch imagined, as well as inside mainstream United States popular culture. When Brown began her publishing career, a career as an open, political lesbian could not be imagined. The possibility of a lesbian best-selling author, of a lesbian writing middle-brow books for popular consumption, of taking the lesbian-feminist familiar, a cat, and transforming that into a series that is widely read by lesbians and non-lesbians alike is one that could not be imagined. Brown created it in conjunction with many other publishers, editors, and writers. The fact that today Brown is a best-selling author and a lesbian is a reality worthy of celebration. It marks one transformation of our political, social, and economic environment. Underestimating Brown's achievements is a cruel diminishment of both her work and of the lasting—and transformative—effects of lesbian print culture.

Adapted: Legacies of Lesbian Print Culture

Since 1996, there have been three significant film adaptations of lesbian work by writers whose work originated in lesbian print culture. Anjelica Huston directed the adaptation of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (hereafter *Bastard*) for Showtime, a cable station, in 1996; Lee Daniels directed *Precious*, based on the novel *Push by Sapphire* (hereafter *Precious*) as a feature film in 2009; Tyler Perry adapted Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is*

enuf (hereafter *for colored girls*) in 2010. Allison, Shange, and Sapphire all published work in lesbian-feminist journals; lesbian-feminist presses published their early books. Lesbian print culture nurtured and supported the careers of all three of these writers. The movement of these authors' works, first to commercial publishers and then to film, represents wider distribution of lesbian-feminism and its attendant ideas and ideologies to both lesbian and non-lesbian audiences.

Lesbian-feminism describes a variety of political, ideological, social, cultural, and economic expressions of feminism and feminist alliances. The contexts and meanings of lesbian-feminism evolve during the 1970s and 1980s, but generally lesbian-feminism is an expression of feminist commitments that affirm and celebrate lesbianism. To examine the material and cultural legacy of lesbian-feminism, I offer first a brief history of the movement of books between small lesbian-feminist presses and commercial publishers. I then discuss the early films that emerged from lesbian print culture and the challenges of translating lesbian-feminist work into film. I then discuss each of the books offering a reading of the text in relationship to lesbian-feminism. Finally, I examine how lesbian-feminism translates—or doesn't translate—in the film adaptations.

The study of these three books and their film counterparts suggest three conclusions. First, Robert Darnton's "Communications Circuit," which provides a "general model for analyzing the way books come into being and spread through society," needs an additional node, film, to understand how books are being spread through society today. Second, films offer possibilities and perils for lesbian-feminist books, though on balance the new possibilities that films created outweigh the perils.

Finally, these three books and the film adaptations demonstrate the on-going legacies of lesbian-feminism and lesbian print culture from the 1970s and 1980s.

From Lesbian Print Culture to Commercial Publishers

Although these three texts and the movement of the authors from small lesbian-feminist publishers to trade publishers is notable, the boundary between small presses and commercial publishers for lesbian writers always has been porous. Gertrude Stein's work moved from her small, self-publishing press, Plain Editions, to Harcourt Brace with the book, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Audre Lorde published four poetry books with Broadside Press, a small African-American publisher based in Detroit, MI, before W. W. Norton published her work, beginning in 1976. Rita Mae Brown published two novels with Daughters, Inc. and two poetry collections with Diana Press, then published her subsequent novels with commercial presses. In 1976, Bantam reissued Shange's *for colored girls*, originally published by alta's Shameless Hussy Press. The regular movement of authors and books from small presses to commercial publishers highlights one of the functions of small presses historically: vetting work and authors for larger presses.⁸¹⁴

This vetting process by small presses functions in both aesthetic and economic registers. Aesthetic innovators and experimental writers often find early homes for their work at small presses. Small press publishers need to satisfy fewer editorial tastes (and often only one) in making their selections, and they often have modest sales expectations. The economic risks of publishing for small presses are less dispersed. In addition, often

⁸¹⁴ A similar dynamic exists in music publishing as Geoffrey Stokes documented in *Star-Making Machinery: The Odyssey of an Album* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1976).

publishers value aesthetic rewards over marketplace success. Historically, small presses publish work and nurture audiences to buy the work. When an author has a large enough audience for a trade press to realize profit from the work, often the author moves to a trade press to gain greater visibility and more economic compensation for her work.

Some lesbian-feminist publishers, however, criticize this dynamic. Some lesbian-feminist critics viewed the movement of authors from lesbian-feminist presses to trade presses as an assault by trade publishers on small, feminist presses. June Arnold of Daughters, Inc. wrote that the “finishing press [her phrase for commercial publishers who want to “finish” the women’s movement]. . . does not want the independent women’s presses to survive. Each time he takes a feminist book from us he weakens us all.”⁸¹⁵ The women of Persephone Press, a lesbian-feminist publisher that operated from 1977 through 1983, included a clause in their contracts that they would not sell rights to male publishing houses. Indeed, one value of lesbian-feminist publishing during the 1970s and 1980s is to retain lesbian-feminist authors within lesbian-feminist publishing; authors who publish with commercial presses were treated by some with suspicion and even derision. Thus, my thesis here, that there is value to the porous relationship between small presses and commercial publishers, would be pilloried by many of these historical actors.

Yet, small presses receive benefits from these moves. For a small press struggling to keep up with demand for a popular book, selling the rights for a reprint or mass market edition can ensure the success of the book and the future success of the author—and bring much needed revenue to the small press. The sale of *Rubyfruit Jungle* to Bantam by

⁸¹⁵ June Arnold, “Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics,” *Quest* III, no 1 (summer 1976), 25.

Daughters, Inc. and the sale of *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* to Warner by Naiad Books were economic windfalls for all involved—the lesbian-feminist publisher, the author, and the trade publisher. Lesbian readers benefitted as well; both of these books had wide distribution not only in bookstores but as mass market paperbacks they were in grocery stores, drugstores, and a variety of other retail outlets. They reached a much wider audience through the mass market paperback format from a commercial publisher.

Although I respect the dissent of lesbians about “selling out” to trade presses and agree with many of the critiques, I also celebrate the opportunities that it creates, for publishers, for authors, and for readers. The porous relationship between lesbian-feminist presses and commercial presses cannot be characterized as symbiotic, but these relationships are important for the broader ecosystem of lesbian feminist publishing, and they can be used by savvy publishers to benefit lesbian-feminist publishing. Although the channels between small presses and trade presses have been open for lesbian-feminist authors since the 1970s, the last two decades are unique because lesbian-feminist books move from lesbian-feminist print culture to film. Film brings a much larger audience to lesbian-feminist stories than any format of a printed book.

From Page to Screen

During the 1970s, Rita Mae Brown optioned *Rubyfruit Jungle* for a film, but, although there were reports of its being in production, the film never materialized.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹⁶ In 1977, *Lesbian Tide* reported that the screen play for *Rubyfruit Jungle* was in its second draft and director Joan Tewksbury would direct the film (Majoie Canton, “Casting Begins for Rubyfruit Movie,” *Lesbian Tide* 6, no. 6 (May/June 1977): 13), but by 1979, Brown told *Lesbian Tide* that the producers were still trying to raise money for the film and if they didn’t by August 24, 1980, the rights would revert back to her (Paula Facine and Sharon McDonald, “The Many Faces of Rita Mae Brown,” *Lesbian Tide* 9, no. 3 (Nov/Dec 1979): 4.)

Prior to the 1990s, the most prominent film adaptation of a lesbian novel was Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, adapted to film by director Steven Spielberg. Audiences, however, received *The Color Purple*, as a book and as a film, in the context of Walker's identity as an African-American feminist writer, rather than as a bisexual woman.⁸¹⁷

Donna Deitch made Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* into a film, *Desert Hearts*, in 1986. *Desert Hearts* was an "art house" film with modest distribution. The film was a hit with lesbian audiences, however; when released on VHS, Naiad Press distributed *Desert Hearts* directly to consumers and feminist books through its catalogues.

Translating lesbian-feminist books to commercial films poses two challenges. First, the capital investment to produce and distribute a film is much greater than the capital required to produce and distribute a book. Adapting the work of lesbian authors is an economic gamble because, until recently, mainstream film audiences were not receptive to lesbian characters and plots. Second, in some instances, lesbian-feminist ideas and values expressed in books are lost in film. Themes, particularly lesbian characters and sexuality, central to the written text are muted in film adaptations. This reality, combined with separatist ideas about lesbian-feminist culture, made some lesbian-feminist writers reticent to sign film contracts. Nevertheless, the continued circulation of work that originated in lesbian print culture is an important legacy of lesbian-feminism, and it represents the dispersal of lesbian-feminism in mainstream United States culture.

Lesbian-Feminism in *Bastard*

⁸¹⁷ Evelyn C. White describes Walker's process of embracing her bisexuality (Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 411-413).

Penguin Putnam published Dorothy Allison's *Bastard* during a flowering of lesbian writers in trade presses during the 1990s.⁸¹⁸ Allison's early writing was nurtured by lesbian print culture. Allison was a member of the *Conditions* editorial collective. Lesbian-feminist journals published her early work. Long Haul Press published Allison's first collection of poetry, *The Women Who Hate Me*, in 1983. Firebrand Press published Allison's short story collection, *Trash*, in 1988. Firebrand rereleased *The Women Who Hate Me* in 1991. In 1992, when the commercial publisher Penguin Putnam acquired Allison's first novel, *Bastard*, Allison earned a record advance for the book; Victoria Brownworth reports that Allison received \$37,000 for the book, the "largest advance ever by an out lesbian for a first novel."⁸¹⁹ Even though *Bastard* was published by a trade press, it is a legacy of lesbian print culture.

Bastard is a coming of age story about Ruth Anne Boatwright, "Bone." Bone narrates the novel, telling stories about the first thirteen years of her life. Set in Greenville, South Carolina, Bone and her mother, Anney, live in a world where people work hard but never quite have enough money to pay all of their bills, where memories are long, and where family stories shape one's fate. Anney struggles to create a better place in the world for herself and her two daughters, but in the process, Bone becomes the target of extreme physical and sexual abuse by Anney's second husband, "Daddy

⁸¹⁸ There are many reasons for the relative abundance of lesbian writers in commercial presses in the 1990s, including market demand for books, lesbians or gay men in influential acquiring editor positions at commercial publishing houses, and the strength of the small presses in identifying and publishing books by lesbian writers. Sarah Schulman discusses these dynamics astutely in "To Be Real," the final chapter of *Ties that Bind*.

⁸¹⁹ Victoria A. Brownworth, "On Publishing: Indecent Advances," *Lambda Book Report* 4, no. 8 (January 1995), 49. In September 2001, Brownworth wrote that Allison's advance for *Bastard* was \$60,000 (Victoria A. Brownworth, "Get It in Writing," *Lambda Book Report* 1, no. 2 (September 2001): 5).

Glen.” *Bastard* concludes with a harrowing rape scene; “Daddy Glen” viciously brutalizes Bone. Bone leaves the home to live with her aunt Raylene. At the end of the novel, Anney visits Bone and gives Bone her birth certificate; Anney then leaves Bone with Raylene and returns to her marriage to Glen.

Lesbianism is not a central theme in *Bastard*; poverty, child abuse, child sexual abuse, and illegitimacy are. Lesbians, however, read *Bastard* as a lesbian book. *New York Native*, a gay newspaper, wrote about the upcoming publication of *Bastard*, “Dorothy Allison’s first novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* will appear in April ’92. . . . While it’s impossible to determine from the catalogue copy whether the main character, Ruth Anne Boatwright, is a lesbian, she probably is.”⁸²⁰ In part, lesbians readers assumed that Bone was an autobiographical character. This assumption is not far from the truth. Allison describes her own early life in the essay “A Question of Class”: “I was born in 1949 in Greenville, South Carolina, the bastard daughter of a white woman from a desperately poor family, a girl who had left the seventh grade the year before, worked as a waitress, and was just a month past fifteen when she had me.”⁸²¹ Later in the same essay, Allison adds autobiographical details that mirror Bone’s own biography; when Allison was five, her mother married “the man she lived with until she died. Within the first year of their marriage Mama miscarried, and while we waited out in the hospital parking lot, my stepfather molested me for the first time, something he continued to do until I was past

⁸²⁰ “Publishing News,” *New York Native* (September 1991): 40.

⁸²¹ Dorothy Allison, *Skin* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1994), 15.

thirteen.”⁸²² Allison’s personal narrative and her history in lesbian print culture shaped the reception of *Bastard* as a lesbian novel.

While lesbianism is not a central theme in *Bastard*, there is one significant lesbian character: Bone’s aunt Raylene. Raylene is not revealed as a lesbian until the final pages of the denouement. There are, however, clues about Raylene’s lesbianism earlier in the novel. The first time Anney sends Bone to Raylene’s house to keep her away from Daddy Glen while she works, Bone objects. Bone wants to go with her mother and earn extra money washing dishes at the diner where Anney works. Not realizing Bone’s secret desire, Anney asks Bone, “Did somebody say something to you about Raylene?”⁸²³ Bone asks, “What would anyone say about Raylene?”⁸²⁴ This exchange signals that there may be something “odd” about Raylene—something that would cause people to talk. Shortly after this exchange, Bone tells readers more about Raylene. Raylene “had always been different from her sisters.”⁸²⁵ Butch told Bone “that Raylene had worked for the carnival like a man, cutting off her hair and dressing in overalls. She’s called herself Ray.” Bone observes, she “wore trousers as often as skirts.”⁸²⁶ These details, the clothing, the hair, the name, function as clues to lesbianism for readers trained to decode lesbian characters.⁸²⁷

⁸²² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸²³ Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina* (New York: Plume, 1992), 177.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸²⁷ Barbara Grier, building on the work of Jeannette Howard Foster, wrote extensively about how to decode lesbian characters in fiction and defined a reading practice that

At the end of the book, Raylene comes out to Bone, not in a traditional “coming out” narrative but by telling her a story. Raylene tells Bone about a woman she loved and how she made the woman choose between her and her children. Raylene tells us it was a terrible choice, one that “killed her” and “killed me.”⁸²⁸ By telling Bone this story, Raylene builds empathy in Bone for the choice that Anney faces: leave Glen or leave Bone. Raylene’s revelation that she was in a relationship with a woman is incidental to her broader narrative about the choices women face between their children and love.

Although Raylene presents lesbianism as tangential in her story, as a character Raylene is not tangential in *Bastard*. In fact, Raylene is Bone’s savior. When Raylene discovers that Glen has been physically beating Bone at a family funeral, she tells her brothers, who physically extract revenge against Glen.⁸²⁹ After Glen’s most violent and brutal beating and rape of Bone, which puts Bone in the hospital, Raylene comes to the hospital to rescue her. When Bone is in the hospital, Raylene shoves her way in and comes to Bone, “like a tree falling, massive, inevitable, and reassuringly familiar.”⁸³⁰ Allison invokes a natural image of Raylene as a tree that will shelter and protect Bone. Bone describes herself as opening her mouth “like a baby bird.”⁸³¹ This nature imagery situates Raylene as an “earth mother” figure caring for the vulnerable, birdlike Bone.

influenced readers and writers throughout the second half of the twentieth century and through until today.

⁸²⁸ Allison, *Bastard*, 300.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, 244-247.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

Raylene is also a god-like figure. When the sheriff interrogates Bone, Bone hears Raylene's voice, "awesome, biblical."⁸³² Raylene is powerful. She can intervene and end the brutalities of men: the assaults of Daddy Glen, the verbal assaults of the sheriff, and the insistent questioning of the doctor. Raylene has the power and the authority to stop them all. Metaphorically and literally, Raylene is the only woman who can save Bone from the brutality of Daddy Glen. Bone's mother abandons her, choosing Daddy Glen instead; Raylene rescues her from the hospital and from the sheriff's interrogation. Raylene brings Bone home to nurture her to health.

Reading Raylene, the open lesbian, as both savior and earth mother ties both of these roles to lesbianism. In *Bastard*, Raylene is the person who can care for Bone and save her from the physical and sexual brutality of Glen as well as from the emotional neglect of Anney. In this reading of *Bastard*, Raylene as a lesbian suggests that lesbians are saviors; lesbians are nurturers for women and children; lesbians offer an alternative to the violence of men.

There is another lesbian-feminist reading of *Bastard*, one that invokes lesbian separatism and its theoretical vision for change. Lesbian separatism is a theoretical and ideological position championed by lesbian-feminists; lesbian separatists advocate withdrawal from the hetero-patriarchal culture into woman-centered communities. In these woman-centered communities, lesbian separatists imagined that women could heal from physically, emotionally, and intellectually from the effects of patriarchy and strategize to create new tactics to overcome systemic misogyny and sexism. Lesbian separatists struggled with how to include heterosexual women in their vision for social

⁸³² Ibid., 298.

change. How could straight women be a part of the world of lesbian separatism? Would they eventually betray other women in service to the needs of men?

Allison enacts this anxiety in the plot of *Bastard*. Although we see, through Bone's narration, the pain and anguish that Anney faces with the choices that confront her, in the end, Anney leaves Bone for her husband. For lesbian-feminist readers and lesbian separatists, this plot is a morality play about the dangers of heterosexual women to the feminist revolution. Allison portrays starkly the inability of heterosexual women to stand up to men, even in the face of overwhelming violence against their metaphorical and literal sisters and daughters. Through the characters in *Bastard*, Allison explores women's inability to act in solidarity with women, even when those women are their daughters. While the violence and brutality of Glen is important in the novel, for lesbian readers, especially lesbians interested in a revolutionary lesbian-feminist consciousness, the anguished Anney and her relationship with Bone is the central focus. How could Anney let her daughter be violated emotionally, physically, and sexually by her husband? One answer the novel intimates is the divided loyalty of heterosexual women between other women, particularly their daughters, and men. *Bastard* challenges lesbian-feminist readers to examine their loyalties and allegiances to heterosexual women by animating the dire consequences of heterosexual women's divided loyalties. Allison challenges heterosexual female readers to get their priorities straight and not stay with abusive men.

These are two different and complementary lesbian-feminist readings of *Bastard*. In one reading, Raylene is a lesbian savior and nurturer Bone, helping her escape male violence. In the other reading, a solution to male violence for Bone—and for all

women—is lesbian separatism, the refusal to be with men as suggested by Bone’s life with Raylene. In both of these readings, *Bastard* is a profoundly lesbian-feminist novel.

Bastard: From Page to Cable

Bastard was an extraordinary success for Allison. *The New York Times* included it with the listing of books to “Bear In Mind” and named it one of the best books of 1992 after it was a finalist for the 1992 National Book Award.⁸³³ Director Anjelica Huston optioned movie rights, for \$25,000. That payment, plus the advance for her second novel, *Cavedweller*, which Lisa Cholodenko made into a movie in 2004,⁸³⁴ paid Allison’s debts and a down payment on her house in Guerneville, California.⁸³⁵ In 1996, the cable network, Showtime, released Huston’s film of *Bastard*, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh as Bone’s mother Anney.⁸³⁶ The film generated controversy when Ted Turner refused to air it because of its portrayal of violence. This controversy expanded the original audience for the movie.

In the film *Bastard*, lesbianism is unintelligible. There is a brief discussion between Raylene and Bone about the carnival. Bone says she heard that Raylene ran off to the carnival with a man and then asks Raylene, “How come he didn’t marry you?” Raylene tells Bone, “I did run off to the carnival all right but not for no man. I ain’t never wanna

⁸³³ Award citation: <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba1992.html#.T2YonI77qSM> (accessed 18 March 2012).

⁸³⁴ *Cavedweller*. Dir. Lisa Cholodenko. Cavedweller Productions Ltd., 2004.

⁸³⁵ Alexis Jetter, “The Roseanne of Literature” *The New York Times Magazine* (December 17, 1995).

⁸³⁶ *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Dir. Angelica Huston. Showtime Networks, 1996.

marry nobody. I like my life the way it is, little girl.” For the cable television audience, Raylene is an independent, single woman, not a lesbian.

In the film, the focus of the plot is the brutality of Daddy Glen. In the novel, while there are ample descriptions of the brutality and violence of Daddy Glen, there is more attention to the relationship between Anney and Bone. Ultimately, the novel centers on relationships between and among women—not only Anney and Bone, but also Anney, Bone, and Anney’s sisters. The film centers on relationships between women and men. While the book explores questions of women’s complicity with male violence, the film explores child abuse and sexual assault as violence inflicted by men on women and children.

The film makes one other significant alteration from the book. Bone’s birth certificate functions as an important symbol and subplot in both the book and the film. Anney wants to have Bone’s birth certificate changed from “uncertified,” meaning that Bone was born to an unwed mother and therefore “illegitimate,” to “certified.” Anney’s struggle to have Bone’s birth certificate “certified” is a drama in which Anney, as an individual, petitions representatives of the state for authorization and validation. This quest for state-sanctioned recognition can be understood in a variety of ways. Anney demonstrates her care and concern for Bone’s future through it. Anney also rebels in this quest, demonstrating both her ability to fight for her child and the opposition that she faces from the state to being the mother that she wants to be. Finally, this quest raises questions about how people’s lives are defined by the labels given by the state; as a young child Bone hates the word “bastard,” yet the word marks her indelibly.

In the book, when Anney comes to visit Bone for the last time at Raylene's house, she gives her an "oversized, yellow, official looking, and unsealed" envelop. In it is Bone's birth certificate. At the bottom it is "blank, unmarked, unstamped."⁸³⁷ Anney gives Bone a birth certificate that doesn't label her "illegitimate." Readers can imagine it as a passport to a world where Bone is not labeled unworthy by the state. In the film, Anney also gives Bone the birth certificate, but it is stamped at the bottom "certified." This is a small change, which likely reflects the visual needs of filmmakers. "Certified" is more dramatic than blank space on film. Yet this stamp of approval at the end of the film is misleading. It codifies a binary of certified and uncertified which Allison deftly avoids in the novel. The blank birth certificate of the novel suggests a life for Bone yet to be written; the stamp of "certified" in the film writes an overly optimistic future for Bone.

Films necessarily flatten the nuances of a book, which have more space to develop characters and themes. Moreover, particularly in 1996 to reach the larger audience that film brings, the themes change to speak to a broader, more mainstream, more middlebrow audience. The film, *Bastard*, erases Raylene's lesbianism. Yet, even though there is not explicit lesbianism in the film, a lesbian-feminist aesthetic informs the film. Although the focus of the film is on Glen's unrelenting violence, the story of the violence bears the watermark of lesbian-feminism. Telling the truth about violence against children, the whole naked truth, in an artistic way, expresses an aesthetic value of lesbian-feminism. Bearing empathic witness to violence through the film, the audience, unwittingly, adopts a standpoint from lesbian-feminism. The audience of the film may not understand, as readers of the novel do, the possibilities of lesbian saviors or the exigency of lesbian

⁸³⁷ Allison, *Bastard*, 309.

separatism as a possible alternative to male violence, but they assume an empathic standpoint, enabled by lesbian-feminism, that lets them witness male violence in which they can engage their imaginations to ameliorate it. The power of this lesbian-feminist empathic standpoint is even more evident when considering *Bastard* in relationship to other films about domestic violence such as *The Burning Bed* (1984) and *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991). Certainly, this aesthetic value, achieved through a lesbian-feminist standpoint, it is not apparent to all viewers of *Bastard*, but it is a beginning of a mode of seeing and understanding stories about lesbian lives for mainstream United States audiences. In this way, *Bastard*, introduces lesbian-feminism subtly to mainstream United States audiences.

Lesbian-Feminism in *Push*

Like Allison's *Bastard*, Sapphire's *Push* is a novel that thematically addresses poverty, violence, and sexual abuse. Like Allison's early work, Sapphire's early work was nurtured by lesbian-feminist print culture. Sapphire's earliest writing was published in 1978 in the second issue of *Azalea: A Magazine by Third World Lesbians*. *Azalea*, a periodical for third world lesbian writers and artists based in New York City, regularly published writing by Sapphire through 1983. Two of Sapphire's poems were included in *Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology*, and her stories were published in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *IKON*, *Conditions*, *13th Moon*, *Conditions*, *Heresies*, and *On Our Backs*. In 1994, High Risk Books, a small publisher affiliated with the London publisher Serpent's Tail, published Sapphire's collection of poetry, *American Dreams*. In 1996, Sapphire published *Push* with Knopf. An excerpt from the novel was published in *The New Yorker* in April 1996. Knopf published Sapphire's second poetry collection, *Black Wings &*

Blind Angels, in 1999 and her second novel, *The Kid*, in 2010. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Sapphire was also well-known in New York poetry scenes as a lesbian-feminist and as a slam poet.

Push is narrated by sixteen-year-old Claireece Precious Jones. Precious is pregnant with her second child by her father and learning to read and write for the first time through a caring teacher, Blue Rain, at an alternative school. *Push* is as unrelenting as *Bastard* in its portrayal of violence. Allison explores Anney's inability to choose to protect Bone; Sapphire narrates not only Mary Johnson's, Precious's mother, inability to protect Precious but also Johnson's own sexual abuse of Precious. *Push* confronts readers with multiple forms of family sexual violence. Sapphire offers no easy gender paradigm to understand the violence.

If there is a savior in *Push*, it is Precious's teacher, Blue Rain. Like Raylene, Blue Rain is a lesbian. Throughout the novel, Precious struggles with what to think about homosexuals, particularly in light of her idolization of Louis Farrakhan. Blue Rain reveals her sexuality in an open way, initially via codes for readers cued to recognize lesbians and later openly when confronting the homophobia of Farrakhan. When Blue Rain introduces herself to the class, she says, "I'm here because my girlfriend used to teach here and she was out one day and asked me to substitute for her, then when she quit, they asked me did I want a job. I said yeah and I been here ever since."⁸³⁸ In this introduction, girlfriend may be misunderstood by readers as simply a female friend. In the next paragraph, however, Sapphire slyly reports Precious as appraising another young woman in the class, "a big redbone girl, loud bug-out girl . . . a girl my color in boy suit,

⁸³⁸ Sapphire, *Push* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 45.

look like some kinda butch.”⁸³⁹ Precious’s ability to recognize lesbians only as butch becomes important later when she learns that Ms. Rain is a lesbian.

In Ms. Rain’s class, Precious reads Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and identifies with Celie, the protagonist in *The Color Purple*, “except I ain’ no butch.”⁸⁴⁰ By juxtaposing Precious’s negative thoughts about lesbianism and her readerly identification with Celie, Sapphire demonstrates how lesbians are appropriate role models for young women. Sapphire stages Precious’s realization about Ms. Rain’s lesbianism along with her reconsideration of Farrakhan. From the beginning of the book, Precious shares her admiration for Farrakhan, but Ms. Rain confronts Precious about Farrakhan. Precious reports, “Miz Rain say Farrakhan is jive anti-Semitic, homophobe fool.”⁸⁴¹ Precious continues, “Just when I go to break on that shit, go to tell class what Five Percenters ’n Farrakhan got to say about butches, Ms Rain tell me I don’t like homosexuals she guess I don’t like her ‘cause she one.” Precious is shocked by this revelation. She thinks, “I was shocked as shit. Then I jus’ shut up.” She decides, “Too bad about Farrakhan. I still believe allah and stuff,” but she relinquishes some of her idolization of Farrakhan.⁸⁴² Through this intertwined narrative, Sapphire suggests that education is an important way to overcome homophobia.

Sapphire’s *Push* does not simply extol the value of literacy and education; Sapphire also narrates the development of Precious’s consciousness through Precious’s own voice.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., 76.

⁸⁴² Ibid., 83.

Precious confides, “Ms Rain say homos not who rape me, not homos who let me sit up not learn for sixteen years, not homos who sell crack fuck Harlem. It’s true. Ms Rain the one who put the chalk in my hand, make me queen of the ABCs.”⁸⁴³ Sapphire sets up a dichotomy between the sources of oppression in Precious’s life as she understand them (rape, lack of a quality education and drugs in her community) and the sources of liberation—literacy—facilitated by an open lesbian. Through Precious’s journey to literacy, Sapphire animates Precious’s growing consciousness about homophobia and her own critical reflections on her life.

Throughout *Push*, Precious learns more about gay and lesbian people, and she comes to accept them. Thinking about her classmate Jermaine, Precious says “She write real in book. Call what she is sexual preference. Say she shouldn’t be judge ‘cause of that” (Sapphire, 97.) Precious develops a language to talk about lesbians, learning terms like sexual preference, and also a way to emotionally respond to lesbians as having shared experiences. Precious continues, “She got hard rock story too. Say mens beat her for what she is. Mother put her out house when she fine out.”⁸⁴⁴ Both Precious and Jermaine have experienced male violence and been thrown out of their homes by their mothers. As Precious says, “These girlz is my friends.”⁸⁴⁵

In addition to lesbianism as something revealed to Precious by Ms. Rain, in *Push*, lesbianism is a site of empowerment for Precious and for all of the young women. “Ms. Rain say we got to write not in our journals. Say each of our lives is important. She got us

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

book from Audre Lorde, a writer woman like Alice Walker. Say each of us has a story to tell. What is a black unicorn? I don't really understand the poem but I like it."⁸⁴⁶ Lesbian-feminist writer Audre Lorde, bisexual writer Alice Walker, and Walker's lesbian character, Celie, offer models for Precious and other young women to understand their own importance in the world—and their own agency. Lesbian writers and lesbian characters model empowerment for Sapphire's characters.

Finally, Sapphire enacts lesbian-feminist ideologies through the narrative in *Push*. Through both Blue Rain as a lesbian character and the story about Precious's being HIV positive, Sapphire demonstrates a shared camaraderie among the poor women of color in Precious's class, the LGBT community, and people with AIDS. Sapphire textually animates a crucial tactic of lesbian-feminism, articulated by Bernice Johnson Reagon in "Coalition Politics," by linking the young women in the Each One, Teach One program, the LGBT communities, and the communities of people with AIDS.

Although Blue Rain can be read as a savior figure like Raylene in *Bastard*, salvation is much more tentative in *Push*. Blue Rain recognizes that Precious, like all human beings, has an interior life and needs to articulate and share that life through language. Like Allison, Sapphire evokes the natural world, the earth mother, in Blue Rain, most notably through her name. At the conclusion of the novel, though, Precious's future is by no means certain—she has a young baby, Abdul, to care for and recently has been diagnosed HIV positive. Precious can read and write at an elementary level and looks forward to teaching Abdul to read and write, but success is not certain for Precious.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 98.

In *Push*, readers follow the narrative of a young, African-American woman whose life is transformed by her lesbian teacher, Blue Rain, and by lesbian-feminist writers, particularly Alice Walker and Audre Lorde. By tracing an intellectual genealogy for Precious, Sapphire situates lesbian-feminism as an ideology that is liberatory for Precious and for her students in the Each One, Teach One program. This is an important continuation of the values and legacies of lesbian-feminism that Sapphire invites readers to the novel to adopt.

From Alfred to Oscar

The translation of *Push* from the novel published by Alfred A. Knopf to an Oscar award-winning motion picture is handled deftly by director Lee Daniels.⁸⁴⁷ Daniel's 2008 adaptation of *Push* to the silver screen with the title *Precious, a Film Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire* received stunning reviews. Daniels, an openly gay director, brings two important interventions to the film *Precious* for lesbian-feminists.

First, Daniels uses the visual medium of film to provoke a reconsideration of what constitutes beauty—and how beauty is represented—for movie viewers. *Precious* is a visually rich film. Through the protagonist, Precious, played by Gabourey Sidibe, a fat, young African-American woman, Sapphire and Daniels invite film viewers to rethink human beauty and locate it not in a narrow space of slender, young, white bodies. Yet as much as Daniel explores beauty, in the end, *Precious* is a gorgeous film about ugly situations. In addition to the portrayal of Precious's mother, Mary Johnson, by singer Mo'Nique, many critics hailed the performance by singer Mariah Carey as Precious's social worker. Carey's performance is one of the compelling examples of how the visual

⁸⁴⁷ *Precious—Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*. Dir. Lee Daniels. Lionsgate, 2009.

medium of film transforms textual media. Carey's physical transformation for the film—from a popular music icon to a Harlem social worker—was stark. Even though Carey would not be recognized as a music icon in the film, she remained a beautiful person on screen. Similarly, the apartment where Precious and her mother live, a dirty, nasty roach-infested apartment, is in the film still dirty, but Daniels bathes the apartment in different colored light throughout the film, suggesting the emotional and affective space of Precious's interior life. The interplay of visual beauty with ugly, even grotesque, emotional situations expands the viewers understanding of the aesthetics of beauty.

Second, Daniels preserves the narrative of *Push* in the film, including Ms. Rain as a lesbian. In fact, in the film, the scenes of Ms. Rain and her partner make Blue Rain even more of a savior figure for Precious. Ms. Rain as an open lesbian, and the ordinariness with which an open lesbian was received in the film, suggests how much things have changed in the past twenty years. Daniels presents a vision of the text and lesbian characters in the text that is congruent of lesbian-feminist visions in which lesbians possess special characteristics for redemption and salvation for the world.

Three Decades of Ladies: A Choreopoem in bars, theatres, print, and film

While Allison's *Bastard* and Sapphire's *Push* have lesbian characters, Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls* does not. Shange's choreopoem is an homage to sisterhood among African-American women. Sisterhood in *for colored girls* is a strategy to overcome the sexism and racism in the world. As the lady in purple explains,

she held her on her lap
the lap of her sisters soakin up tears
each understandin how much love stood between them
how much love between them
love between them

love like sisters⁸⁴⁸

At the climax of *for colored girls*, all the women affirm that their love is “too beautiful, too sanctified, too magic, too complicated, too music to have thrown back on their faces” (Shange, 49.) The women chant and dance together until they “fall out tired, but full of life and togetherness.”⁸⁴⁹ This intimacy that the women find in one another and then in themselves concludes in the chant “i found god in myself & I loved her.”⁸⁵⁰ This mantra is a formulation of both feminist sisterhood and lesbian solidarity in the 1970s configuration that Rich articulates as the “lesbian continuum” and Walker describes as “my mother’s garden.” *for colored girls* expresses lesbianism through the female solidarity. The text, a genre hybrid of poetry, dance, and performance, emerged from a moment of feminism in which lesbianism and feminism commingled in powerful ways.

The material history of *for colored girls* from its early performance at The Bacchanal to its travels to New York and the Broadway stage demonstrates the cultural power that *for colored girls* had as a site to translate feminism and intersectional woman of color identities to theatre audiences. Shange describes the genesis of the choreopoem in her experiences of reading Judy Grahn’s “The Common Woman” poems.⁸⁵¹ She developed the work using the spaces she “knew: Women’s Studies Departments, bars, cafes, & poetry centers.”⁸⁵² Moreover, the people who showed up to nurture the

⁸⁴⁸ ntozake shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 44.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., xvii.

⁸⁵² Ibid., xx.

development of the choreopoem were poets, dancers, and the women's community.⁸⁵³

Shange describes "working in bars" as "a circumstantial aesthetic of poetry in San Francisco" (Ibid., xiii.) She says, "During the same period, Shameless Hussy Press & The Oakland Women's Press Collective were also reading anywhere & everywhere they could. In a single season, Susan Griffin, Judy Grahn, Barbara Gravelle, & alta, were promoting the poetry & presence of women in a legendary male-poet's environment This is the energy & part of the style that nurtured *for colored girls*. . ." ⁸⁵⁴ *for colored girls* as a text and as a play emerged from the vibrant communities of lesbians and feminists in the San Francisco Bay area.

Given both the historical specificity of the text and its endurance as a book, a poem, and a theatre piece, its translation to a motion picture in 2010 is a fascinating addendum to its wider travels. Tyler Perry directed the film, *for colored girls*.⁸⁵⁵ Tyler Perry is a modern-day Hollywood mogul, a unique blend of popular culture icon (Perry stars in many of his own films) and an extraordinarily astute businessman. Perry's films, often made with modest budgets, are profitable; his films have strong theatre ticket sales as well as subsidiary rights sales for television, cable, and DVDs. Perry's films reach a broad African-American audience. Perry's films are also middlebrow entertainment; Perry often employs formulaic narratives in which faith and God play a prominent role in solving heterosexual family crises. Although Perry has been critiqued by African-

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., xiv.

⁸⁵⁵ *for colored girls*, Dir. Tyler Perry, 34th St. Films, 2010.

American critics, including Spike Lee, I find his combination of business acumen with his showmanship and entertainment production a powerful popular culture force.

Perry's vision of *for colored girls* translates the poetic, impressionistic text of Shange into a more dramatic narrative with a star-studded cast. *for colored girls* was a modest success at the box-office, grossing over \$37 million⁸⁵⁶ and a disappointment to many fans of the book and the play. The lesbian-feminist message of Shange, like that of Allison, is muted in the film. *for colored girls* as a film focuses more on relationships between men and women than relationships between women. Yet, the adaptation of *for colored girls* by Perry introduces the story to a new generation. On balance, having more stories from lesbian print culture circulating in popular United States culture is a positive development—for lesbian-feminist writers and publishers.

Conclusion

These three books—*Bastard*, *Push*, and *for colored girls*—share much in common. Early work by all of the authors circulated in lesbian print culture. Violence is a central theme of all three books. Relationships between and among women are a central theme of all three books. For Shange, relationships among women are a way to survive and possibly overcome violence; for Allison and Sapphire, relationships among women are more fraught: they offer both the possibility of redemption and survival, but also the peril of abuse and betrayal. Finally, both *for colored girls* and *Push* challenge expectations about genre. *for colored girls* defines a new genre, the choreopoem, to contain its mixture of poetry, dance, performance, and drama. At the conclusion of *Push* is a book within a

⁸⁵⁶ Box office revenue from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1405500/>.

book, the writings of the young women in Precious's class, telling the stories of these women.

Each of these novels became films in different ways and in different systems of power within the film industry. Huston's film of *Bastard* was a made for television film; Daniels, already an award-winning filmmaker, adapted *Push* into not only an award-winning film, but a box office success; Tyler Perry, a filmmaker with extraordinary commercial success but limited critical acclaim adapted Shange's work. Each film uses different strategies to portray lesbianism—from a muted, almost erased, presence to an open, almost celebratory, portrayal. Yet, in spite of these differences, all three films circulate lesbian-feminist theory and ideology to mainstream audiences. Film reaches a much wider audience than books; a best-selling book by a lesbian author might sell 75,000 copies in its first year; the film *Precious* in a limited release opening weekend was seen by about 180,000 people.⁸⁵⁷

Together these three texts and film adaptations suggest three things. First, today Darnton's communications circuit needs to be amended to include film as a vital component of the circulation of books. Increasingly, adaptations of novels function as a crucial part of the communications circuit of books, and they have important economic consequences for authors and publishers. The sale of film rights benefits authors with cash payment to acquire the rights and, occasionally, royalty payments in conjunction with the economic performance of the film. Publishers who own the rights to the book when the film is released, generally reissue the book with a special cover that highlights the film and increases the individual sales of the book.

⁸⁵⁷ Source: <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=preciouspush.htm>.

The disparate social and cultural locations of each of these films demonstrate the multiple ways in which objects from lesbian print culture move from narrower literary circulations to broader distribution through film. The books speak to artists situated differently within the *habitus* of film-making. During the 1970s and 1980s, movement of lesbian novels to made-for-television films, Oscar-worthy films, or popular films simply was not possible. Now, it is possible, and the past three to five years illustrate a real flowering of the adaptation of lesbian-feminist novels.

Second, through film, lesbian-feminist ideas and principles circulate within a broader cultural milieu. While publishers imagined lesbian print culture becoming the “real” culture, that is supplanting others, what happened, and continues to happen, is that the ideas and principles of lesbian feminism circulate beyond the small circles of lesbian-feminists into a broader cultural milieu through popular culture. Dick Hebdige argues that dominant cultures incorporate subcultures through commodities and ideology.⁸⁵⁸ These three texts, originally published by commercial publishers, demonstrates how lesbian-feminism became a commodity in publishing. Similarly, the film adaptations are commodities circulated in the dominant culture, but both the books and the films are also ideological incorporations of lesbian-feminism into United States culture.

Ideological incorporation may be co-optation, but it also may represent a change to the prevailing ideology. Commodification co-opts work by subcultures, and there is merit to the argument that popular culture co-opts lesbian-feminist work. Houston’s adaptation of *Bastard*, with its erasure of Raylene as a lesbian and its focus on the relationship between Anney and Glen instead of the relationship between Anney and Bone, co-opts

⁸⁵⁸ Hebdige, *Subculture*, 95.

some aspects of Allison's work to craft a more palatable narrative for a presumed heterosexual audience. At the same time, the film invites audiences to assume a lesbian-feminist standpoint—even if audiences are unaware of the standpoint. The adaptations of *Push* and *for colored girls*, however, retain more of the ideology of lesbian-feminism; these two films are less co-optation than adoption of lesbian-feminism. In a material sense, all three films co-opt the original work of the authors to create a new cultural object that generates profits for a variety of stakeholders. Yet, each of the authors in creating the text, and in the case of Shange the text and the performances, made her own commodity: a book to be sold. In addition, each of these authors received a substantial royalty payment for the rights to adapt their work to a film; for all of them, this money was crucial to supporting their future work as artists.

In all three of these books and films, ideas that originate in lesbian-feminism circulate through the films beyond the circumscribed circles of lesbian-feminism. Through these films, lesbian-feminism, if not as a named object, then as a set of ideologies, circulates in middlebrow culture in ways that are visible and apprehensible for a larger public. Thanks to film, lesbian books are no longer just for lesbians.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, I have mapped five ways to understand the aesthetic contributions of lesbian-feminist print culture. First, I examined how lesbians played central roles in aesthetic innovations throughout the twentieth century, focusing in particular on Imagism, Modernism, and the School of Quietude. This history is important to understand the contributions of lesbians in a broader, historical narrative of literary history. Second, I examined Norton Anthologies to consider how lesbian-feminism

influenced anthologies created in the 1990s and 2000s. Third, I examined the aesthetic contributions of lesbian-feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, I discussed what accessibility meant to lesbian-feminist writers and publishers, how lesbian-feminists wrote explicitly about lesbian sexuality, and how experience operated as a crucial site for the generation of lesbian-feminist theory. I also examined how the production and distribution of books also had a particular aesthetic valence of lesbian-feminists. Fourth, I discussed the career of Rita Mae Brown as an example of a writer central to lesbian print culture whose influence extends beyond the lesbian-feminist community during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Brown is one example of the influence of lesbian-feminism in popular culture today. Finally, I discussed three film adaptations of work that originated in lesbian-feminist print culture. These films demonstrate the increasing ways that lesbian-feminist writers enter popular culture and the ways that lesbian print culture, and its values and ideologies, shape contemporary cultural production.

Ultimately, what I want is for lesbian writers and artists to be recognized in a variety of cultural fields for their contributions. For me, reading Elizabeth Bishop's poetry as an undergraduate in the late 1980s was an exhilarating experience because I knew she was a lesbian. I want other lesbian poetry in the canon of what young readers discover through college and high school courses. I want lesbian poets to receive critical scholarly attention. I want lesbian poets to be read, reread, circulated, and enshrined in libraries, digital and physical.

Mapping the habitus of lesbian print culture robustly makes those who are currently being canonized less exceptional because it situates them in communities of writers and artists. Audre Lorde, who is included now in most literary anthologies,

worked in an environment that also produced E. Sharon Gomilion, Stephanie Byrd, Pat Parker, Joan Gibbs, and Cheryl Clarke. Marilyn Hacker worked in an environment that also produced Irena Klepfisz, Susan Sherman, Joan Larkin, Claudia Scott, Jacqueline Lapidus, and Martha Courtot. Dorothy Allison, whose *oeuvre* includes novels, poetry, and essays, is an artist akin to Jan Clausen and Minnie Bruce Pratt, who also write in multiple genres. The period between 1969 and 1989 is a fertile moment for multiple lesbian writers. The dynamic of star authors as exemplars of the moment is a function of canon-creation, but it is important to remember the environment that produced this literature and the multiple artists working together to write and reflect the voices and experiences of the time. Genius does not emerge in isolation; the presence of a broad community of people creating art is crucial. By mapping writers who are currently being canonized, such as Hacker, Lorde, and Rich, in relationship to a broader community of writers, we understand their work more fully and open new possibilities for others.

The effects of lesbian print culture are long-lasting, even as the adumbration of lesbian writers into the cultural milieu are not complete. Lesbian print culture flourished in conjunction with the WLM but is not exclusive to the WLM. Lesbian print culture is constantly being reimagined and reinvented by new generations of lesbians and feminists as it has been for the past century.

In 1976, in the introduction to the Bantam edition of *for colored girls*, Shange wrote, “I am on the other side of the rainbow/picking up the pieces of days spent waitin for the poem to be heard/while you listen/i have other work to do/[.]”⁸⁵⁹ Shange’s conclusion explains the dynamics of writers and artists in relationship to print culture.

⁸⁵⁹ Shange, *for colored girls*, xxi.

Print culture binds words into books; the discovery of those books extends over time. In lesbian print culture, because many of the books were produced by small publishers, much of the work is at risk of being lost, but for a small number of artists, the work remains and continues to be recognized. Maintaining access to the wide range of work produced by lesbian-feminist print culture is crucial as is nurturing the habitus in which lesbian artists work today.

Somewhere today, someone is stepping into a performance space to hear the work of a lesbian artist. In ten or twenty years, that work may be taken up in popular culture, seen on film, heard in popular music, read in best-selling novels. That work may bring us new understandings of lesbian lives and lesbian communities, and of common lives and common communities. But, as Virginia Woolf warns, it will only happen “if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think.” It will only happen if we have the ability to recognize the work as aesthetically valuable, as worthy for inclusion in anthologies, as important to be available to broad groups of people. It will only happen if there is material support for lesbian writers and the projects that they imagine and create. “So to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.”⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁶⁰ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 117-118.

Conclusion

The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives explores lesbian print culture as an important historical, epistemological, and cultural project of lesbian-feminism. The history of lesbian print culture from 1969 until 1989 challenges and alters contemporary narratives about the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM); it re-contextualizes lesbian-feminism, and lesbian separatism, as vital and vibrant aspects of the WLM. *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives* demonstrates how lesbian-feminists used books—the writing, printing, distribution and circulation of books as well as other objects of print culture (for example journals, chapbooks, newspapers, and broadsides)—as tools to elaborate and extend lesbian-feminist epistemologies. Finally, *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives* demonstrates culture as a vital and material component of the WLM and of lesbian-feminism.

The history of lesbian-feminist publishing and lesbian print culture illuminates the multiple geographic locations of lesbian-feminism and the WLM. Despite earlier historiography, the WLM was not a bi-coastal phenomenon. Neither was lesbian-feminist publishing. Lesbian-feminism and lesbian print culture bloomed in multiple locations around the United States. This history of lesbian-feminist publishing suggests a revision to feminist historiography that illuminates the effects of feminism on the broader social, political, economic and cultural *habitus*. In addition to resituating the history of the WLM without a geographic bias toward either United States coast, this study of lesbian print culture repositions cultural feminism and lesbian separatism as two vital expressions of feminism. Feminist histories routinely disregard cultural feminism and lesbian

separatism, and even deride them as insignificant. This history demonstrates that, in fact, cultural feminism and lesbian separatism are important expressions of feminism that made significant contributions to the WLM.

Cultural feminism is not a kluge to radical feminism. Cultural feminism does not denude the feminist movement of political action or of a vision of the transformation of society. As this study explains, women working on cultural projects understood their work as profoundly political, containing the seeds of revolutionary transformation. Engaged in a feminist practice that used the material of culture as a site for social transformation, cultural feminists considered their work a feminist intervention with multiple meanings and political valences. Lesbian-feminist production of culture through publishing is and was a societal intervention to address sexism, homophobia and patriarchy, operating with multiple valences: political, social, and economic. As lesbian-feminist publishers demonstrate repeatedly, not only in their production but also in their commentary on what books they publish and how they publish those books, they wanted not only to build lesbian consciousness and communities of lesbian readers but also to use books to leverage social change in broad, transformative ways. Thus, cultural feminism was not a fleeing from radical feminism, but a vital adaptation of a variety of feminist practices where the target for change was culture, and that culture was understood as deeply material—and meaningful—to women's lives.

Similarly, separatism and lesbian separatism are important and recurrent strategies in the WLM. Beginning with the articulation of lesbian separatism by The Furies and continuing through the publishing work in the 1980s, lesbian separatism is not a strategy of separation and withdrawal but a strategy of engagement to address a variety of

feminist concerns including patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism. Moreover, both cultural feminism and lesbian separatism are ideological positions inflected with theoretical, political, and material analyses. Neither can be understood, or dismissed, as simply essentialist ideologies. Rather, they are ideological positions, shaped by the material conditions of women's lives with political and material intentions. Of course, neither cultural feminism nor lesbian separatism are monolithic constructs. The nuance of both of these ideologies in relationship to the WLM and lesbian print culture are important. By repositioning cultural feminism and lesbian separatism as crucial to various feminist formations, we can understand the WLM as a complex social movement with many invested actors. This history of lesbian print culture re-imagines radically feminist historiographies of the WLM to include cultural feminism and lesbian separatism in meaningful and productive dialogues.

The history of lesbian print culture also illuminates how lesbian-feminists used publishing as an epistemological project. Lesbian-feminists theorized actively about the world and, particularly, about people's roles and responsibilities in the world. Lesbian-feminists wanted to build ideas and strategies for transformative social, political, and economic change. Central to lesbian-feminist publishing in the 1970s was the interrogation of the origins of the modern world and particularly the origins of oppressive structures. During the 1980s, lesbian-feminist theories focused intensely on identity formations. Lesbian-feminist publishers extended conversations about identity formations, particularly the identity formation "woman of color," through a variety of publishing projects. While these two strands of theoretical engagement had significance in each of these decades, for lesbian-feminists, publishing, during this time period and

beyond, offered epistemological interventions into a wide range of feminist dialogues, including, but not limited to, identity formations.

Previous examinations of lesbian print culture established the formative role of lesbian print culture in relationship to lesbian identity but elided the significance of economics in both the production and circulation of lesbian print culture. Examining the material conditions of lesbian print culture, that is the creation, production, marketing, and distribution of objects of lesbian print culture, suggests new understandings of both the economic *habitus* of writers and small presses as well as changes in the broader United States economy. The conventional narrative about lesbian-feminist publishing is that words and books helped to create feminist consciousness and changed individual lives. This is true, but lesbian print culture also had a broader impact on individual women, communities of women, and the United States popular culture.

Lesbian print culture activists conceived lesbian print culture as a means of economic support for women. Certainly, for some women publishing was a hobby—a project that women did on the side as an addition to their primary means of economic support—but for others, it was an activity for building skills, resources, and institutions to create an economic power-base for lesbian-feminists. Although this vision was not realized in an enduring way on a broad, societal scale, for many women printing and publishing provided skills and economic support. For instance, after her involvement with the Women’s Press Collective, Martha Shelley worked as a typesetter,⁸⁶¹ Casey Czarnik, one of the principals of Diana Press currently owns a print shop outside of San

⁸⁶¹ Martha Shelley, interview by Kelly Anderson, transcript of video recording, October 12, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 58.

Francisco, CA;⁸⁶² Helaine Harris, one of the founders of WinD, started Daedalus books, a distributor of remaindered books, in 1980; she continues to work there today as a vice president. In addition, many of the writers who began their careers publishing with small, lesbian-feminist presses continue writing and publishing with both mainstream presses and new small presses, including Minnie Bruce Pratt, Jan Clausen, Elly Bulkin, and others. For many of the people in this study, publishing remains a vital economic engine in their lives.

The stories of lesbian-feminist publishing begin to map the contours of the United States economy during this time period as the United States government implemented neoliberal economic policies. The ending of federal work training programs like CETA had a profound impact on lesbian-feminist publishers limiting the opportunities for funding to support and build their operations. The limiting of public resources for the arts also presented challenges and limits for lesbian-feminist publishing. From these stories a picture begins to emerge about how macro-economic changes effect individuals and small businesses. Moreover, there is an economic component to the rise and fall of feminist organizations, directly related to the United States economy and to government investments in the arts.

In addition to illuminating the economic restructuring in the United States, lesbian print culture illuminates the formation of political recognition of gay and lesbian as citizenship categories in the United States. During the 1990s, lesbian print culture, and the activism that corresponded with it, was central to promoting the idea that lesbians were part of the national conversation and had a valid subject position to make

⁸⁶² Personal communication with Suzanne Snider.

citizenship claims. The literary activities of lesbian-feminists in both their activist work and in the published work make lesbians apprehensible to a variety of national formations, including the NEA. This apprehensibility, and the demands of lesbians to be understood in relationship to the national body politic, provides a crucial platform to the LGBT rights movements in the 1990s and beyond, particularly in relationship to military service and marriage equality.

This history invites the examination of what constitutes a lesbian literary canon, particularly the relationship of lesbian literary work to the American literary canon. I have offered counts and percentages of the representation of women and lesbians in various literary locations. This practice raises the question: what should the percentage be? Gender parity in all major sites of literary and aesthetic appraisals seems reasonable. It is discouraging that in 2010, after forty years of feminist activism both inside and outside the academy, the numbers are not more consistently near fifty percent. Certainly, gender representation may range from forty-five to fifty-five percent (45-55%) in a particular year, even forty to sixty percent (40-60%), but in a particular five or ten-year period, gender parity should exist. In fact, some journals and some prize competitions do have numbers like that, though some of the most prestigious, elite journals and competitions continue to have women authors represented at less than forty percent (40%), and more often around a paltry one-third (33%) of published authors. Forty years of feminism have changed the literary landscape, but thirty-three percent (33%) or forty percent (40%) is not enough. Gender parity remains a distant goal, and perhaps an unachievable one without a focused and forceful intervention.

If we achieve gender parity in literary appraisals, the work of achieving gender parity in aesthetic appraisals will be easier. Moreover, if women have parity with men in literary and aesthetic appraisals, then lesbians will be better represented. This is not a given, of course. The conflicts around lesbian issues in the early WLM and even today demonstrate that homophobia continues. Nevertheless, gender parity is an essential milestone for lesbian writers.

Finally, this history is instructive for the state of publishing today. The WLM asked questions about power. Who has power? Who wields power? Who is affected by the wielding of power? Lesbian-feminist publishers fundamentally challenged the system in which publishers held power over authors and creators of literary works. This system had been challenged before, of course, by many, but in a sustained way, the WLM reshaped the relationships between and among authors, publishers, booksellers, and readers. These relationships among writers, publishers, and readers are being renegotiated today as new technology emerges in publishing, particularly print-on-demand technology, online publishing, and ebooks. The actions, values, and ideals of the women who are at the center of this study are instructive for contemporary readers thinking about similar issues.

The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives focuses on the process of publishing. It explores how individuals and collectives published work; it considers how women distributed books to existing readers and cultivated new readers through their work; it examines personal and interpersonal relationships behind significant publishing events. This attention to the process of publishing demonstrates how cultural production is deeply material. While symbolic systems often describe the foundations of culture, for

cultural production, people and money—labor and capital—are the foundation. *The Whole Naked Truth of Our Lives* demonstrates the material component of culture for the WLM and for feminism. It resists the elision of the material, of labor and capital, from culture as a societal structure and the sensorium as an individual and interpersonal structure. It insists that we recognize the process as a crucial part of the outcome. This obsessive attention to the material histories of books in lesbian-feminist communities echoes an important value of lesbian-feminism: our process is our politics. How lesbian-feminists did things is as important as what they did. How lesbian-feminists published books is as important as the books that they published.

Although lesbian print culture continues beyond 1989 and there are a number of exciting lesbian print culture projects today, the end of the 1980s is an end to a particular formation of lesbian print culture—a formation shaped and defined by lesbian-feminism. By 1989, Naiad Press and Firebrand Books were the only two operating lesbian-feminist presses; all of the other lesbian-feminist presses closed. Moreover, as lesbian-feminist presses like Naiad and Firebrand forged into the 1990s, the works they published reflected new identity formations, focusing more on queer and lesbian than on the hybrid identity of lesbian-feminist. While the impact of lesbian print culture is evident in the circulation of ideas and objects from lesbian print culture in film, and the 1990s themselves have exciting developments for lesbian print culture that merit further examination, lesbian-feminist print culture, as defined and articulated in the 1970s and 1980s, comes to a rest at the end of the 1980s, eclipsed, at least temporarily, by other formations of identity and other instantiations of print culture.

To conclude, I invoke the words of poet and publisher, Judy Grahn. “I am the wall at the lip of the water” is one of the poems from Grahn’s collection *She Who*. This history is a wall, a rock, the dyke in the matter. It is a womanly swagger, a dragon, a bulldyke, a bulldagger. It is a celebration of my wicked grandmothers and a prayer for my wicked daughters—may they write and publish prolifically in our lesbian-feminist future, bolstered by knowledge, strength, and history from the lesbian-feminist past.

Julie R. Enszer
April 2013

I am the wall at the lip of the water
I am the rock that refused to be battered
I am the dyke in the matter, the other
I am the wall with the womanly swagger
I am the dragon, the dangerous dagger
I am the bulldyke, the bulldagger

and I have been many a wicked grandmother
and I shall be many a wicked daughter.⁸⁶³

⁸⁶³ Judy Grahn, *love belongs to those who do the feeling*, (Los Angeles, CA: Red Hen Press, 2009), 89.

A Note about the Lesbian Poetry Archive

Throughout my research for this project, I have been compiling a digital archive of materials at www.LesbianPoetryArchive.org. This digital humanities project is a substantive output of my doctoral research. There are six objectives for the Lesbian Poetry Archive. The Lesbian Poetry Archive:

- is a repository for a variety of digitally reproduced print publications,
- functions as a visualization tool for understanding my work and exploring the connections between and among the various cultural objects produced by lesbian print culture between 1969 and 1989,⁸⁶⁴
- makes my research and sources visible and more transparent to common and expert readers,
- allows people to interact with publishing data, poems, journals, and the histories that I have compiled,
- invites alternate readings for new thinking and different conclusions about the materials,
- operates as a teaching tool that invites people to engage with lesbian poetry and the history of its textual reproduction, and
- enhances the experience with print through multimedia engagements.

At its core, the Lesbian Poetry Archive is a project about public scholarship.

Throughout the twentieth century, lesbians, primarily lesbians outside of academic locations, initiated, published, printed, distributed, and read lesbian print culture through a variety of public channels. The Lesbian Poetry Archive uses a contemporary technology platform to continue this vital work of compiling, analyzing, and disseminating lesbian writing.

One of the most inspiring aspects of researching and writing this dissertation has been learning about the lesbian community reception of poetry during this time period.

⁸⁶⁴ While my dissertation is circumscribed to these dates, the material at the *Lesbian Poetry Archive* is not limited to this time frame.

Nine hundred women at the launch of *Lesbian Poetry*; five hundred women at the launch of *This Bridge Called My Back*; two hundred women at the fifth annual Lesbian Writers Conference in Chicago, IL; the travels of Minnie Bruce Pratt throughout the south reading her chapbook, *The Sound of One Fork*. I dream about ways to create audiences like that in our contemporary world. The Lesbian Poetry Archive is one intervention of mine to that end.

The Lesbian Poetry Archive consists of four primary components: Archive, ebooks, Exhibits, and Bibliographies. The **bibliographies** are compilations of bibliographic data on publishers, poets, writers, and journals. Much of this material has been compiled from academic databases and augmented with additional research and conversations with individuals involved with the press. The **exhibits** gather materials that are both visual and textual and tell stories to readers about lesbian print culture. The exhibit area includes some maps and other visualization tools to think about data that is included in the archive.

The **ebooks** are the newest aspect of the Lesbian Poetry Archive. In conjunction with authors, I create facsimile editions of chapbooks with new content from the author and contemporary critics that situate the books historically and in a contemporary context. To date, the Lesbian Poetry Archive has published two ebooks: *The Sound of One Fork* by Minnie Bruce Pratt and *Two Chapbooks* by Stephania Byrd. Future ebooks are scheduled to profile the work of Martha Courtot, Eloise Klein Healy, Cheryl Clarke, and Mab Segrest. For each ebook, the launch corresponds with an online publication about the ebook in another location, generally one that is not primarily a lesbian audience. *The Sound of One Fork* was profiled in an article at the Poetry Foundation

website and Byrd's chapbooks were profiled on the *Ms. Magazine* blog. These articles and profiles fulfill my political objective to interject lesbian writers into literary conversations that are not restricted to LGBT writers.

Finally, the **archive** itself. In the archive, I gather and display out of print books. Unlike the ebooks, these are not contextualized by the authors but are simply presented in digital form using facsimiles from the printed book. The archive primarily contains books that are out of printed and have limited availability in public or university library systems. Many are texts that have been formative to my thinking about lesbian print culture.

My plans to expand the Lesbian Poetry Archive are ambitious; the Lesbian Poetry Archive is a cornerstone of my future research agenda. One objective for the Lesbian Poetry Archive is the continued expansion of core materials in the archive section and the continued release of new ebooks. In addition, I have identified a number of multi-media sources to add to the archive. As new technology becomes available, I want to create learning experiences at the Lesbian Poetry Archive that utilize video and audio files and that present the stories being lesbian print culture to visitors in dynamic and compelling ways. Although digitization of archival materials continues in academic libraries, some of the key materials of lesbian-feminism, particularly periodicals, are being left out of the process. By integrating the Lesbian Poetry Archive into my teaching, I plan to build archives of lesbian-feminist periodicals using the *Hot Wire* and *Heresies* archives as models.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁵ The archive of issues of *Hot Wire*, *The Journal of Women's Music and Culture*, is here: <http://www.hotwirejournal.com/hwmag.html> (accessed 2 March 2012) and the

The Lesbian Poetry Archive is one of the outcomes of my dissertation research; it complements this written text. More importantly, it expands the public consideration of lesbian print culture. Averaging over 500 unique visitors a month with over 1,500 page views, the Lesbian Poetry Archive is a public, scholarly forum where lesbian print culture is accessible and available. The Lesbian Poetry Archive is a digital humanities project where the intellectual work of preserving, analyzing, and evaluating lesbian print culture, lesbian literary history, and lesbian literature can continue and grow.

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