

Spring 1998

Gender Lines Spring 1998

La Salle University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/gender_lines

Recommended Citation

La Salle University, "Gender Lines Spring 1998" (1998). *Gender Lines*. 1.
https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/gender_lines/1

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gender Lines by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact careyc@lasalle.edu.



GENDER LINES

VOLUME 8
SPRING 1998

GENDER LINES

Volume 8

Spring 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APRIL WHITE <i>1998 Essay Winner</i>	Showing Stereotypes through Symbolism: <i>The Yellow Wallpaper and The Awakening</i>	1
JEN WEIKERT	Review, Repossession, and Deconstruction in Eavan Boland's <i>The Journey and Other Poems</i>	10
LORI LITCHMAN	Contradiction in Chaucer's <i>Wife of Bath</i>	21
KORI CONNELLY	The Reality of Rape	32
ALLISON NANARTOWCZ	Brave New Woman	45
KRISTIN MCGONIGLE	A review: <i>One Thread at a Time</i>	52

Winner of the Caryn McTighe Musil Award

APRIL WHITE

**Showing Stereotypes through Symbolism:
The Yellow Wallpaper and *The Awakening***

To a nation poised on the brink of the twentieth century, Charlotte Gilman Perkins and Kate Chopin offered their stories: the short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and the novel *The Awakening*, respectively. These works, now much praised, were an affront to the turn-of-the-century society in which the authors lived. This society was dedicated to rigid social roles—the "cult of domesticity and the worship" (Golden 231). These works offered a dangerous alternative view, placing the individual woman above the family. However, critics and the public alike ignored the valuable social commentary in favor of a more harmless reading.

Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* was categorized as Poe-esque horror (Ammons 37) while Chopin's *The Awakening* was characterized as an unexceptional love story (Seyersted 158). In reality, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a horror story, a unique and terrifying account of the horrors of oppression, and *The Awakening* is a love story, a revolutionary story of the importance of self-love. The main themes of the works show through in both the plots and symbolism.

The patterns of the yellow wallpaper trap Gilman's unnamed heroine, and the boundless ocean, representative of independence, entices Chopin's main character, Edna. Through this rich symbolism, Gilman and Chopin reveal the struggle of all women against the restrictive roles of wife and mother defined by a patriarchal society.

The societies presented in these works, though different in setting—*The Yellow Wallpaper* takes place in a remote country home while *The Awakening* is set in the Caribbean and New Orleans—share similar expectations of the proper roles of women. The works tell us that a woman at the turn of the century must be a wife and a mother. As a wife, a woman must be submissive to her husband; as a mother, she must be strict with her children. Chopin and Gilman criticized the rigidity of these views, finding injustice in placing the stereotypical duties of a sex above the individual. Although neither author denies the place of marriage or children in the society, they beg that their audiences recognize the conflict between these dictated roles. These works question, first, how one can at once be a child for her husband and a mother to her children, and second, more subtly, why one must do this at all. Skillfully, Gilman and Chopin translate these impertinent questions into the striking symbols which pervade these two pieces.

The Yellow Wallpaper, Gilman's short story, is an account of a woman's descent into insanity. This piece at once criticizes the traditional depression cure of enforced inactivity and serves as a semi-autobiographical portrait of the author's own brush with depression. However, the rich symbolism reflects the novel's true theme, the oppression of women (Benstock 63).

The story is told as a series of entries in the journal of an unnamed woman. The journal entries directly oppose the depression cure which her husband, a renowned doctor, has prescribed for her. She, the unnamed woman, suffers from postpartum depression (Masse 29). Sentenced to a life of solitude and a lack of intellectual activity, the woman uses her journal as a confidante. At first, the entries discuss conventional topics such as her condition, her limited actions and her surroundings. Quickly, the latter subject becomes the sole focus of the woman's writings. The surroundings

become an obsession for the woman, and the journal entries begin to explore the decor, a traditionally feminine concern, as an allegory to a woman's position in society (Chandler 140).

Gilman uses the house and the room which comprise the woman's world as a microcosm (Masse 29). The house is described as a colonial mansion with Victorian style architecture. Gilman subtly reminds her audience of the inferior position of females in Victorian society (Ammons 36). She also describes the house as a "hereditary estate" (Gilman 3), implying that this condition persists.

The woman also calls the house "haunted" (ibid). The deliberate word choice on Gilman's part continues the image, likening the spirits which haunt the house to the attitudes of men toward women throughout the ages (Benstock 68).

The woman then discusses the room to which she is confined. She deduces that the room is a converted nursery, "for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things on the walls" (Gilman 5). Placing the woman in a child's room strengthens the stereotypical role of women as helpless. The bars on the windows suggest imprisonment, and the rings and things, innocent toys of the young, become paraphernalia of confinement (Golden 146). It is the husband who chooses this room for his wife, and therefore, it is the husband who is her jailer (Golden 236).

One final aspect of the room draws the woman's attention--the wallpaper. "I never saw worse paper in my life...(the color is) repellent, almost revolting: a smoldering unclean yellow...No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long!" she writes (Gilman 5).

The wallpaper, however, is riveting, and the woman is compelled to describe it in greater detail. The pattern, the confusing, outrageous, contradictory pattern so compelling to the woman is the pattern of her life. The "principles" and "laws" she attempts to find in the pattern are the social code which defines her. As she comes to this realization, the wallpaper takes on a life of its own. It "becomes bars" (Gilman 13) to this kept woman and frustrates her efforts to understand it. "You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down and tramples upon you," she writes (ibid).

In the confusion of the wallpaper, the narrator finds her child, her husband and herself. While her husband and child make up the pattern, she stands behind it, a shadow of a woman trying to escape. The child in the story is mentioned directly only occasionally but "it" appears often in the narrator's thoughts. Gilman expresses her dissatisfaction with the confining role of motherhood through the narrator's anger at "the impertinence of (the child) and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere" (Gilman 7).

Her husband, John, plays a larger role in the text. The narrator often quotes him in her journal and tries to bring herself to obey him. John often reminds the narrator to practice self-control, but this self-control is really societal control, strict adherence to inflexible ideals (Masse 30). Therefore, John is the strangling pattern in the paper.

As the narrator's understanding grows, she begins to fight the pattern. First, she sees a woman behind the paper and then identifies herself as this woman. Soon she can distinguish many women trapped behind the bars. The

wallpaper embodies the conflict of self and stereotype central to the work. Madness is the only refuge.

Her struggle against the pattern evolves into a collective fight, the fight of all women (Benstock 75). The women inside the paper help her destroy it. "I've got out at last," she triumphantly tells her husband, "And I've pulled off most of the paper so you can't put me back!" (Gilman 19) Her insanity is freedom, her husband can no longer control her mind, but it is a "sadly limited and ironic autonomy" (Masse 36).

Gilman leaves us to ponder if escape from the pattern is possible. The narrator also considers the other women: "I wonder if they all come out of the wallpaper as I did?"

Edna is one of those other women. As the main character of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna also reaches an awareness of her oppression and longs for freedom.

The strict social code which Chopin criticizes throughout the novel allows Edna's husband, Leonce Pontellier, to treat her as a child, incapable of handling money or herself (Christ 33). To others in the novel, however, "Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world" (Chopin 17). These women accepted the conditions that slowly become, to Edna, "an indescribable oppression" (Chopin 14). Although at the start of the novel Edna is "forced to admit that she knew of none better" than her husband, her awakening—a sexual and spiritual growth—forces her to see beyond the stereotypes of society (Skaggs 96).

The other women of the book serve as a foil to Edna's role as a mother. Chopin describes these women as "mother-women," and Edna reflects that

they "idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals" (Chopin 19). In contrast, Edna's interaction with her children is limited. Like the baby in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the children in *The Awakening* are not described in any detail (Seyersted 154). They are merely figures which add to Edna's oppression. Edna loves her children but believes that the role of motherhood will conflict with her budding search for selfhood. She announces repeatedly that she would give her life for her children, but she would not give herself (Dyer 103).

Chopin draws a metaphor for Edna's awakening in the sea (Christ 30). Unlike the yellow wallpaper in Gilman's story, the sea is not the symbol of oppression but the opportunity for escape. The sea is described as seductive and parallels Edna's sexual awakening. However, it even more vividly serves as a mirror of the emergence of an individual from a stereotype.

Edna, at the start of the novel, can not swim. Although many efforts are made to teach her, she finds herself unable to summon the courage to separate herself from her teachers. Finally, one night, Edna, "like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who all of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone" (Chopin 70), learns to swim. Exhilarated by the independence, she finds herself wanting to "swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (Chopin 71). Edna, however, is not yet strong enough to break all ties with conventions. Overestimating her strength, she swims too far from shore and must be rescued.

At the end of the novel, Edna returns to the ocean. Edna has been sexually awakened through her extra-marital affairs and has been able to cast off her husband's emotional control. She has also begun to paint and gain financial independence, purchasing her own house and realizing sovereignty

there. Yet, here at the edge of the ocean and freed from societal control, she is "absolutely alone," illustrating the relationship between a woman's quest for freedom and social isolation (Christ 35).

Having grown above the patriarchal image of a woman as a child, Edna still must contend with the all-consuming role of motherhood. The novel, which occurs over the nine-month period of the pregnancy of a minor character, does not allow Edna to ignore this aspect of a woman's duties. At the birth of the baby, its mother urges Edna: "Think of the children" (Chopin 289). It is their presence which is the final challenge to Edna's independence. While Edna is unwilling to "trample upon the little lives" (Chopin 293) of her children, she is equally loath to trample upon her own life.

Edna finally confronts the expansive sea and thoughts of her husband and her children--"They were part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (Chopin 302). Stripped of her clothing and symbolically societal control, she allows herself to be seduced by the voice of the sea, "seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in the abysses of solitude" (Chopin 300). She has no fear this time and does not look back but continues to swim "where no woman had swum before" (Chopin 71).

The characters of these two works gained an understanding of the stereotypes that shaped them. Just as an infant grows, Edna and the unnamed woman grew out of the image of a woman as a child. They learned to take their first steps independently; Edna swam toward the horizon, and the unnamed woman crept from her bed towards the paper. They learned to rebel and question; Edna swam out too far and the unnamed woman tore the paper from the walls. Through these actions, they found a new perspective. They

escaped the views of society. Edna and the unnamed woman sought the right to be a wife, a mother, and an individual, not to remove themselves from society but to join it. While their search for freedom from the oppression under which they suffered ended in triumph, their search for the freedom to be themselves was left unfinished.

Turn-of-the-century society could not accept Gilman and Chopin, two women who saw injustice in sex stereotypes and sought to reveal it. Still, the authors, trapped by the twisting patterns of the yellow wallpaper and tempted by the boundless ocean, dared to ask "Who am I?" and offer their revelations to the "other" women.

Works Cited

- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Benstock, Shari, ed. *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Chandler, Marilyn R., ed. *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964.
- Christ, Carol P. *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on a Spiritual Quest*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1980.
- Dyer, Joyce. *The Awakening: A Novel of Beginnings*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*. Lane, Anne J., ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Golden, Catherine, ed. *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on The Yellow Wallpaper*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1992.

Masse, Michelle A. *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Skaggs, Peggy. *Kate Chopin*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.

Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

JEN WEIKERT

**Review, Repossession, and Deconstruction in
Eavan Boland's *The Journey and Other Poems***

Throughout her 1986 collection entitled *The Journey and Other Poems*, Eavan Boland attempts to recover the experience, stories and language of women who have been historically excluded from the predominately male Irish literary canon. While revising the narrative of male authors, repossessing women's history and deconstructing the myths of woman as goddess or muse, Boland travels a literary and figurative journey pronouncing her perspective on the experience of being female.

The quick shifts in recent years of Boland's status – from woman poet, to feminist poet, to leading poet, to major poet – reflects the stress and turmoil in the Irish literary world as it struggles to come to terms with its own unwinding history of prejudice (Allen-Randolph 13). Combating centuries of male poetry which either ignored or silenced women, Boland journeys back through a patriarchal culture to meet her anonymous, ancestral sisters. In examining the idea of the symbolic journey as theme, Sheila Conboy suggests that “Boland intimates that literal journeys figure women's search for their own way of writing, for their own language” (71). Traveling down into the underworld of *herstory*, the poet unlocks the literary potential for women and gives volume to their forgotten voices. Yet, Boland soon discovers that she has moved into unfamiliar territory. Discussing the challenges of being a female poet in a tradition that is lacking literary foremothers, Boland stresses: “It was not even so much that I was a woman. It was that being a woman, I entered into a life for which poetry has no name” (*Object Lessons* 18). Boland faces a dilemma

common to both woman reader and woman writer, one which Adrienne Rich identifies:

She goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world . . . she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities, and over and over in “word’s masculine persuasive force” of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about: she meets the images of Woman in books written by men (Rich 2049).

Asserting her desire to overthrow old, male-dominated literary constructs, the first stop on Boland’s literal journey is the act of revision which she demonstrates in “Mise Eire.” Boland believes that the Irish female poet can reclaim the English language and traditional poetic forms and make them her own through a subversion of them (Robertson 268). Influenced early in her career by Irish literary fathers like Yeats, “the young Boland failed to recognize, [her role as a woman poet] and her male models gave her no sense of how her experience as a woman might affect what she wrote” (Haberstroh 60). By revising Padraic Pearse’s “I Am Ireland” in “Mise Eire,” Boland battles against the images of women created by male poets; women who are often passive or decorative. She abandons her role as feminine object and struggles to become her own subject matter.

Acknowledging her slow literary awakening, Boland stresses: “It took me years—and a great many revisions of perspective—before I could connect my Irishness with my poetry and my womanhood” (Robertson 68). Her acts of revision seem motivated by the critical discourse of several female American poets including Adrienne Rich. In her essay entitled “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision,” Rich tackles a core question of contemporary feminist scholarship which seems to plague Boland on her journey—where should women look for literary models when poetic vocabulary and images

have been derived from a set of out-of-touch male authors and critics who devalue feminine contributions? Rich's solution for the female literary community is simple. As "part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of a male-dominated society," she urges women writers to overhaul male-authored texts until they represent an accurate picture of female subjects (Rich 2046). In presenting her solution, Rich emphasizes:

Revision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival (2045).

Boland describes revision as more of an editing process which "often consists in making a text from which she was erased or where she was fixed and silenced" (236). Thus, she not only revises Pearse's poem as an act of personal survival but also wants to ensure the longevity of an Irish *herstory*. She juxtaposes the romantic fictions of female figures in traditional Irish myth, songs and poem with her own fiction (Allen-Randolph 14).

By beginning "Mise Eire" with the assertion "I won't back to it," Boland's speaker immediately announces her rebellion against the image of the victimized Mother of Ireland, the Old Woman of Beare Pearse relies upon (1). As Hagen and Zelman propose, "suddenly the woman is digging in her heels, demanding a divorce from the mystic" (447). Instead of constructing the poem around an idealized, passive speaker, Boland presents three diverse females – an immigrant mother, a poet and a prostitute. According to Marilyn Reizbaum, the development of the three speakers denotes Boland's revision of Irish women, as a whole, who display both "oppressive and potent identities" (472).

Although each woman presents a compelling argument for revision, the collective power of their voices, harmonized by Boland, provides a shrill affirmation of the need to escape the male canon. Each woman, reluctant to return to her displaced homeland, expresses her frustration by employing a vocabulary of linguistic terms. The poet speaks of brutal “roots” and “dactyls” which suggest the harsh environment of exclusion the speakers must face. In addition, she begins “complaining that language has been misused in ‘the songs that bandage up history, the words/ that make a rhythm of the crime’” (Conboy 71). The prostitute equates her sexual activity to “quick fricatives.” Cradling a dying infant, the mother “guttural with the vowels/ of homesickness...” seeks out a revised style of speech to capture her distress (Boland *The Journey* 37-39). Condemning the silence that Pearse enforces on his speaker, Boland and the mother seem to be crying out for “a new language” which represents:

a kind of scar
and heals after a while
into a passable imitation
of what went before (*The Journey* 11).

By summoning a new language for women in “Mise Eire,” Boland begins her textual overhaul and also appears to be speaking directly to Pearse as if to say enough is enough. According to Haberstroh, “Boland’s speaker’s words “unbandage” history and present another view of the “crime,” pointing out ways in which Irish songs and poems have created an image of Ireland with women either excluded or sentimentalized” (25). Boland succeeds in revamping the role of the female; moving her three speakers away from the tradition of passivity in Pearse.

After revision, the next phase of Boland's journey is the repossession of the *herstory* of sisters, mothers, and family matriarchs who never made their way into Irish literature as evidenced in "The Oral Tradition" and "Fever." As Boland began to investigate the presence of women in poetry, she discovered a lack of female subjects and the absence of female literary mentors. In a 1987 interview with Reizbaum, Boland acknowledges the lack of a woman-centered literary tradition:

As an Irish woman poet, I have very little precedent. There were none in the nineteenth century or early part of the twentieth century. You didn't have a thriving sense of the witness of the lived life and what you did have was a very compelling and at times oppressive relationship between Irish poetry and national theme. (Reizbaum 475)

The only reconciliation possible for her was to repossess that tradition (Hagen and Zelman 444).

In "The Oral Tradition," the speaker, a female poet who has just finished giving a "reading/or a workshop or whatever," gets sucked into a conversation transpiring between two of the event's attendees which alludes to that missing tradition (2-3). Boland writes:

Two women
were standing in a shadow,
one with her back turned.
Their talk was a gesture,
an outstretched hand. (*The Journey* 14)

According to Haberstroh, the speaker, transforming the over-heard conversation into a sort of signal, connects herself with other women and the

present with the past (77). Yet, the women's discourse, the "outstretched hand" also acts as a invitation for readers to join Boland on her quest toward repossession. By reclaiming their past through the art of story-telling, the women become the precedents, the literary foremothers Boland desperately wants to discover. Therefore, with the female story-tellers leading readers through the remnants of *herstory*, segments of "The Oral Tradition" provide readers with directions to how Boland will explore the act of reclaiming. The story heard by the poet/speaker details how a woman, possibly one of the women's grandmothers, gave birth to a child at night while unassisted in an open field. The primary speaker, mesmerized by the story, realizes that parallel tales only exist in Ireland's "oral song/ avid as superstition, layered like an amber in/ the wreck of language/ and the remnants of a nation" (71-75).

Expanding on some of the themes raised in "The Oral Tradition," Boland notes: "The past in which our grandmothers lived and where their lives burned through detail and daily incidence to become icons for our future is also a place where women and poetry remain far apart" (*Object Lessons* 24). Yet, in the poem, Boland allows the poet/speaker to reach a short-lived epiphany. Right at her exact moment of understanding, the poet must leave the scene to travel homeward. With "distances / ahead of me," she takes with her "a sense suddenly of truth/ its resonance" (81-82/ 88-90). Boland's account suggests that women of the past have been hidden in history and that, because their stories go untold, contemporary women continue to feel that they live through the present with no matrilineal ancestors (Conboy 70).

Still searching for the truth about women as subjects or as authors, Boland states: "I wanted a story. I wanted to hear the narrative of someone else – a woman and a poet – who had gone here, and been there" (*Object Lessons* XVI). Thus, in "Fever," the woman she elects to reconstruct is her maternal

grandmother who died at a young age in a Dublin hospital while battling a fever. Investigating Boland's motivations and aims, Haberstroh comments:

This is probably Boland's most direct statement of intent. The fever that killed her grandmother represents a lost history, which erupts, weakening "the given" and "the certain," that legacy of the Irish past that often ignores the lives of women like her grandmother. (*Object Lessons* 78)

Unsure of the factual details of her grandmother's illness or even her life, part of Boland's re-possession is a game of filling in the blanks:

I re-construct the soaked-through midnights; vigils; the histories I never learned to predict the lyric of; and re-construct risk; as if silence could become rage. (*Object Lessons* 25-28)

According to Ann Weekes, "the effort to recreate women's experiences is also linked to the irrational attempts to bear the elusive power out of women throughout the centuries" (164). "Shaken out from words or beaten out / from meaning / and survives to weaken / what is given," Boland highlights how the fever has taken a literal and figurative toll on a generation of silent, shadowy women (*Object Lessons* 31-33). In her examination of texts which have suppressed the truth of the female experience, Carolyn Heilbrun alleges that "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots or examples, by which they might assume power over – take control of – their lives" (17). Thus, in both "The Oral Tradition" and "Fever," "whether she writes of the women of the past or of the present, this is Boland's point: it is not only just the record of women's work that is lost, it is the record of lives, thoughts and fears" (Weekes 173).

The final destination on Boland's journey is where she begins, as Conboy suggests, to question why male writers have represented, with few exceptions, women as passive goddesses or muses without thought to actual identities. Rejecting the practice of imagemaking employed by the patriarchy, Boland stresses the importance of womanhood as tool that can deconstruct the myth of Irish femininity. Boland adds: "I consider womanhood and my own as an enlightened power, I don't invoke it as the sexual icon that it is in the work of men" (Reizbaum 479).

In *Object Lessons*, Boland refers several times to the scholarship of Robert Graves who worked extensively with the image of woman as muse. Discussing the double-bind for the woman poet when using a muse figure, Graves states: "The case of a woman poet is a thousand times worse since she is herself the muse, a goddess without external power to guide or comfort her" (247). But in his 1948 work entitled *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, Graves takes his argument one step further. Not only does he deny the female poet the opportunity of invoking a muse, his muse possesses the ability to "transform herself into sow, mare, bitch, vixen, she-ass, weasel, serpent, owl, she-wolf, tigress, mermaid or loathsome hag" (10). None of Graves' characteristics present a positive image of women; he seems to want to damn women who are active agents of language. Fed up with seeing her female ancestors imprisoned in the images made by men, Boland, in an interview with Amy Klauke, lashes out at Graves' ideas stating, "I reject all that as a lot of nonsense" (58). Because Boland cannot believe in these images and cannot approve of them, she has found it necessary to shape her own images and myths, to vary them to suit her own experience (Robertson 274).

Thus, in direct response to the images created by Graves and explored by Irish male poets and critics, Boland writes "Envoi." As a literary device, an

envoi is traditionally defined as the explanation or concluding remarks to a poem. Boland's "Envoi" is a direct pronouncement of her move toward deconstruction of imagemaking. Arranged in the middle of the collection, it follows "The Journey" which describes the reflections of a mother who watches over her sick children and "dreams of the wailing children described in book 6, the underworld scene of the *Aeneid*" (Haberstroh 75). Like the male pilgrims (Dante, for example) led through the underworld by male guides, the speaker here follows Sappho, her literary mentor (*ibid*).

Using "The Journey" and its unprecedented female escort as a jumping-off point, Boland describes her messenger – an active, sometimes brazen muse – in "Envoi." Understanding how deep the tradition of imagemaking runs, the speaker, perhaps Boland herself, stresses: "My muse must be better than those of men / who made theirs in the images of their myth" (*The Journey* 5-6). But the work she has begun is only "half-finished," and the tools with which to complete it are only "the crudest measure" (Robertson 247). Therefore, by recasting women and their images from reality instead from mythology, Boland deconstructs the imagemakers themselves.

Upon completion of her literary travels, Boland emerges as a figure who is bound by the artistic canon of telling the truth about the lives of Ireland's mothers, lovers, speakers and poets. In "Mise Eire" and "Envoi," Boland has a sense of what might be; if only the male muse and male tradition could be changed, varied, subverted (Robertson 276). In "Fever" and "The Oral Tradition," she sets out to reclaim the stories and art of fiction-making for women. Committed to telling the truth about the lives of past and contemporary women, "Boland reintroduces to public discourse the perspectives that run counter to the demand of Irish myth, to lead away from

the safety of amnesia and toward the risky complexity of life" (Hagen and Zelman 452).

Works Cited

- Allen-Randolph, Jody. "Finding a Voice Where She Found a Vision." *PN Review* 21 (Sept.-Oct. 1994): 13-17.
- Boland, Eavan. *The Journey and Other Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1986.
- _____. *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*. New York: Norton, 1995.
- Conboy, Shelia. "What You Have Seen is Beyond Speech: Female Journeys in the Poetry of Eavan Boland and Eilíean ni Chuilleanáin." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 16 (July 1990): 65-72.
- Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*. New York: Creative Age, 1948.
- Haberstroh, Patricia Boyle. *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- Hagen, Patricia and Thomas Zelman. "We Were Never on the Scene of the Crime: Eavan Boland's Repossession of History." *Twentieth Century Literature* 37 (Winter 1991): 442-53.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: Ballantine, 1988.
- Klauke, Amy. "An Interview with Eavan Boland." *Northwest Review* 25 (1987): 55-61.
- Reizbaum, Marilyn. "An Interview with Eavan Boland." *Contemporary Literature* 30 (Winter 1989): 471-79.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 1985. 2044-2056.

Robertson, Kerry . "Anxiety, Influence, Tradition and Subversion in the Poetry of Eavan Boland." *Colby Quarterly* 30 (Dec. 1994): 264-78.

Weekes, Ann Owens. "An Origin Like Water: The Poetry of Eavan Boland and Modernist Critiques of Irish Literature." *Bucknell Review* 38 (1994): 159-76.

LORI LITCHMAN

Contradiction in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*

Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* is one of the most dynamic characters he sends on his pilgrimage to Canterbury. "She has become a figure to be reckoned with by anyone interested in the history, both factual and literary, of women before 1500" (Hansen 26). Because the *Wife* is so dynamic, much study and criticism have been written about her, primarily with a focus on the gender roles present in her *Prologue* and *Tale*. The *Wife* speaks, as opposed to the silence many medieval women practiced. However, what the *Wife* speaks in her *Prologue* and what she presents in her *Tale* pose a problem. There are several contradictions to the strong woman who speaks in the *Prologue* and the woman who tells the *Tale*. After careful examination, one can conclude there are specific reasons why Chaucer presents these contradictions.

An Overview of the *Prologue*

In the *Prologue*, the reader meets the vocal woman who is from Bath. Not only does she speak, but she delivers a monologue on the trials and tribulations of marriage. She claims vast knowledge of this subject, having been bride to five husbands. In addition, she claims to have had domination over all of them, or "sovereynete" (III, 1038). Even though the *Wife* claims sovereignty over all of her husbands, the fifth, Jankyn, took some winning over. Jankyn, who was at one time a cleric, physically beat Alisoun leaving her "somedel deaf" (I, 444).

All Chaucer quotes come from *THE COMPLETE POETRY AND PROSE OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER*, 2nd ed. Fisher, John H., ed.

In her *Prologue*, the Wife claims to have loved Jankyn best, because he was “so fresshe and gay” (III, 508) in bed. It was through sexual intercourse that the Wife would forgive Jankyn for his abuse. “Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,/That thogh he hadde bet on every bon,/He koude wynne agayn my love anon” (III, 510-512). Jankyn also abused the Wife emotionally by constantly reading from the anti-feminist work, *Book of Wikked Wyves*. In this book, Jankyn read of women, such as Eve and Clytemnestra, who the anti-feminist clerics had deemed wicked and ruinful of men.

The *Book of Wikked Wyves* serves two purposes in the *Prologue*. After enduring enough abuse from Jankyn, the Wife hits him. Jankyn then retaliates by striking the Wife back, and causing her deafness. However, the book then becomes the agent of the Wife’s sovereignty over Jankyn. Because Jankyn feels guilty for hitting the Wife, he agrees when she asks him to dispose of the book. Jankyn burns the book to satisfy the Wife, and he vows to give her the sovereignty she desires. Here, the Wife uses the very cause of her oppression, the writings of anti-feminist clerics, to get what she desires most, domination over her husband. Perhaps Chaucer uses this episode in the *Prologue* as a foreshadowing of the events that follow in the *Tale*. Although the Wife has become subordinate to Jankyn, she still has a voice in the events of her life, much like the maiden in the Wife’s *Tale*.

The Wife also refers to other anti-feminist writings, especially those found throughout the Bible. However, she cites the tales, such as the parable of the Samaritan woman, to fit her agenda. The Wife speaks of virginity and her belief that women should not remain virgins. She refers to St. Paul as one of the anti-feminist writers in the Bible.

Th'apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede.
He seyde that precept theof hadde he noon.
Men may couseille a womman to been oon,
But conseillyng is nat comandement.
He putte it in oure owene juggement;
For hadde God comanded maydenhede,
Thanne hadde he dampned weddyng with the dede.
(III, 64-70)

The Wife essentially “invades [these] masculine territories of discourse” (Martin 219), such as the Bible, with her voice and preaching.

In addition to the Wife’s preaching on virginity, she also preaches for the freedom of sexual expression. She is gat-toothed, a physignomistic characteristic indicating lustfulness. She has no shame in her body and often refers to herself with reference to parts of her body. “I hadde the best quonyam myghte be” (III, 609). She claims “experience” (III, 1) and “auctoritee” (III, 1) in sexual matters from the very first line that she speaks, boldly quitting the males in her group who have only book knowledge. But there seems to be a slight contradiction between what the Wife says and what she intends. She says, “In wyfhode I wol use myn instrument/... Myn housbonde shal it have both eve and morwe” (III, 149-152). Even though she is vocal about her sexuality, it appears that her husband has control over it. Her use of the word “have” suggests her husband’s possession of her body. Her body is not for her own sexual pleasure, but for his. However, Jerry Root disagrees with this interpretation, arguing that the Wife’s use of the word instrument could mean her mouth. “Free use of her body implies freedom from the subjection of an economy of reproduction. We must also understand this freedom as a ‘space to speke’” (Root 259).

An Overview of the *Tale*

In the *Tale*, the storyteller seems quite different than the Wife Chaucer presents in the *Prologue*. In the beginning of the *Tale*, we see one of King Arthur's knights rape a nameless woman. This action sets the stage for the Wife's tale. The court then sentences the knight to death, but the Queen begs for his life. It is interesting that the Queen, a woman, would beg for the life of a rapist, after her husband has sentenced him to death. The Queen allows the knight a chance to survive only if he can answer the question of what women desire most. The knight subsequently finds an ugly hag in the woods who gives him the answer to the question. The knight's life is saved again, by a woman. The knight answers, "Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee/As wel over hir housbond as hir love,/And for to been in maistrie hym above" (III, 1038-1040). However, the knight must pay for the knowledge that the hag gives him, by marrying her. The hag, however, gives him the option to have an ugly faithful wife or a beautiful faithless wife. He allows her to make the decision, giving her power over him. The woman is then transformed into a beautiful maiden who promises to be subordinate to the knight forever. "With the happy ending the heroine relinquishes her power and dissolves into literal silence and alleged submission, the archetypal feminine transformation" (Hansen 33).

A Comparison of the *Tale* and the *Prologue*

The *Prologue*

The problem many feminist critics have with the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* and *Tale* is the contradiction that exists between the two. In the *Prologue*, the Wife is what contemporaries would call a feminist. She is a strong woman who is vocal in her belief that women should be powerful. However, in the *Tale*, the Wife is definitely a different person. In the *Tale*, she presents what some

critics may call an anti-feminist tale which is representative of the writers that she disdained in the *Prologue*. Although there are elements of the Wife's tale that are empowering to women, some critics argue that the majority consists of misogynistic text.

The portrait of the Wife that Chaucer paints throughout both the *Prologue* and *Tale* mirrors that of the "wikked wyve" (III, 685), painted by the anti-feminist clerics. The Wife is very vocal, openly sexual and wishes for dominance over all men. The Wife openly gossips to her friend about the wiles of her life and lovers. However, one immediate contradiction to the powerful discourse of the Wife is the fact that she is introduced to the reader in reference to a man. Her name, Alisoun, appears only twice in the whole text. Priscilla Martin compares the Wife to the Prioress, claiming commonality in the way each is addressed. "Each is defined in terms of sexuality or its renunciation, each defined, in a sense, in relation to men" (30). The woman from Bath is the Wife, not Alisoun.

While some critics perceive the Wife as inherently feminine, others argue that she is the polar opposite. These critics argue that because she is vocal and bawdy she is masculine. Timothy O'Brien argues that the use of water as a symbol makes Alisoun an icon of femininity: "The legendary background of Bath covertly posits water as a natural, original, salutary power inextricably linked with the feminine" (391). O'Brien also cites the numerous examples the Wife uses throughout her appearance, such as the parable of the Samaritan woman, and the reference to Midas (378). O'Brien continues in his analysis to argue that the Wife's discourse equates her with the feminine. "The term *queynte*, . . . puns on the past tense of *quenchen*, 'quench,' as well as the term . . . for female genitals" (ibid).

However, Martin disagrees with the characterization of the Wife as feminine. She argues that “the Wife seems, like many feminists, not very feminine” (37). Martin argues that even though the Wife has a typically feminine profession, dressmaker, her “skill is presented in terms of capitalism and competition, not service and self-abnegation” (38). Other critics agree with Martin in her evaluation and even take it a step further. The Wife’s trade signifies a designated place in society, something that women of the time did not have. Critic Stewart Justman also argues that the Wife did more than trade in the market, but her personal life was also a market place: “The Wife exploits the potential of marriage; the same could be said of a merchant making the most of the possibilities of trade” (347). She is nothing more than “a consumer of men” (348). The Wife is a strong businesswoman, who can bargain with the best. One of the reasons critics become baffled with the contradiction concerning the passive characters in the *Tale* is because of the strength the Wife displays in the *Prologue*.

The *Tale*

In the *Tale*, Chaucer presents quite an opposite image of the Wife depicted in the *Prologue*. There are several women present in the *Tale*; the anonymous woman who is raped by one of King Arthur’s knights, Queen Guinevere and the hag/beautiful woman. The woman the knight rapes is nameless throughout and is seen as nothing more than a body, a means to elicit a plot. After she is raped, she is no longer seen in the tale. She is “banish[ed] from the tale. She is ... a commodity to be exploited, conserved, or ignored by those whose rank in the structures of society affords them the right of proprietorship” (Lee 19). After a knight is sentenced to death, we are reminded that it is Guinevere, a woman, who saves the knight’s life, therefore, betraying the woman who was raped. Critic Brian S. Lee argues that the women of the

court save the knight's life because they "need him" to make their lives meaningful (30).

There is no solidarity present among these women of the *Tale*, again a contradiction to the words of the *Prologue*, where it appears that the Wife celebrates all women. In the end of the *Tale*, the old hag turns into a ravishingly beautiful woman who promises to be subordinate to the rapist knight. Critics argue that this situation is an anti-feminist's dream come true to have this woman give the man sovereignty. The knight is "ultimately rewarded" (Lee 17) for committing such a heinous crime. "To control him by his desire she must be controlled, literally shaped, by that desire" (Lindley 16).

There is even contradiction in the *Tale* itself. In the end, after the hag and knight are living happily ever after, the Wife emerges in her own voice to offer some insight.

And Jhesu Crist us sende
Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,
And grace t'overbyde hem that we wedde.
And eek I pray Jhesu shorte hir lyves
That wol nat be governed by hir wyves.
And olde and angry nygardes of dispence,
God sende hem soone verray pestilance!
(III, 1258-1264)

Again, the Wife preaches that women should have dominance over their husbands or else the husbands should die. But, as demonstrated above, the Wife has made the nameless hag/beauty submit her power to the knight and to be his subordinate. We hear the Wife's voice at the end, but can we believe what she says, taking into account the inherent contradictions?

An Analysis of the Contradictions

Because of the contradictions described above, modern critics are faced with the dilemma of sorting out Chaucer's intended meaning of what he presents. Some critics argue that the contradictions exist simply because Chaucer is a man. They argue that because of Chaucer's sex, he could never accurately convey the true intentions of the Wife. Some also argue that Chaucer is creating the ultimate male dream. Chaucer creates in the Wife "what men produce when they think about women" (Lindley 4). A woman who is strong is made passive through the tale she tells. This characterization then becomes the ultimate in subordination. "This is a male fantasy, of course. And when we consider that such desire for the reform – not the overturning – of patriarchy is represented as a woman's desire, it is even more apparent that this is a masculine dream" (Dinshaw 117). These critics believe that the character of the Wife is what the men of the Middle Ages dreamed of, not only silencing all women, but especially silencing a strong woman.

Others argue that Chaucer presents such a strong character specifically because the Wife is the perfect example of the "wikked wyve" (III, 685) according to anti-feminist clerics. She becomes the combination of all the wives Jankyn reads about.

She not only uncovers what is hidden in the working of patriarchal ideology but simultaneously appropriates the place of the Other that ideology openly creates; she assumes the place of the feminine (the stereotype) to which patriarchy explicitly relegates her. (Dinshaw 119)

These critics argue that Chaucer gave this woman the characterization of mimicking patriarchy because he is trying to show the foolishness of it.

Perhaps the most valid interpretation and the one critics most widely accept is the fact that the Wife is, after all, a product of her time, regardless of how modern she appears. Chaucer creates a woman who mimics patriarchy so that she can gain control in a world that makes her subordinate. "The Wife of Bath uses the material force of language to break open a space in which she can speak rather than being spoken" (Root 262). By taking the words of the anti-feminist clerics and putting them in her own mouth, and taking the actions of the stereotypical woman and putting them in her body, she has taken control.

She makes audible precisely what patriarchal discourse would keep silent, reveals the exclusion and devaluing that patriarchal discourse performs. Speaking as the excluded Other, she explicitly and affirmatively assumes the place that patriarchal discourse accords the feminine. Far from being trapped within the 'prison house' of anti-feminist discourse, the Wife of Bath, ... convert[s] a form of subordination into an affirmation. (Dinshaw 115)

The Wife is fully aware that the chance of the improvement in the status of women during her lifetime is slim. Her goal is to give women a voice in the patriarchal world that silences them.

The fact that Chaucer is merely trying to give women a voice that they otherwise were denied in the Middle Ages solves the dilemma of the contradiction founding the *Tale* and the *Prologue*. Chaucer, as a medieval man, is aware of his society and realizes that the status of women is going to remain relatively the same. But he attempts to give women the voice that they desire. Simply because the nag turns into a ravishing beauty at the end of the Wife's *Tale*, this does not necessarily mean that Chaucer is anti-woman. Quite the opposite is true. Instead of silencing the Wife, he allows her to speak and to share her knowledge with the other women of the era. Even though the

woman at the end of the *Wife's Tale* allows herself to be governed by the knight, she is still given the right to speak her decision. Chaucer gives the Wife and the women of medieval time what they "moost desiren" (III, 901), and that is a voice in their otherwise patriarchal society.

While some may argue that a woman who was strong and vocal in the Middle Ages would have had an end similar to that of Joan of Arc, one must keep in mind the fact that the Wife did not practice what she preached. The Wife endured countless instances of physical and mental abuse from her husbands. What she did was speak from her experience. Not only did she have sexual experience, she had the experience of how to defend herself against the violence of her husbands and the anti-feminist's rhetoric of her era. She lived to tell her experience in an attempt to make life better for some other young woman. If Chaucer were to be unrealistic, he would have created a character who was unharmed by violence. Instead, he created a woman that the women of the era could have related to, having shared the same experiences the Wife endured. The Wife of Bath is the voice of all women who were rendered powerless and silent by the anti-feminist people of the time.

Conclusion

What must be considered is the fact that Chaucer is after all, a human being. Perhaps the contradictions he designed between the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* and *Tale* were intentional, perhaps they were not. What Chaucer has created is a character who is vocal and who wants to give women the voice they deserve. Chaucer was a writer in the Middle Ages who wrote about what he knew. Of course, he is not going to create the blazing feminist that society of the 1990s would picture. Such a characterization would be unrealistic. Chaucer attempts something that writers, and even society today, often fail at,

and that is giving women what they most desire – a voice to create their lives on their own. Such a notion is a human one, not a feminist or anti-feminist one. Through Chaucer's Wife of Bath, he makes an attempt to fix something he believed to be wrong.

Works Cited

- Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Fisher, John H., ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*. 2nd ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1989.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Justman, Stewart. "Trade as Pudendum: Chaucer's Wife of Bath." *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994): 344-351.
- Lee, Brian S. "Exploitation and Excommunication in The Wife of Bath's Tale." *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995): 17-33.
- Lindley, Arthur. "'Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where': Alisoun's Absences in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*." *ELH* 59 (1992):1-19.
- Martin, Priscilla. *Chaucer's Women*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990.
- O'Brien, Timothy D. "Troubling Waters: The Feminine and the Wife of Bath's Performance." *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992): 377-391.
- Root, Jerry. "'Space to Speke': The Wife of Bath and the Discourse of Confession." *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994): 252-269.

KORI CONNELLY

The Reality of Rape

Review of the Law

The 1970s saw sweeping reform in rape laws across the country, which marked the first significant change in the approach of the law towards victims. Traditionally, courts and laws placed the victim on trial by requiring an unnecessary and unfair burden of proof. Rape myths pervaded the criminal justice system, making rape the most underreported crime (Brownmiller 190) and, in essence, blaming victims for the crime and undermining victims' healing processes. Rape victims were treated far differently and far worse than any other victim of crime. New laws eliminated the need for corroboration and the victim's resistance. Many states enacted rape shield laws to prevent the exposure of a victim's past sexual experiences.

Despite the reforms of the 1970s, the criminal justice system continued to perceive rape myths as true, resulting in a noticeable difference in the treatment of stranger rape victims and acquaintance rape victims. Acquaintance rape continues to be treated, both by the laws and courts, as less serious, underscoring the myth that non-stranger rape is less traumatic than stranger rape. Realizing problems with the law's treatment of acquaintance rape, Pennsylvania's rape statute underwent reform in 1995. Several other states have also continued to reform their laws in the hope of providing more

This essay is excerpted from a more expansive manuscript which examines the existence and persistence of rape myths within the historical context of rape law.

fair standards; however, in 1997, the criminal justice system is still upholding rape myths, which degrades victims and dissuades them from reporting their victimizations.

For the purposes of comparison to Pennsylvania's recent changes, fifteen states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont and Wyoming) were randomly selected in order to determine today's trend of rape law reform.

In three of these fifteen states, the law contains a separate spousal rape clause, which grades the rape of a spouse less seriously and punishes less severely. Prior to its 1995 reform, Pennsylvania law also contained such a clause, that defined spousal rape as a second degree felony -- a lesser crime, and therefore less heinous, than first degree forcible rape. By separating spouses from the law, legislators uphold the rape myths that real rapes are committed by strangers and that stranger rape is more traumatic than non-stranger rape. By making this crime a lesser offense, the government seems to be sending a message to rapists that it is absolutely wrong to rape a woman who they are not married to, but not as wrong to rape their wives.

These state laws also uphold the myth that a victim must be injured for the act to be rape by grading rape/sexual assault in varying degrees based on the amount of force used or injury received. By saying that the most serious crime involves the use of a deadly weapon and results in serious bodily injury, these laws indicate that the crime in question is not sex against the victim's will, but the violence used against the victim. The ultimate violation in a rape is not the external violence a victim may receive; these external injuries, such as a bruising of the face or a slitting of the throat, are punishable under

different laws, such as assault and aggravated assault. The ultimate violation is, and should be, forced sexual penetration, and a victim should not have to receive serious bodily injury in addition to the rape itself in order to be protected fully by the law.

It is also interesting to note the statements that several states make regarding penetration: "The essential guilt of rape consists in the outrage of the person and the feelings of the victim of rape. Any sexual penetration, however slight, is sufficient to complete the crime" (9 Cal. Penal Code §1). If the essential guilt is the sexual penetration/intrusion, then why does every one of these fifteen states treat rape differently depending on certain circumstances such as force and age?

Very few laws allow the victim's lack of consent to be the sole condition of the crime. Consent is currently defined by the law in several different ways. Texas' Penal Code defines "without consent" as the use of violence, the threat of violence, when a victim is unconscious, suffers from a mental disease, has been intentionally impaired, or if the accused is a public service, mental health employee or clergyman (Ch. 22). In California, consent means "the positive cooperation in act or attitude that is pursuant to an exercise of free will" (9 Cal. Penal Code Ch. 1). Nebraska's law states that "without consent" involves the use of force or coercion, expressed lack of consent through words or actions or deception of identity. Nebraska's law cautions that this consent must be genuine and real. The legislative intent behind this law was to "protect the dignity of the victim at all stages of the judicial process, which will ensure that the alleged offender has due process and establishes a system of investigation, prosecution, punishment and rehabilitation for the welfare of the citizens" (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 28-317-320).

Another problem that is evident in reviewing these laws is the number of different names and varying definitions of rape. There are thirteen different names for rape in these fifteen laws: rape, sexual battery, sexual assault, sexual assault of a spouse, unlawful sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse without consent, male rape, sexual contact with an inmate, forcible rape, aggravated sexual assault, first through fourth degree sexual assault, first through third degree rape and first through fourth degree criminal sexual penetration. With so many different names for the same basic crime, how can people be sure exactly what rape or sexual assault is? Everyone knows what homicide and robbery means, even though state laws differ in their specific elements of the crimes; however, when so many different names exist for the same basic act, it seems unlikely that society (jurors, judges, legislators, police officers, etc.) will be able to understand the differentiation.

These fifteen states are fairly representative of every state's rape laws. However, in order to understand how rape law reform has affected Pennsylvanians, it is important to take a closer look at Pennsylvania's law, comparing it to these fifteen states' statutes.

Pennsylvania's Rape Law Reform

In 1972, Pennsylvania's rape law contained a clear definition of rape, which included more than just sexual intercourse and eliminated the phrase "forcibly and against her will." Reformers also repealed corroboration and the need to file a prompt complaint (Scalo 200). Problems arose, however, in 1994, when the Pennsylvania Superior Court ruled that "no" did not mean "no" according to current law. In the *Commonwealth v Berkowitz* (609 A.2d 1338 Pa. Super. 1992), the court held that a woman was not raped when a man penetrated her, despite her repeated and clearly expressed lack of consent because the law did not contain a consent element (Scalo 195). While the court

noted that verbal resistance was relevant in determining forcible compulsion, verbal protests were not sufficient evidence of forcible compulsion; in essence, the court decided that sometimes the law reads no to mean yes (Scalo 210).

Berkowitz involved two college students who were acquaintances—a typical non-stranger rape case in which no weapon was used. A jury found Berkowitz guilty of rape and indecent assault, but the Superior Court discharged the rape conviction and reversed and remanded the indecent assault charge because it found that evidence was improperly excluded under the rape shield law (ibid). Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court affirmed the Superior Court’s dismissal because the evidence did not satisfy the forcible compulsion element of the rape statute. The court did uphold the indecent assault charges, however (Scalo 213). The court held that there were neither threats nor use of force, except the defendant’s body weight—which was not enough to constitute forcible compulsion (Scalo 214). The court, in essence, upheld rape myths by equating the lack of resistance with a degree of force – since she didn’t resist there was no force (Scalo 220). The requirement of additional force assumes that lack-of-consent sex itself does not constitute force and pain, which completely ignores rape victims’ experiences. The harm in rape is in the intimate physical invasion; additional injuries other than the actual penetration are punishable under different criminal laws (e.g. assault).

The Pennsylvania Senate passed its own rape law reform which removed forcible compulsion from the statute and added “without consent of the other person” as the definition of rape (Moran A1). The Senate had wanted rape to mean nonconsensual sex; they defined consent as: “words or overt actions by a person who is competent to give informed consent indicating a freely given agreement to have sex” (Scalo 218). The House of Representatives had its own version, sponsored by Karen Ritter, which stated that lack of resistance by a

victim would not constitute consent. In a memo written by Ritter, she suggested that her goal was “to get more felony convictions for ‘acquaintance rapes.’” The best way to achieve this, she believed, was to have two grades of offenses. Dismissing the terms rape and deviate sexual intercourse as “outdated,” she suggested using the term sexual assault. After a year of debates in the House and the Senate, a new law was endorsed by Governor Ridge on March 31, 1995.

Like most states, this new law used a gradation approach by defining rape as a first degree felony and by defining sexual assault as a second degree felony (Scalo 219). The sexual assault provision was hailed as the direct response to *Berkowitz*, which reaffirmed the fact that “no means no.” However, sexual assault only applies to sexual intercourse, not to other types of sexual penetration. Also, many argue that the reform still refuses to acknowledge that a victim is a full-fledged rape victim; instead, a victim is a “sexual assault” victim, and her assailant is not punished as severely (Scalo 227). Pennsylvania’s distinction between rape and sexual assault, much like Missouri’s law, holds that a real rape - one which is a first degree felony - involves force, while sexual assault involves lack of consent and is, therefore, not as severe. Calling the two crimes different names, despite the fact that the act is essentially the same (the sexual penetration), furthers the distinction between stranger rape (which normally involves external violence) and nonstranger rape (which often does not result in external violence). This distinction further legitimizes the sense of nonstranger rape as being less bad, upholding the myth that stranger rape is more terrifying and more heinous.

According to the head of the Sex Crimes Unit in the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office, Charles Ehrlich, the reform has made it easier to get convictions, but the charge of sexual assault is not utilized very much by his

office. Judges use it sparingly as a “compromise” when no force or injury is present. He contends that the problem of low reports and convictions remain despite changes to the law because of people’s misconceptions about rape (personal interview).

Pennsylvania’s Law in Comparison to Other States’ Rape Laws

Pennsylvania’s rape law has improved and remains one of the better laws in the country. Unlike several states, Pennsylvania does not have a separate spousal rape clause, while it does contain a sexual assault law that defines the crime as against a victim’s consent. The sexual assault law does help prosecute more acquaintance rapes, where violence or external injuries are not usually inflicted.

After reviewing these laws, several problems are evident. For example, not one of the sixteen states has a single definition of the crime “rape”; every state has at least two different types or forms of rape. Six of the states use a varying degree approach, much like murder, in which the amount of force used dictates the degree of sexual assault. Many people advocate this approach as giving more options to judges and juries; however, too often juries are not properly instructed on all of the options for fear of confusing people.

Three states used aggravated sexual assault and simple sexual assault, the same way assault is usually divided. Earlier research on the 1970s rape law reform movement has shown that this separation of crimes is not effective (Spohn and Horney). Juries are often not instructed on these different options; even in Pennsylvania where there are only two distinctions, the Assistant District Attorney Erhlich agreed that there is little need for more than one definition of rape, stating “Either it’s rape or isn’t.” Erhlich found the addition of sexual assault to be ineffective for the most part, since juries are

usually not instructed on it and judges infrequently use it (personal interview). Therefore, the law that was hailed in Pennsylvania as being the answer to the *Berkowitz* dilemma has really not improved the system, as judges, prosecutors and juries continue to view rape as involving violence and view sexual activities against a victim's expressed will as acceptable behavior.

When the law was under reform in Pennsylvania, much debate was held over the naming of the crime. Many wanted to switch to "sexual assault," to emphasize the violence of the attack; however, many victims protested this name because, to them, the crime was anything but sex (Schorer 6). The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) initially lobbied for the term sexual assault, but changed its opinion after more research. As Kathryn Geller Myers explained, people understand what rape means. "It conjures up specific images in people's minds that sexual assault just doesn't do...people don't know what sexual assault is" (personal interview). However, when the new law was passed with two different names, PCAR officials agreed that confusion was sure to arise from the two different terms.

The Perfect Law

It is obvious from analyzing these laws that a perfect rape law, at this time, does not exist. Although New Jersey, New York and Nebraska are considered examples of good reform by PCAR, none of them define rape by a single definition. According to Susan Brownmiller, who wrote the first comprehensive book about the history of rape and the treatment of rape victims: "All acts of sex forced on unwilling victims deserve to be treated in concept as equally grave offenses in the eyes of the law" (425). She goes on to define the act of rape as "an invasion of bodily integrity and a violation of freedom and self determination wherever it happens to take place, in or out of the marriage bed" (428). To dispel the various myths that exist, she further

describes rape as: “a dull, blunt, ugly act committed by punk kids, their cousins and older brothers, not by charming, witty, unscrupulous, heroic, sensual rakes, or by timid souls deprived of a normal sexual outlet or by supermenschen possessed of uncontrollable lust” (228).

Brownmiller believes that men and women have different perspectives on rape, most likely because women are at a significantly higher risk for being raped. She claims that:

To a woman, the definition of rape is fairly simple: a sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private, personal inner spouse without consent—in short, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods—constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical, and rational integrity and is a hostile, degrading act of violence that deserves the name of rape. (422)

According to Assistant District Attorney Erhlich, Pennsylvania’s law is perfect the way it is (personal interview). But the rape victim advocates from PCAR offer a different view. Their perfect law would be quite simple: rape would be defined as sexual intercourse, anal intercourse, cunnilingus and fellatio that is without the victim’s consent. They would make one definition for rape, which would be a first degree felony (Geller Myers personal interview). Thus, the law would protect all victims equally – spousal rape victims, acquaintance rape victims and “real” victims. This law would debunk the myth that says that one type of rape is more traumatic than another, since they would all be equal before the law. It would also debunk the myth that force or fighting is necessary in order to constitute rape.

The need for force to be present in order to prosecute the crime to the fullest extent of the law also needs to be changed when creating the perfect

rape law. Equating the need for force with the absence of consent “tells men it is okay to rape, just don’t use a weapon” (Estrich 62). According to Estrich, the present need to demonstrate force is not compatible with the reality of rape: “That a woman feels genuinely afraid, that man has created a situation that she finds frightening, even that he has done it intentionally in order to secure sexual satisfaction, is apparently not enough to constitute the necessary force or even implicit threat of force which earns a woman’s bodily integrity protection in the context of a simple rape” (67). Again, a perfect rape law would clearly state that the crime in rape is the penetration without consent, regardless of force.

In a perfect law, “without consent” would include: force; mental, physical, psychological or emotional coercion; expressed lack of consent through words or actions; or if the victim is physically or mentally incapacitated or unconscious.

This law would also include provisions for the payment of medical bills and any related psychological therapy, as some states’ laws currently do. Furthermore, the allowance of a victim’s past sexual history would not be permitted into evidence.

In a perfect world with these perfect laws, judges, district attorneys and juries would also be well instructed and informed as to the issues of rape. Understanding the truth about rape and treating victims with the dignity, respect and sensitivity that they deserve is an essential component of this perfect law.

*The Need for Education **

After reviewing the laws of sixteen states, including Pennsylvania's, it is obvious that the law is far from being perfect. However, study after study has been conducted after reforms have been enacted which show that despite the continual progress of the criminal justice system, victims still do not report the crime.

According to Assistant District Attorney Ehrlich, there were no changes in the screening process after Pennsylvania's last reform, nor was there a vast change in the number of cases the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office dealt with. He claims that a rape victim's treatment has been better in the criminal justice system because "of society, not reform" (personal interview). He added that there is no need for a new law, "because it is a problem with society, not the law." Rape victims continue to be treated differently because people "look at her behavior" (personal interview).

PCAR also suggested that the problem with rape is with people's understanding of the crime; "people only think of stranger rape; they are in denial about acquaintance rape" (Geller Myers personal interview).

Instead of focusing on a perfect law, in the hope of encouraging more victims to report, society must focus its attention on rape education. The

The expanded manuscript explores the growing movement on college campuses to increase awareness and to provide education and support for victims. It concludes with a proposal to begin such a program at La Salle University.

more people learn about rape, the less likely they are to believe rape myths. The more rape myths are debunked, the more rape victims are accepted as true victims. Creating a victim-friendly environment will increase reporting and will create an increase in convictions of rapists, both for stranger and non-stranger rape cases.

Works Cited

Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ch. 13.

Brownmiller, Susan. *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. NY: Bantam Books, 1975.

9 Cal. Penal Code Ch. 1.

Col. Crime Class. § 18-3-402-404.

45 Mont. Code Ann. §5.

Erhlich, Charles. Assistant District Attorney, Philadelphia Sex Crimes Unit. Personal Interview. 7 March 1997.

Estrich, Susan. *Real Rape*. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Geller Myers, Kathryn. Communication Director of Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. Personal Interview. 9 March 1997.

18 Idaho Code Ch. 61.

Moran, Robert. "PA Senate Passes Rape Bill," *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 14 June 1994: A1.

Neb. Rev. Stat. Ch. 28.

21 N.J. Rev. Stat. Ch. 14.

N.M. Stat. Ann. §30-9-10-16.

N.Y. Penal Law §130.00.

Ohio Rev. Code Ann. § 2907.02.

18 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. §3121-3125.

Ritter, Karen. Letter to Members of the House Judicial Committee. 9 June 1994.

11 R.I. General Laws Title Ch. 11-37.

Scalo, Rosemary J. "What Does No Mean In Pennsylvania?-The Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Interpretation of Rape and the Effectiveness of the Legislature's Response," *Villanova Law Review*. 40(1996): 193-232.

Schorer, Jane. "It Couldn't Happen to Me: One Woman's Story," *Des Moines Register*. 25 Feb 1990 (reprint).

Spohn, Cassia and Julie Horney. *Rape Law Reform: A Grassroots Revolution and Its Impact*. NY: Plenum Press, 1992.

Texas Penal Code Ann. §22.011-22.021.

V.T. Stat. Ann. Title 13 §2014-2.

6 Wyo. Stat. Ann. §2-3.

ALLISON A. NANARTOWCZ

Brave New Woman

The weight of the realization made her sink deeper into the black beanbag chair, and she shifted to stare at the gray sky outside. The past few weeks had been tremendously emotional for her, and she had finally managed to bring herself to a state of distance and numbness from her feelings. Her friend's comment, however, reopened surges within her.

"It won't be the same," he had so casually said, "now that college is over."

College. That mysteriously unique period in a person's life that is proclaimed to be full of certain opportunities and experiences that can only be lived once. For Alex, it was the critical period of such significant decisions and moments that would be officially ending with her graduation in three days. She supposed that this was going to be yet another milestone into adulthood, although she sometimes wondered when or whether a person ever reached all the required milestones and achieved full adult status.

Her thoughts lately, however, were concerned with other matters. Some of the things on her mind did involve achievements, or rather, expectations. Alex was the first to admit that she set high goals for herself, usually to the extreme of perfectionism. Even now, she could recall the list she had prepared of what she would, not *might*, accomplish during her college years. Since she was a little girl, her parents had told her she could do whatever she set out to do. Therefore, it had been with confidence that she had seen herself at the top of her class; that she had envisioned herself not only participating in multiple organizations, but being a leader in them as well; that she had pictured herself satisfied and surrounded by people who were to be lifelong loved ones.

How ironic, then, that the figure gazing so intently outside should look as forlorn as the skies on which she focused her attention.



A couple of months ago, Alex had received information about summer jobs as a camp counselor. A substantial chunk of the piles of paperwork had been recommendations to be given to trusted references. Alex had spent a lot of time examining both the questions and the potential people she could request to complete them. That had been a difficult task, because she tended not to let people get too close to her. This was due in part to the fact that she preferred to be alone — growing up, her favorite toys had been her books and imagination. She often came across as too quiet to others, who combined this with her “sweet” voice and generally did not make the effort to bother with her. It was only when someone got to know her on a more individual and private level, or when Alex approached others based on an interest in them from her close observations, that she allowed people into her world.

Looking at the people in her life was always painful for Alex, largely because there were so many men. Despite the number of involvements and relationships that were represented by the bundles of letters and photos in her keepsake box, there was an emptiness too. There were regrets and pain that sometimes made loneliness seem more desirable. When she was younger, Alex had looked far older than her actual years. Long, dark lashes framed her green eyes, which sometimes appeared blue; her smile was lodged between dimples; the angles of her face revealed her Native American heritage; the curves of her petite figure reflected her vigilance about her weight.

It was this very attention to her body that had led her to stand in dance class one day, to look at her thighs in her high-gloss tights, and to resolve to shed a few pounds so that she could have the shape the other girls whispered about

and regarded with envy. Her resolve was soon to become her obsession as she spent two years battling with anorexia nervosa.

Her looks and attentiveness to them were not unfamiliar to guys, either. Alex could not deny that in many ways, she had seen her body as a source of power. She had always liked flirting, and knowing that by moving a certain way and by having a certain manner about her, she could influence men. What she also learned was that her body could be a weapon against her as well. It was her body that was held down to be violated. It was a body that was invited for one-night stands and casual sex. It was a body that was thrown against a car in a fit of anger. It was a body that two of her professors had wanted to see outside of class. It was a body that was suited to work as a strip dancer or as a Hooters waitress for big money. It was a body that was attached to names like “slut” and “whore,” and that fit nicely into slinky clothes and lingerie, but not relationships and lives. It was a body that was going to be given a letter of reference, she was told, once a few favors were provided.



“Did your final grades come yet?”

Alex stared at the voice and turned to her artist friend, who leaned tiredly against the half-opened door.

“Yes,” she answered, “And I did miss top honors, just as I suspected.”

Her friend shook her head in a way that seemed to imply both frustration and surprise. “But you worked really hard and did really well. You should be proud of yourself. I am.”

Alex smiled her thanks and began to doodle on a notepad on the floor where she was still curled on the beanbag chair. She wasn’t exactly thrilled with her marks, because she knew she was capable of better. She was also not enthused

because her academics had always been of utmost importance to her, and she felt she had failed.

When it came to scholastic over-achievement, Alex was an expert. She excelled in her classes, took her attendance and assignments seriously, was acquainted with all her instructors, and put her schoolwork above all else. Perhaps her attitude originated from a family full of teachers. Perhaps her attitude originated from a passion for words— for reading and writing— and a passionate curiosity. More than likely, her attitude came from a desire to balance one asset, that of her appearance, with another, that of her intelligence. She enjoyed the challenges of learning, and of exploring the logical places that were so unlike her more free-spirited ways of thinking. But similar to her body, her mind could be a weapon, too. When she was praised for her averages, she was criticized for her lack of common sense. When she was recognized for her scores, she was teased about being an “eternal student.” And when she was emotional or opinionated, she was reprimanded for “knowing better” and having not “thought things through.”

It was not until the end of her senior year— indeed, just recently— that Alex had concluded that this was all there was to her, all she had going for her: a body for sex and a mind for school. Both seemed so limited, and she so wanted to believe there was more to herself.



Having left her friends and having found a window seat on the “el” Alex reflected on her past four years. Although she had not necessarily accomplished her original list of goals for college, Alex could not deny that she had at least touched upon most of them. She was graduating in the top percentile of her class. She had participated in a number of activities, to the extent that her work schedule had allowed, for she had financed her own

education. She had made a number of friends, much more so than ever before in her life, and although she was curious to see who would stay in touch, she would make a definite effort on her part not to lose track of them. Extensive tests and surveys from her school's Career Development Center reinforced the major and career interests she had pursued since the start of college. However, these were not the things that passed across the screen of Alex's mind as the city rumbled and whirled past beneath her.

Alex sat and thought about how her mother had read her diary and had discovered Alex's most intimate sentiments and actions; her mother had eventually consented to Alex going to a gynecologist, who put her on the Pill. She thought of her first HIV test, and how she had had to convince her boyfriend at the time to be tested as well; he had said that if anything happened to either of them, it would be Alex's fault. She thought of how she had transferred away for a year, and while away at her new school had witnessed her roommate's abortion there. She thought about how she had known nothing about alcohol and other drugs, and then how common their presence and usage had become to some whom she knew. She thought about how she had almost overcome her terror of traveling by herself— of getting lost, of being in the dark, of being robbed or attacked. She thought about the death of her grandfather and brother. She thought about the day that she declared, "I don't believe in God." She thought about these and other events as the gray of the day darkened into the black of night.



Alex wanted to believe that she was more than just her body and her intelligence. She wanted to believe that she was just as good and successful as the people to whom she compared herself. A classmate from high school had stopped by a few days ago and had informed Alex about her apartment, new

car, and impressive nursing job. Alex's overwhelming feeling of inferiority had been complete with the mention of a search for a wedding gown for a May ceremony in one year. Alex had been engaged herself, and the relationship had not worked. Alex had remained still and quiet listening to her former classmate and had said to herself, how wonderful it must be to live in a world with people, but to have your own world as well –a world where your view of yourself comes from your own eyes, and your focus and standards come from inside, not external sources.

Alex wanted to believe that one day she would have her own practice and a large family. She wanted to believe that she would find someone who would be dedicated and devoted to her as she would be in return, but who also would respect her independence, her opinions, even her moodiness. Despite what she had always been told to the contrary, she wanted to believe she could “have her cake and eat it, too.” Alex wanted to believe that someone would see the other characteristics she believed she had to offer, although admittedly when individuals did acknowledge them, she often felt awkward and unworthy of their compliments, as if they were too close. More than anything, with strengths and deficiencies aside and all-else aside, she wanted to be Alex.

~*~*~

College. That period in a woman's life when she looks back at who she was, and what she dreamed she would do. That mixture of moments of reassurance and doubt, of change and growth. As Alex sank deeper into her bed cushions and shifted to stare at the framed diploma on her wall, she could hear the congratulations and “best wishes” from relatives and friends echoing in her head, reminding her that the “real world” awaited her. She could also hear her laughter, her tears, her determined proclamations, and her whispered affections from the past few years – years when she felt she was and had indeed already

lived in the “real world.” But that evening, curled beneath her covers, Alex heard with the greatest clarity the voice that told her to be herself, her whole self, and to regard this period not as a disappointment or ending, but rather as a precious new memory and beginning again.

A review by KRISTIN McGONIGLE

One Thread at a Time

SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap,
by Peggy Orenstein in association with the
American Association of University Women.

In the last twenty years, specialists in numerous fields have researched, studied and questioned if the term “gender equity in schools” is actually an oxymoron. In her recently published work entitled *SchoolGirls*, journalist Peggy Orenstein also takes part in the recent trend toward investigating gender differences in education. *SchoolGirls* chronicles a year in the life of two Northern California middle schools—one urban, the other suburban—and the girls who attend them. Orenstein sets out to decipher whether gender bias still exists and if so, whether it discriminates according to race and economic status. What she eventually discovers is that the ugly beast of gender bias still roams the halls of American schools and often wages a battle with other education hindering monsters.

Orenstein begins her work by acknowledging the previously published research, studies and tests of her feminist predecessors. She writes in association with the American Association of University Women (AAUW), whose own breakthrough survey was the first to assert the notion that girls receive less attention in the classroom than their male counterparts. The AAUW’s report based on the survey, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, also ascertained that the deficiency in a female’s education is one of the leading causes of low self-esteem. Appalled at the results of the survey, the most extensive on gender and self-esteem ever produced, Orenstein decided to

go to the schools to see for herself and find out if things have possibly changed for the better.

SchoolGirls ultimately succeeds in the purpose for which it was intended; it tells the stories of numerous women, be they of pre- or post-pubescent ages, and the effects of gender bias in education on their personal lives. It tells the stories because *SchoolGirls* primarily reads like narrative prose with eloquent descriptions of its subjects and their surroundings. Thus, the subjects become characters and the swell, crest and crash of their educational wave is interwoven into an intriguing plot.

Orenstein first presents her examination of the suburban Weston Middle School, whose primarily white student body consists of intelligent eighth grade girls who are afraid to admit to their abilities and the boys that tease them. It is in this section that Orenstein first illustrates the concept of “the hidden curriculum,” the unstated lessons that students learn in school due to behavioral norms and socialization factors. Weston girls know that they have greater opportunities than their female predecessors, yet they still shrink into themselves during math and science classes and let the boys claim the class’ and teacher’s attention. Consequently, they are still ignored and lose their sense of self-esteem in the process.

On the other hand, the girls of Audubon Middle School are doubly cursed. Not only do they face the gender bias that Orenstein and the AAUW discuss, but they face the disheartening challenge of attending a poverty-stricken school that often ignores its gender deficiencies to focus on its ever-present racial and economical dilemmas. The Audubon girls are not only ignored because of their sex, but also because of the collective notion that the students as a whole are not worthy of a reputable education.

What is most satisfying about *SchoolGirls* is that Orenstein, as an investigator, gives a personal account of her experience as a knowledgeable outsider. She is never critical of her subjects or those that affect them the most and she makes an effort to illustrate the solutions some teachers have taken to resolve the inequities in their classrooms.

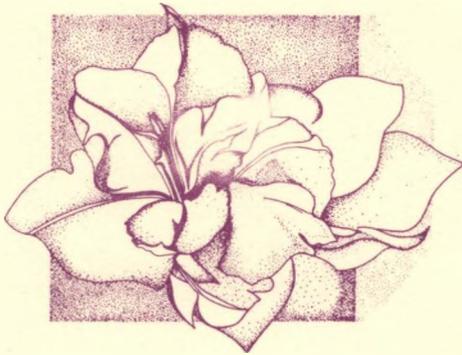
Orenstein ventures into the lives of the Weston and Audubon girls to put faces on the statistics revealed in the AAUW report. She forges friendships with the girls to discover the many problems that take root in their educational deficiencies. Orenstein addresses the problems her subjects face from their point of view and realizes that they're not always academic. She eventually discovers that burdens such as body image, sexual harassment, and family responsibility also weigh heavily on how a young girl handles middle school.

In the final chapter, entitled "Through the Looking Glass," one of the teachers that Orenstein examined in her research makes a statement that sums up the essence of what *SchoolGirls* is ultimately attempting to convey. The final chapter discusses life in a gender fair classroom and in one of its most powerful examples describes Ms. Logan, a sixth grade teacher who is assisting her class with the construction of a quilt depicting "Women We Admire." As both her male and female students work conscientiously on their panels at their desks, Ms. Logan turns to Orenstein and states, "This is how you teach about gender, one stitch at a time."

Works Cited

AAUW Survey. *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*. Researched by the Analysis Group, Greenberg-Lake. Washington, D.C, 1990.

Orenstein, Peggy. In association with the American Association of University Women. *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.



*The logo of the La Salle University Women's Studies Program is adapted from the Sara Steele painting, Feng/Abundance of Light.
©1988 by Sara Steele, All Rights Reserved.*



La Salle University
Women's Studies
1900 W. Olney Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19141-1199