EMMA THOMPSON - HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

ON THE ISSUES
THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S QUARTERLY • FALL 1998

PAPAL POLITICS & PELVIC MATTERS
AUNG SAN SUU KYI BURMA'S GANDHI
PARTY ANIMALS GEN-X'S POLITICS
PLUS: MARY DALY, TANYA MELICH AND BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

HUMAN RIGHTS
HUMAN WRONGS - A SPECIAL ISSUE

US$3.95 • CAN $4.95
AN EXTRAORDINARY BOOK AND PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION FOR
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Published by Rizzoli International Publications, ENDURING SPIRIT includes the complete collection of exhibition photographs and a special essay by ISABEL ALLENDE. Available at fine bookstores or by calling 1-800-52-BOOKS.

For information about the EXHIBITION call 1-888-294-9880. For information about AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL call 1-800-AMNESTY
ON THE ISSUES

FEATURES

COVER STORY
Human Rights Human Wrongs, a World Report – 14
Fifty years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Emma Thompson - Marilyn Stasio – 16
   The world’s her stage
   An interview with Charlotte Bunch
Layli Bashir - Kavita Menon – 23
   Unexpected Crusader
Aung San Suu Kyi - Alan Clements – 24
   Burma’s Gandhi
The Ultimate Growth Industry - Jan Goodwin – 28
   Trafficking in women and girls
America’s Political Prisoners - Mary Lou Greenberg – 32
A Place at the Table
   Women at the UN - Jennifer Tierney – 33
   Today Harvard, tomorrow the world - Swanee Hunt – 34

SPORTS
Enduring Women - Anngel Delaney – 36
   Athletes achieving the impossible

RELIGION
Rosary V. Ovary - Ann Pettifer – 38
   Papal politics and women

TRENDS
Brave New Girls - Debbie Stoller – 42
   These TV heroines know what girl power really means

RELATIONSHIPS
Saving the World - Michelle Brockway – 46
   Motherhood as advocacy

POLITICS
Turnout or Turnoff in 1998 - Tanya Melich – 50
   Women’s vote is key

COLUMNS
Poetry Redux - Merle Hoffman – 6
A Meditation on the Sea - Phyllis Chesler – 8

DEPARTMENTS
Feedback – 4
Talking Feminist
   Southern Discomfort in New Orleans - Mimi Yahn – 10
   Reel Danger - Margaret Morganroth Gullette – 11
   The Black Matriarchy - Marcia L. McNair – 12
Books
   The Resurgence of the Real by Charlene Spretnak – Reviewed by Mahin Hassibi – 52
   Quintessence...Realizing the Archaic Future by Mary Daly – Reviewed by Elizabeth Millard – 53
   A New Kind of Party Animal by Michelle Mitchell – Reviewed by Jennifer Nix – 54
Film
   Fountain of Youth for Men Only - Molly Haskell – 56
Theater
   Memories of Seduction - Marilyn Stasio – 60
Cover: Emma Thompson; Photo Brian Thompson/Sygma. This page: Skulls, right, UPI/Corbis-Betmann; Kagiso Township resident, left, Reuters/Corbin-Betmann
Thoughts on Ethestic Tyranny
First I want to congratulate you on the articles you published describing the mistreatment of the physically intersexed ("Should Physicians Be Designing Sex?" and "The Tyranny of the Esthetic," Summer 1998), of which too little has been said. The pain and socially induced self-hating they describe should be enough to make even the most unthinking of surgeons reflect on the morality of "treating" them, though I doubt that it will.

Only by speaking out on this subject can we even begin to end the pain the intersexed suffer and would still suffer even if left physically unaltered. (That much the medical community has right, though I doubt you'd ever get them to admit that the problem is not with the genitals, but with our culture.)

However, what I see lurking below the surface of both articles is yet another resurgence of that most hideous of notions: biological determinism. Gender, being a social construct, is not determined by an individual's genetic structure. Such thinking, with or without the scientific jargon, has been used to justify the differential (inevitably worse) treatment of women and racial minorities since the beginning of time. It is the language of prejudice, the rationalization of discrimination, the dehumanization of the oppressed so that the oppressor doesn't feel guilty.

I commend your courage in venturing into this oh-so-gray area, but biological determinism is not the answer. Only when the cross-gendered are included in the dialog can feminism develop a true picture of the bio/psycho/socio-logical development of gender in the human personality. A picture that is necessary to put an end to our respective oppressions (if not gender itself) and create a society which protects the right of all individuals to choose for themselves how they will live.

Leslie Walter - Via e-mail

A Number of Things...
Due to Information Overload, I've just gotten around to reading most of OTT's Summer issue, which has inspired these responses:

As an early CORE activist and anti-racist "white" person, I've managed mostly to live in integrated neighborhoods; but I understand Toi Derricotte's desire ("Passing") to confront racism in her smug white community (where I personally wouldn't want to live), and I hope she shakes them up.

Regarding Jan Goodwin's searing piece on Afghan women ("Buried Alive"), an important piece of information is lacking: our government's military backing enabled the rise of the Taliban.

Finally, at the risk of getting on a petah list, I disagree with Merle Hoffman's assumptions about Bill Clinton's guilt and Hillary's "wifely cover-up" ("What's A Feminist to Do?"). I have plenty of criticisms of Clinton's policies and judgments, but both he and Monica Lewinsky vowed they had no sexual relationship, and so far there's no substantial evidence otherwise. I don't doubt Clinton was flattered by this needy, insecure young intern and probably indulged, as is his fashion, in warm hugs hopefully misconstrued by Lewinsky. Despite this, however, the only basis for Starr's investigation and media prosecution is Lewinsky's self-aggrandizing boasts and probable wishful fantasies, encouraged and entrapped by Tripp's tapes. I'm still waiting for—no pun intended—hard evidence.

Ann Davidson — Philadelphia, PA

Clinton Condemnation Took Guts
Thanks to Merle Hoffman for having the guts to condemn Clinton for his odious behavior ("What's A Feminist to Do?, Summer 1998). I'm sure it couldn't have been easy for you to write that piece, and, as a subscriber, I'm so glad you did.

Elizabeth Vandepaer — New York, NY

Kate Millet—Praise and Dismay
"Devaluing the learned" and "peonizing learning" by the two-tier system in American colleges and universities (Kate Millet's "Out of the Loop and Out of Print," Summer 1998) is outrageous. Adjunct (temporary, part-time) professors (largely female) are the migrant workers of higher education. It's an unjust, abusive form of labor. And, it is a shame that a brilliant, creative pathbreaker, Kate Millet, is offered $1,200 to teach a one-semester course. Frankly, this piecework system in higher education must be opposed. I applaud the "gifts" Kate Millet has given to so many. I first read her as a teen in the early 1970s. She deserves both kudos and money.

Susan Dion — Carneys Point, NJ

I don't mean to minimize Kate Millet's despair in any way. But I was stunned that OTT would publish her description of suicides as people who had the "courage of direct action," as though the appropriate thing for women to do when others don't appreciate us is to take ourselves quietly out of their way. Her statement is not only a dangerous invitation to millions of suicidal women; not only a further blow to the self-esteem of the millions who already regard the continuation of their own lives as the result of cowardice; but also a slap in the face to those of us who have had the courage to live and to refuse to take orders from our pain.

Susan Haas — Zanesville, OH

Correction
Kate Millet's article in the Summer 1998 On The Issues, "Out of the Loop and Out of Print," noted that Jill Johnston is out of print. Two of Johnston's books, Admission Accomplished: The Lesbian Nation Years—1970-75 and The Lesbian Nation Years—1975-78, have been re-issued in paperback this year. On The Issues regrets the error.

Leslie Walter — Via e-mail

Fighting for Abortion Access
In the article, "The Fire This Time" [Summer 1998], Mary Lou Greenberg does an excellent job of documenting the lengths to which anti-choice activists will go in their attempts to deprive women of reproductive choice. The author also describes factors other than violence which affect women's access to abortion services, including lack of providers, mandatory waiting periods, parental consent laws and limited public funding.

Readers might like to know that there are over 50 abortion funds in the National Network of Abortion Funds, all working at local and national levels to increase access to abortion, including increased public funding. Funds also raise money to provide direct financial aid to women without resources or health insurance to cover abortion costs.

I encourage people who live in areas without abortion funds, to explore the possibility of starting them. We can make abortion possible for low-income women as we work to remove the barriers to abortion access which affect all women. Information is available from the National Network of Abortion Funds, c/o CLPP Program, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA 01002. The Network's e-mail address is clpp@hamp.hampshire.edu

Barbara M. Melrose — Amherst, MA

Cross-Gender Casting
Marilyn Stasio's "To Be Male or To Be Female—That Is the Question: Gender, Sex and Politics in Shakespeare" [Summer 1998] demanded my response, because I feel that many of the arguments for cross-gender casting are made not because of a positive new direction for theater, but because too many bad male actors have played these roles before. Many of the sources quoted in the article refer to the experience of hearing Shakespeare's text in a totally new way, giving them new insight into the play. In truth, every single actor, male or female, should bring fresh insight to an audience every time he or she speaks a line.

I was most upset by the passage in the article referring to violence on stage as appearing to be more real when performed by women. Yes, I grew up playing "soldiers and cowboys," but I have also, in later life, had the unfortunate experience of being in fights where the consequences were possibly deadly. This is the experience I bring to a stage fight, and any actor who can't get beyond, "uh-oh, here comes the fight scene" and tell a story with that fight shouldn't be cast in the role in the first place.

I believe that women's voices in the theater, whether as actors, writers, or directors, are what's going to save theater on this continent from a slow, boring death, but whether or not there is cross-gender casting is irrelevant, if the story of the play is not illuminating for the audience. I have seen many plays...
with women in traditionally male roles, and was delighted with how the story of the play was illuminated. But please don’t look at cross-gender casting as a salvation for performing Shakespeare, simply because too many back male actors have botched Shakespeare’s lines over the years.

Ian M. Bordens—Kansas City, MO

Give Holistic Medicine Better Treatment
I am dismayed by the dismissive tone of Katherine Eban Finkelstein in her article “Research for Your Life” (Spring 1998). She was not only contemptuous of so-called alternative medicine, she displayed a disgusting lack of empathy for the sick woman featured in her article. She also exhibited no knowledge of holistic medicine, and showed no desire to learn about it—either, except to report negatively on the personal characteristics of the few holistic practitioners whom she met.

The space could have been better utilized with an article on how allopathic medicine bilks women of billions of dollars yearly, and disrupts their bodies with poisonous drugs and dangerous and unnecessary surgical interventions, instead of utilizing the body’s natural abilities to heal.

As a bodymind psychotherapist and holistic health educator, I encourage you to hire someone who has successfully treated cancer with holistic methods to write a meaningful article. The many women who are seeking answers to their suffering deserve better than derision and superficiality.

Nina Silver, Ph.D.—Worthington, MA

Katherine Eban Finkelstein Responds
Ms. Silver may indeed, know a great deal about holistic medicine. But her letter would suggest that she knows little about journalism. Why should On The Issues commission a reported piece from someone who practices, and endorses, and profits from alternative healing methods? In the world of journalism, such reporting would entail a serious conflict of interest.

An article written by someone who has successfully treated cancer with holistic methods would be inevitably a plug for alternative medicine.

A well-reported piece should strive to raise many questions, while not necessarily providing an endorsement. As a journalist, I made no effort to say I was objective. Rather, I presented myself as a character in the article—as someone with my own biases, following a woman in the grip of a difficult decision-making process. It is not my job to form the reader’s opinions.

And finally, as to Ms. Silver’s blanket description of allopathic medicine as killing defenseless women of billions, the truth is far more complex than this well-worn and hysterical description. A recent cover story in New York magazine, as well as articles in the New York Times, describes conventional medicine’s embrace of Eastern healing techniques, prayer, and laying on of hands. This evolutionary synergy recognizes that while Western medicine may treat the body, it does little to treat the soul. And it is being practiced, at leading medical centers in New York.

School Shootings Target Females
Since I received the Spring issue, we have seen the murders/shootings in junior high school settings in several parts of the country. As I’ve listened to the news, etc., I am conscious of the fact that it is young BOYS/MEN who are doing the shooting and it seems that quite frequently, the intentional victims are females, as well as a girl who was described as a dating relationship. This was very much the case in the Jonathan’s shooting and yet the media, even discussion programs on NPR, paid no attention to the misogynistic character of the shooting.

I’d be interested in seeing OTI do an issue on misogyny in its “subtle” or insidious form in our culture such that even subservient teenage boys feel that no girl has a right to break up with them and that they will make her “sorry” that she did so. I’d also be interested in the language connection to this issue. That is, the sexually violent language (fuck, screw you) as well as military language that has become part of our everyday conversation and that, in my opinion, desensitizes youth and young adults (male and female) to the fact that it is primarily women who are the victims of the sexual and military aggression from which we now commonly use terms are derived.

Thank you. OTI is the only magazine that I subscribe to and I read it cover to cover and then pass it on to other women-centered groups.

Betitia M. Ferrari—South Bend, IN

Good Work
Just a note to thank you for providing copies of your wonderful magazine for delegates to our state NOW conference held in San Jose the weekend of April 24th. Everywhere I go I praise your magazine; it is the best women’s magazine on the market.

Keep up the good work — you are doing good work!

Meg Bowman—San Jose, CA

On The Issues does not accept letters or articles that are not written in a manner that is appropriate for the magazine. All material will be read by the editors. Unaccepted letters or articles may be published in a later issue or on the website of the magazine. Unaccepted letters or articles may not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Advertising accepted at the discretion of the publisher.

If you have questions about subscriptions, advertising, or editorial, please contact us at info@otimagazine.org or call us at 1-800-705-3105.

On The Issues (ISSN 0895-6014) is published three times a year for $15.00 a year domestic (air mail); $25.00 a year foreign (air mail). Send subscriptions to Otis Amir, 97-77 Queens Blvd., Suite 1020, Flushing, NY 11374, or e-mail us at onissues@echo.nyc.com.
POETRY REDUX
BY MERLE HOFFMAN

I had gone to bed in my habitual way—very late, with some difficulty, the muted sounds of C-Span droning in the background. Hours after, dazed with sleep, I heard it. Something about the grass being “the handkerchief of the Lord.” The metaphor was so arresting that I was unsure whether it was the product of my own imaginative longings or the result of a dream.

The wondering woke me enough to realize that I was hearing the part of Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” in which he answers a child who asks, “What is the grass?”

... it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and rememberer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner’s name some way in the corners, that we may see and remark and say, Whose?

The image of the creator as a designer who drops his handiwork for name recognition was extraordinary in itself. Even more remarkable was that this reading was being broadcast from the East Room of the White House.

Fully awake now, I realized I was watching a replay of a “Millennium Evening” celebrating April as National Poetry Month. Three poets laureate—Robert Pinsky, Rita Dove, and Bob Hass—were reading from the best of American poetry. Soon the words of Langston Hughes, Emily Dickinson, and William Carlos Williams filled my bedroom. Then came the powerfully moving Sylvia Plath, whose love poem to her child begins:

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new...

Populating the zeitgeist with explosions of expression, poetry and poets seem to be everywhere. There are poetry bouts, where the poets alternate reading poems up to five minutes long for a panel of judges who score them with points for each “round,” as in a boxing match; poetry slams, where teams or individuals who may or may not be accomplished poets compete for trophies; and poetry circuses, which include both the above, plus roundtables, tag-team poetry, and “conventional” readings.

The Nation magazine is now publishing more than Calvin Trillin’s political four-liners, and the inside front cover of Tikkun magazine showcases a modern religious poem. The Village Voice reports that a national queer slam has grown out of the need to create a safe space for gay and lesbian poets to slam. And poet laureate Joseph Brodsky’s American Poetry and Literacy Project distributes thousands of copies of 101 Great Poems in truck stops, supermarkets, hotels and train stations across the country every April.

In a particularly heady mixture of creativity and capitalism, Marks & Spencer, the British department store chain, has hired an in-house poet, making the company the first in the U.K. (possibly the world) to do so. Earning $1,500 a month, the experimental bard—Peter Sansom, a father of four whose favorite poets include Allen Ginsberg—represents an attempt by management to “demystify the arts...[and] boost employee morale.” He holds hour-long poetry workshops for employees four times a month. Similarly, Poets in Residence assigned by Britain’s Poetry Society have been hired by Kew Gardens and the BBC, and there are rumors that the London Zoo is considering having one (no doubt to read Blake’s “Tiger! Tiger! Burning bright”).

Why so much poetry, and why now?
John Keats describes the poet as capable of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” In a society that venerates what is observable and measurable; in a “culture” that constrains imagination and reduces much of creativity to shallow, formulaic images, is it possible that we are witnessing a renaissance of the poetic sensibility? A tropism toward the internal and transcendant rather than the material? A cri de coeur for meaning?

To Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great poet and essayist who believed that all men live by truth, the poet is a vessel, a receiver of the ultimate truth with the ability to impart it. When the truth and beauty of the world “renders most people mute,” poetry is a counterpoint of quietness, using language to evoke and provoke. It speaks most deeply to and of the silences, and resonates with the music of thought. Poets visit and rest in the spaces between immediate experience and experience mediated by the collective reality—and poetry chronicles the landscapes of those spaces. All poems are maps of interior journeys, and poets are cartographers of the soul. The more intensely evocative the map, the greater the poet.

The gift of poetry is in the challenge of the naming—and how much unnamed experience it can evoke. For the German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger:

...The poet names the gods,
and names all the things
in that which they are....
Poetry is the establishing of being by means of the word
Only and for the first time in this between is it decided,
who man is and where he is settling his existence

The truth of experience that poetry evokes awaits our readiness to hear it. We memorize poetry as children without understanding, so that when our lives fill in the spaces with experience, we will be able to graft some fragment of poetry onto them. And in this way, we give our world and the world meaning. The more people in any culture recognize, practice, and create poetry, the more the map of future experience is enlightened.
A dying culture kills imagination first, replacing it with experience, we will be able to graft some fragment of poetry onto them. And in this way, we give our world and the world meaning. The more people in any culture recognize, practice, and create poetry, the more the map of future experience is enlightened.

Merle Hoffman, publisher/editor-in-chief of On The Issues, is founder/president of Choices Women’s Medical Center, Inc. and Choices Mental Health Center in New York City.
with stereotypic images, banality, and minimalistic musings. When the naming of an experience is superficial, insipid; when love becomes sex; when death becomes trite, the result is the diminishing of individual and collective experience.

One can argue that the political is the antithesis of the poetic, yet it is within the poetic sensibility—the deep imaginative leaps, the courage to chart the unknown—that a truly progressive political should reside. Much of the joy, wonder, and awe of existence finds expression through poetry. Many of our great philosophical, theoretical, and ethical values are imparted through poetry. Perhaps our national conversation should focus on poetic values.

In my professional, political, and personal journeys, I have visited many places. They are all part of who I am. My own poetry is tied to my in-between states—of beauty, truth, pain, loss, questioning. Now, when the external world is too much with me; when I am burdened by the functions and the forms of living; when I feel as if my consciousness and imagination are imprisoned by daily life, poetry can help free me. So here I offer some of the maps of my former journeys:

LISTEN,
You'll leave me I know
Giving me back to paper dreams
And lonesome Sunday mornings with twice-read books
But I have traced too many mad patterns
on marble floors
And been too long without love to allow it.

So now,
Lying beside you in this half-light
I create eternities without movement or fear
And practice my kisses on the ear
Fainting
Waiting

Waning for you to wake
And want me again
To take me violently
And then perhaps
To make me forget
that I had ever danced alone.

Unbidden
Restraint only by will
You enter my mind
through patterns of gentle insistence

Inhabiting places
I long to discover
Now made real
by the power of your presence

All around me
Shadowed forms of possibility
take definition

Colors, shapes and contours of loving
weave circles of warmth
that amaze me

So I move toward you
openly—eagerly
Still finding new ways to place myself
in the landscapes of your truth.

—1964

Have I seen you --
heard you?
You who are apart from
yet not quite separate
who speaks to me as other
using colored tones of fusion

Binding through light and
cool challenge
the rough edges of my dreaming

'til my interiors with
fire and play and
echoes of familiar longing

Till I
made warm and transparent
by such burnings
seek the surety of mind's presence
only to find your eyes whispering the question.

—1992

So here we are with lust rage and time,
The dandelion once a lion's tooth now served in tea
remakes the edges of my world in a fluid ambiguity

What is most fresh and yellow
(Van Gogh talks about an orange field of soul)
fades into pure extension without color.
ideas replace the awn with flowers

words cover dandelions, arguments mute
the surfaces of data, the springing lawns

green, green-yellow, yellow-green,
green-green.
And time will fold the flowering dandelions
the teeth rot in their raging
the green lust loves ignorance
the poet speaks to lovers who do not hear him
the philosopher speaks to no one but himself.

—1968
A MEDITATION ON THE SEA
by Phyllis Chesler

When in doubt or trouble, but also in times of joy, I always return to the sea: to put things in perspective. In America, only the elements seem eternal, and as such, afford splendid relief. Elements have the power to transport me out of my self. Perhaps the sea is my Confessional. Always, I come down smelling of the city and secular anxiety, grimed over with it. The sea washes all that away, I am reborn in her salty beginning. I meant to go to France, but when the trip fell through, I found myself driving out to the Hamptons, on New York’s Long Island, a place that, for me, is far more than merely “trendy.” I’ve written books here; the place is my own splendid, shining, American Riviera. I need only squint, slightly, and I can see Monet’s Mediterranean: lush green foliage, dazzling white light, sails on the water, umbrellas on the beach, the human enterprise—sandy, wet, impossibly hopeful. Before I see her, I can hear her, smell her, taste her in the air; she is misty-salty on my tongue, pleasantly rank in my nostrils, a rhythmic pounding in my ears. It never fails. I am always slightly overwhelmed each and every time I first catch sight of the sea, it is so heart-stoppingly enormous and yet utterly familiar; it brings one back to childhood summers—no, to a world far older than that: to the very origin of our species. When we left, we took the ocean with us; it is in our every cell, we are, as biologist Carl Safina writes in his recent book Song to the Blue Sea, “soft vessels of sea water...70 percent of our bodies is water, the same percent that covers the Earth’s surface. We are wrapped around an ocean within.”

In America, the elements remind me that life is short, and therefore precious. Only the sea truly comfort me. Skyl, sea, stars, all were here long before human beings first built campfires; with any luck, they may still be here at the end of time. The elements test your mettle against natural forces. The sea reminds us that we have to take what comes as it comes, that some disasters cannot be avoided; that luck or fate is everything, but skill and courage count too. Especially, expect the unexpected and prepare: to ride it out, pray, die, live—and live hard.

The town of Easthampton is 350 years old, older than the American Revolution, far older than that, since Indians once lived here. On April 29, 1648, white settlers (mainly Englishmen from Maidstone, in Kent, but some from Holland and Wales, too) purchased Easthampton from the Indians for 20 coats, 24 hatchets, 24 hoes, 24 knives, 24 looking glasses, and 100 muxes (tools for making wampum). In 1660, a group of Easthampton men bought Montauk for 100 pounds sterling.

Once, I owned a pre-Revolutionary cottage on Three Mile Harbor. I never did find out whether its earliest inhabitants had been whalers or tanners, soldiers or preachers. Tradesmen, perhaps. I do know that the house was cold in winter and hot in summer, had low ceilings, incredibly wide plank floors, small rooms—but I was charmed, instantly, by its long history. It belonged to this place. The large, modern houses have yet to prove their staying power.

Monday: A rainy day, sea-side. Midmorning, the sky is dark and Scandinavian-wintry; by midday, thunder rumbles, indoor lights keep flickering off, the sea is gray-black, the air raw, wet, damp. There is no lightning, but the sky is pale and ominous, sheets of darkening rainwater slant before our eyes; the sky closes in, descends over the waters, the sea turns up the volume, her waves grow wider, wilder, white. A few wet birds sing. A lone figure trudges along the beach. Friday: Today, morning is all haze and fog, and the beach-walkers appear, as if in a dream. One cannot tell air from water, land from sky. After five days of steady, often torrential rain, suddenly, in a flash of unannounced heat and light—the sun appears. I do not trust it, but I have no choice.

It is disingenuous, cruel perhaps, for outsiders to romanticize an element in which they themselves do not
risk their lives. On a bad day I’d call it slumming, or even exploitation, as when heros die, are maimed, and the bard is praised and enriched for telling their tale. But it is oh so human to honor others for doing something we dare not do.

I have no illusions about the sea, which has been known to wipe out a human being—no, entire shiploads of sailors and passengers—in hours. Suddenly. Without pity. Only a hundred yards from land, minutes from rescue. Sometimes, ships have gone down off the treacherous, sandy bars of southern Long Island in full view of distraught rescuers, who could do nothing. In 1850, feminist writer Margaret Fuller, on her way home from Italy, drowned only a hundred yards from the Fire Island shore. The cemeteries in Amagansett and Easthampton are filled with monuments to native sons who died at sea and to strangers who washed up on these shores: frozen in “great blocks of ice”, still clinging to shattered masts. The sea is so lovely—for a killer. Make no mistake: Despite sophisticated rescue technology and heroic air- and sea-rescue teams, here “weather”—hurricanes, gale-force winds, rogue waves—remains a Major Player in human destiny. (Read Sebastian Junger’s book, The Perfect Storm.)

Although I used to sail, in my twenties, and will never forget the blessing of calm waters and steady wind, or the nights on board under the stars, I lack the sailor’s and the fisherman’s profound patience and courage in the face of natural catastrophe. I am no Viking, or pirate (although I love all the myths about them, the true stories even more). I love the sea as metaphor, and from shore, safely. Although there was that one time, five years ago, in Amagansett, when I was alone at the ocean’s edge and a great storm hit. All the houses around me were dark. Someone called to say that the police were evacuating Long Island beachfront communities. And then the phone went dead. Rain lashed the windows, sounded like hail. I made myself a stiff drink and decided: “What the hell, so one Jew gets washed out to sea,” and went to bed, woke up to a shining Hampton morning.

It was as if the storm had never happened—but it had. “Time is but the stream I go fishing in,” wrote Henry David Thoreau. I also fish, in other, more metaphoric waters. Like sailors and fishermen, I have premonitions. I act on them. Despite the dangers, and the high risk of failure, the wearing, boom-and-bust cycles of the writing life, I, too, keep returning to sea. I have traveled through deep waters, usually alone, my entire life, so I’m used to it; it’s too late to turn back, too late to learn another way of being in the world.

Over the years, I’ve asked mountain climbers, deep-sea divers, sailors, wilderness survivalists, what living in Nature requires. They say: You must be prepared, remain alert, never lose your “coo” or give up hope; they say your chances of survival are better in a group than alone. Enormous patience is everything. Time stands still, or is irrelevant when one lives in the moment and for the task at hand. One gets to where one wants to go not at any cost, but rather as a function of adjusting, and re-adjusting to the weather. Is the sea too stormy, the surf too high? Is “getting there” on time worth dying for? Can we get “there” if we die?

Saturday, Montauk Harbor, 5:15 pm: The fleet comes in all at once, like a school of fish, in formation, silent, safely home. I note the tanned and barefoot boys of summer on board. Ye olde fishermen would probably be amazed that there is only one commercial fishing boat among them. All the rest are sport-fishing boats. It’s a recreational Armada. Still they keep coming. A mighty brigade of stragglers begins to round the bend. One is flying a skull and crossbones and playing the Grateful Dead. The day is so very lovely that even this does not offend.

Sunday: A bride and groom are in each other’s arms on the beach, close to the surf; all decked out in white gown and tuxedo, shoe-less. The sea is to be their witness, their place of memory. It seems absolutely right.

I am unanchored now, heading off, once again, into uncharted waters. My mother recently died. The sea is my mother now; the surf, her heartbeat. For the moment, it is all I need.
Southern Discomfort in New Orleans
The City of Good Things as long as you’re rich and white

By Mimi Yahn

I'm not from here.

When my husband and I moved to Louisiana a year and a half ago, all my friends in Oregon said, "Aren't you afraid of the hurricanes?" And I replied, "not nearly as much as I'm afraid of those subdose zone earthquakes."

Then they said, "Aren't you afraid of the pollution?" Well, I replied, I'll drink bottled water and try not to eat too much shellfish.

Then they said, "Aren't you afraid of the violence?" And I had to tell them the truth.

Yes, I was afraid of the violence. I was afraid of living in a town where the police can send out orders over the police radio to murder citizens who speak out against their brutality and lawlessness. (Police officer Len Davis was sentenced to death in November, 1996 for ordering the 1994 slaying of Kim Groves, a 32-year-old mother of three who had filed a police brutality charge against him.) I was afraid of living in a town where the multi-billion-dollar drug trade—which has ripped apart the fabric of African, Latin, and Asian-American family and community life in every inner city in America—is protected and even conducted by the local police and powers that be. And yes, I was afraid of living in a town still governed by unspoken laws, laid down generations ago, that keep alive America's shameful version of apartheid.

I'm no fool; I read Cry, the Beloved Country when I was eight years old. I know what sort of violence is begotten by the resentment reaped from hundreds of years of contempt, hatred, and maltreatment. I know, too, as a woman in this society that the contempt, hatred, and maltreatment taught by the dominant culture are well learned by the subjugated class. And I know just how vicious that anger and resentment become when turned inward toward one's own, how explosive they become when, at last, they are turned toward the perpetrator.

And, yes, I was afraid of living in a town where women are viewed as the Flowers of the South, flowers whose purpose is to be cultivated, admired, pruned, restrained, displayed, crossbred, plucked, threshed, desiccated, discarded, and eventually plowed under by Southern men in order to uphold the pride, virility, and supremacy of Southern Manhood.

But, deep down, I kept telling myself that maybe I was wrong to be afraid of a place I'd visited only once, eight years before; wrong—perhaps even arrogant—about my assumptions; wrong to judge a town without having lived in it, smelled it, walked its streets, and fallen in love with its extraordinary culture, history, and people.

After six months, I wrote to my friends:

"Life here gives us access to spectacularly lush and beautiful swamps, bayous, subtropical scenery, and lovely Gulf Coast beaches with warm water (unlike the frigid water of the Pacific!); extraordinarily fine, old (and mostly dilapidated) architectural wonders—Victorian houses, Italianate mansions, Georgian manors, tiny shotgun houses with porches bigger than their living rooms, Cajun shacks raised ten feet off the ground, and the ubiquitous French colonial houses with wrought-iron balconies and tall, green, wooden hurricane shutters for their full-length windows; a joyous diversity of vibrant, distinctive cultures, including Cajun, Creole, African, Yat, Vietnamese, Isleno, Native-American, Latin-American and, of course, N'Awlins' own brand of Southern U.S.; a climate that produces hurricanes, thunder and lightning storms, floods, heat waves, sweat behind your eyeballs, summer nights that feel like soft black velvet nine months of the year; warm rains, balmy breezes, and year-round gardening—it is a climate that is sultry, exciting and wet, and it truly makes my heart sing; food that is so good, oh it is so good. I swear to you it's like good sex; and whether it's jazz, blues, Cajun, Zydeco or whatever, I'm telling you they got some of the best music in the world here.

"But the racism. The racism is something else. Never have I witnessed such a virulent, aggressive, congenital, and proud hatred of anything African. And never have I seen blacks so submissive. It is sickening and depressing. The privilege, power, and deference enjoyed by whites is extraordinary; it stinks of a centuries-old tradition which commands respect and allegiance, and which is in no danger of being overturned."

And, yes, I was afraid of living in a town where women are turned toward the perpetrator.

After eighteen months, I have learned things.

I learned that the children of New Orleans go to schools which rival, and even surpass in filth, decay and neglect those of the most impoverished Third World nations. I learned, as does everyone, that New Orleans—from its citizenry to its power structure—places no value on the lives and the futures of her children. New Orleans instead squanders hundreds of millions of dollars in carpet-bagging schemes to open casinos and in corporate-friendly tax breaks, while sending her children to schools not fit for dogs. How, then, do our children not grow up to become hopeless, angry and violent?

I learned that the police department is indeed riddled with incompetence, intransigence, hopelessness and corruption. Here in New Orleans, it is the rich who enjoy the privileges and protections offered by the police, while the poor must fend for themselves among the drug-dealing cops and gun-toting gangsters not become violent?

I learned that, despite the recent outcry against violence by so many upstanding citizens, violence has always served a purpose in New Orleans. From territorial wars to slavery, this city could not have been built without violence. New Orleans is not unique in this. What is unique is that New Orleans, along with the rest of the South, has elevated denial to an art form, thereby enabling them to turn embarrassing episodes into symbols of honor, and a violent past into an even more violent future.
Those who forget their past cannot learn from it. I am reminded of this each time I hear a white person use the "n" word. I am reminded of this when the local telecasters air news about football stars raping a woman at gunpoint during their sports segment—as if rape were just another male spectator sport.

I am reminded continually that violence has existed here all along. But the violence that has always and daily defined the lives and limits of every woman and every African-American in this town has only now become important, only now become worthy of official action—because now it affects those who have lived so long in privilege and serenity.

Finally, I learned that the three pillars upon which Louisiana has always stood—religion, money and patriarchy—are beginning to collapse from their own structural weakness. It is inevitable that an economy built on patronage, greed and disregard for the future will eventually fail to function; it is inevitable that the violence used to enforce male supremacy will eventually engulf itself; and it is inevitable that a populace taught to passively accept the dictates of a supreme being will not be active in bringing about change. To everything—corruption, violence, poverty—they shrug and say, "It's God's will." Certainly this is an easier response than confronting the reality that human will causes such misery; certainly this absolves us of our responsibility to act.

After eighteen months, I wrote to my friends: "Down here the real authority is religion, so instead of communities organizing to confront and chase out the dirty little drug dealers or the corrupt, greedy police who are protecting the drug dealers, churches organize prayer marches and prayer vigils, which have, so far, been very effective in convincing the people that they must put their faith and trust in God because they are helpless, incapable of changing anything through their own volition."

Maybe my newcomer's view of the death and decay of New Orleans is lacking in true understanding of this town's—and the South's—intricate, measured progress; after all, I've only been here a short time. But in that time, I've not seen government or local churches do anything for people living in terror in the projects. I've not seen political or religious will stop the bullets or the hyper-macho gang culture.

In that time, I have seen the wealth and the power of the churches used for organizing prayer vigils and countless funerals, but not for organizing communities under siege. I've seen the utter disregard shown by whites for the epidemic of crime, drugs and official malfeasance which has been slowly destroying the black communities for years. And I've seen all of New Orleans still incapable of raising their children with love, dignity, respect and freedom from violence.

Mimi Yahn is a freelance writer living in Metairie, Louisiana. Formerly, she resided in Oregon where she was the editor/publisher of Feminist Broadcast Quarterly.

Reel Danger
Why Women are Boycoting Movies

By Margaret Morganroth Gullette

There is a quiet, subversive movement under way that involves women boycotting movies that depict violence against women. As I write this, I'm boycotting Copycat and Breaking the Waves; a film professor I know, Nil by Mouth; and two younger women, Scream. When I tell people I started my boycott after the stalking scene in Silence of the Lambs, women flare up with their own boycott histories. One named the Coke-bottle scene in The Long Goodbye. Another said disgustedly, "I walked out of The Piano right after he cut off her finger and the camera lingered on her lying in the mud." Everywhere I go—New England, L.A., Iowa; lunches, parties, weddings—I find these spontaneous little sects, relieved to have company in their resistance to misogyny. This is an unreported national movement, and making the boycott and its rationales known is all it needs to be effective.

We needn't agree on one another's choices. Rather, in these indignant groups, women focus on the dangers of adding to our already mountainous archives of sadistic imagery. We are full of ideas for improving the cultural climate.

I was not becoming inured to violence by seeing more. Instead, like someone developing anaphylactic shock after consecutive bee stings, I was getting sicker. Every woman I know increasingly refuses to subject herself to the humiliation, sorrow, paranoia and terror.

My theory is that identifying with female victims can cause "vicarious victimization." This concept is all too familiar to domestic-violence counselors, who listen repeatedly to stories of threats, beatings, rape. They have learned that unless they too get counseling, they can become psychically weakened by continual exposure to such horrendous stories. To live even vicariously in a world structured by male violence against women is risky. Assailed by images of women unable to fight back or escape, counselors imagine themselves vulnerable and helpless.

All women are forced to live to some extent in such an imagined terrorist state. Battering, rape, and murder get reported ever more frequently by TV and newspapers, with horrifying details. Movies can do even more harm because of the emotive power of the narrative. Writer, director, cinematographer, editor, composer—all aim to heighten our sense of impending, appalling harm, to sharpen our dread. I fear this malice. I know the movie makers had these goals in mind—not my pleasure.

Women who boycott instinctively
understand vicarious victimization. They may reasonably fear that they will be weakened in their domestic relations with men. Merely deciding together on film fare may lead to arguments with one's partner. Sometimes his male pleasure in viewing eroticized violence treats her female "unpleasure" as a nuisance.

There are consequences for couples who see violence together. All intimate relationships involve constant negotiations, from sexual to psychological to parental and financial. A woman might find herself, after years of vicarious victimization, weakened in all these negotiations. One woman noticed that on the nights they see male-on-female violence, her partner regularly seems interested in having sex, although she's repelled. Is this still vicarious?

Warning men about becoming vicarious perpetrators is critical, especially in light of studies like that by Daniel G. Linz at the University of California at Santa Barbara, that involves college men watching violent and degrading images. The study showed that after such viewings, the men lost both their sense of repugnance at assaults and their empathy for female victims in real-life situations such as rape trials. Narratives of male-on-female violence help to normalize cruelty: Some men become less ashamed about escalating their power.

I connect desensitization both to arguments with one's partner and to actual battery and murder. So do other cultural critics. But they pull back from obvious conclusions. Todd Gitlin, New York University professor and author of numerous books on social criticism, wrote, "That media violence contributes to a climate in which violence is legitimate—and there can be no doubt of this—does not make it a significant contribution to violence on the street." I disagree. Using visual art to brutalize men and victimize women psychologically is an evil. Boycotters resensitize us by saying, "This evil is urgent enough to cause women to protect themselves against it and to ask for men's cooperation."

The Hollywood rating system has failed us. The PG-13, R, X designations are essentially a form of age-graded titillation that doesn't address women's concerns, framing the debate as if it were about being "old enough" to endure violent images and "cool enough" to enjoy them. Some film reviews in newspapers and magazines now indicate negatives parenthetically ("violence"). But one word can't tell me what I would be letting myself in for. Reviewers need to get specific. They need a code with ample commentary. M for Murder. R for Rape. T for other Tortures. YBW when the victim is a Young Beautiful Woman, as she typically is. No fair talking up "esthetic values" without exposing a film's sexist inventions designed to elevate male testosterone and elicit good reviews.

Women get suckered into seeing movies they wouldn't have seen if they'd only known. I would have shunned Death Becomes Her if a reviewer had written: "T (Tortures). Female aging is so grotesque it amounts to mutilation." Despite its comic surface, the movie gave me nightmares. One comment on Devil in a Blue Dress should have been: "Red-hot poker prepared for...you guessed it, YBW." In the absence of sensitive reviewing, people warn one another. One woman said happily, "My sons warn me." If sons boycotted, the future could really be different.

One current effect of the boycott is that when men see movies labeled as desensitizing, they go alone. They leave at home their girlfriends, sisters, wives, and mothers. They sit by themselves. Eventually, some will realize—to borrow a phrase of one critic—"these are the stag parties of the damned."

Some kinds of film violence may be necessary. The scene of attempted rape in Thelma & Louise demonstrates bluntly how far women will go to protect each other. But the newest ploy is to justify violence as "empowering." In Female Perversions, not one but two actresses slice their own skin. Maybe people will stay away from that type of vicarious victimization in the same way that many African-Americans decide they don't need to see another movie with a lynching, no matter how well made.

Boycotters needn't be defensive. Being required to prove that we're not wimpy or Philistine is hostile. Let's turn the tables. Let's ask, "Why are YOU going?"

Need I say that all this has nothing to do with censorship? Boycotting is a form of free speech. If it swept the country, movies might change. But if they do not, the human relations of the women who stay home—and the men who stay with them—would change profoundly. Nationwide recognition of boycotting would help to detoxify American culture and advance women's freedoms.}

The Black Matriarchy
It takes a lioness to raise young lions

By Marcia L. McNair

B lack women do not make good wives," said the well-dressed, articulate black man on The Ricki Lake Show. In politically correct disbelief, the audience screamed at his bold remark. Several African-American women rushed to the microphone to challenge his view that they do not possess the requisite qualities of submissiveness and domesticity essential to being a "good wife."

I asked my girlfriends what they thought of the comment. Most found it laughable. But why, underlying their wisecracks ("I don't want to be a wife. I need a wife," said one upwardly mobile friend), did I sense an uneasiness? As an African American woman, married at the time, the remark awakened certain latent insecurities in me about desirability and femininity. All African-American women have lived with these insecurities since the 17th century. And as Paula Giddens noted in her landmark historical analysis When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America, Victorian ethics dictated that
true women did not work outside the home, an unrealistic choice for the majority of black women, past and present, whose men had been denied equal access to employment.

Yet much to my chagrin, even as an African-American woman who had spent a great deal of her life in the study and disputation of stereotypes about us, I found it hard to be angry with the audacious brother because, for the most part, I agreed with him. I, for one, never saw the traditional helpmate as the role I should aspire to in marriage.

My anti-wife conversations were the hint of things to come: A year later, my husband filed for divorce. He seemed to agree with the talk show guest. But after a lifetime of struggling with labels designating who I am, either as a black person or a woman, I am finally able to accept one of the most contentious ones: black matriarch.

I was ten years old in 1967, when Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s now infamous report “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” described the “reversed role of husband and wife” as the cause of urban social pathologies in nonwhite communities. Every black person of importance, from political activists to sociologists, took up the crusade to discredit the report, mainly by denying the existence of the black matriarchy, and leaving the patriarchal nuclear family unchallenged as the ideal construct. And like so many racially and socially conscious African-American women, my own mother was vociferously opposed to the idea of a black matriarchy, taking little time to consider the fact that she had headed our household alone for nearly six years.

If ever there was a conflicted role model, I'd say my mother was it. She found the idea of a dominant woman contemptible, but she was only able to support our family by being just that. Her journey from welfare mother to director of the local community center embodied the definitive matriarchal qualities of leadership and assertiveness. Yet, despite her professional and personal successes, she always felt herself inadequate when it came to raising my mischievous younger brother. She insisted, in concurrence with society, that his troubles were due to his being a fatherless boy. Like most people, she never focused on the fact that many of the strong black men we knew, or knew of, including the patriarch in our family, were products of the black matriarchy.

My love-hate relationship with the black matriarchy continued through my twenties and into my early thirties, becoming most intense during my first pregnancy. When my son was born, I was happy that he was healthy, but uneasy with the idea that I would be a single mother raising a boy. Though my son, Kahlil, was apparently well-adjusted, everything I had heard and read seemed to predict the contrary. My decisive moment came when, at the age of three, after observing my daily ritual in front of the mirror, Kahlil asked for some lipstick. This was enough to put the fear of God and Revlon into me. I had to find a male role model for my son before he was “emasculated” by me, the “black matriarch.” I plunged into the dating scene more to find a father for my son than a mate for myself.

**Finding a spouse was easy**

It wasn't difficult to find a husband. Though the image of the single African-American woman as “waiting to exhale” is quite popular, the majority of black single women I know (with and without children) are not unmarried solely because of a lack of marriageable men. There are many black men who are emotionally and financially secure. Yet the notion that there is a shortage of good black men is so prevalent that the Million Man March was needed to disprove it. A little known fact, and I dare say the best-kept secret among African-American women, is that we have plenty of opportunities to get married but often opt not to, for reasons that have little to do with the suitability of black men.

I believe we are simply more comfortable heading our own households, both because most of us grew up in matriarchal households, and because of the strong emphasis black families place on the pursuit of education and employment as the road to racial equality. Race pulls rank on femaleness. A black girl's personal responsibility to elevate the race through academic and professional achievement takes priority over raising children. The familial “when-are-you-going-to-get-married?” is most likely to be asked only after the African-American woman has made it.

My short-lived marriage was a casualty of my independence more than anything else.

Now, several years after my divorce, I've finally come to terms with my matriarchal tendencies. There's something about stepping across the threshold of my own little house that brings out the lioness in me, and who better than a lioness to raise young lions? I teach my boys to imitate the male role model for myself.

Instead of blaming the black matriarchy for the problems in the African-American community, society needs to attack the real culprits—the oppression of sex, class, and race; for if by some miracle every black household became a two-parent one, the black community would still be disproportionately plagued by high levels of crime, drug abuse, and unemployment as long as these evils exist. Therefore, I am making peace with myself as a black matriarch, ridding myself of the guilt and the shame, reclaiming the label to the point where I often paraphrase James Brown's ode to black power: "Say it loud, I'm black, matriarch, and proud."

Marcia McNair teaches English and journalism at Nassau Community College in New York and is at work on her first novel.
As far as human rights are concerned, i

Fifty years ago, in the wake of World World II and the ringing post-Holocaust promise of “Never Again,” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This development, like the establishment of the UN itself, was seen as the only possible step for a world claiming to be suddenly civilized. Still, it would be another three decades before the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women would come into being, in 1979. (Sadly, to date the U.S. has refused to sign on to it.) And it would take yet another long decade before rape during armed conflict would be viewed as a war crime, and female genital mutilation considered grounds for granting political asylum.

Today, despite the lofty pledges of half a century ago, there are, according to the International Peace Research Institute in Stockholm, 25 major armed conflicts in the world, devastating the lives of millions. In an additional 25 countries, millions more are struggling to survive the aftermath of war. And in many of those conflicts, an estimated 300,000 children have been forced into combat. Of the world’s 22 million refugees and 30 million internally displaced, 80 percent are women and children, who, simply because of their gender or age, commonly suffer the double jeopardy of being denied human rights and being sexually abused.

Certainly, in too many spots around the globe, the news is not good. But progress is being made in areas long ignored or excluded from the realm of human rights. While defenders of women’s rights now focus their attention on domestic violence, incest, forced marriage, reproductive and sexual slavery, and so on, demands for rights from previously marginalized groups are also proliferating.

Among those whose human rights are now being recognized are the disabled (easy access, an end to forced sterilization, job opportunities—in the U.S. 67 percent of disabled people of working age are unemployed); girl children (through campaigns against female infanticide, trafficking in girls for sex [see article on page 28], unfair labor practices, and so on); gays and lesbians (access to housing and to health care, decriminalization—20 states in the U.S. still have laws on the books making sodomy a crime); and all of us in relation to the Tibetan Woman demonstrating in Beijing

Survivor of Rwandan massacre
t is the best of times and the worst of times...

environment (as it impacts human health).

Gary Francione, the lawyer who heads Rutgers University's Animal Rights Law Center, may be just a breath ahead of others in seeing that there is "no good reason for excluding any sentient being from consideration in the moral community." If that revolutionary principle becomes more widely recognized, we will have outgrown even "human rights," just as we understand now that it is not just "all men" who are created equal.

The international human rights community must now, in response to social and cultural changes, expand the conception of human rights just as it did when women's rights were recognized as human rights. Once the claim is made that an issue or practice is a matter of human rights, individuals and nongovernmental organizations have a framework for making appeals. Human rights laws, however, especially at the international level, have very few enforcement teeth; they can do little more than encourage governments to do right and give people a forum where they can at least be heard when their rights are not adequately protected. In fact, human rights documents drafted at international conventions often seem like a list of dreams, concocted by wishful thinkers at some distant remove from the violence of real life.

But the claims and statements on human rights that have been collected over the years at ad hoc tribunals are a blueprint of sorts for a global utopia. Indeed, current plans for the world's first International Criminal Court are being based on these tribunals. Though today only a fraction of the world's people enjoy the rights that have been affirmed over the years, the very existence and evolution of human rights laws is proof of the possibility of progress.

This special section of OI takes a look at how far we've come in the five decades since the world first adopted the universal human rights law, and how much work still has to be done. It also introduces some of the women who are devoting their energies, even risking their lives, to fight for human rights. When one considers the deadly new conflicts, such as those in Kosovo and Ethiopia, the shameful refusal of the United States to sign the international treaty banning land mines, and Washington's willingness to overlook brutal violations of human rights in countries like China and Saudi Arabia—placing commerce before people—it is obvious that the road is likely to be a long one.
EMMA THOMPSON
THE WORLD’S HER STAGE

by Marilyn Stasio

Emma Thompson was only 13 years old when Victor Jara died at the hands of the Chilean junta headed by Gen. Augusto Pinochet. During the U.S.-backed military coup that overthrew the socialist government of President Salvador Allende, the troubadour-poet was jailed, and during two days of torture all the bones in his hands were brutally shattered. Jara was herded into the Stadium of Chile in Santiago in September, 1973, with thousands of other artists, intellectuals, and political dissidents arrested during the military takeover—and publicly executed. Although Thompson was a schoolgirl in England at the time, “I knew what was happening during the coup,” she says.

Today, at 38 (the same age as Jara when he was killed), the actress not only remembers how the poet died, she wants to make sure other people do, too—by making a film about his inspiring life and violent death.

Victor Jara didn’t have to die to be a hero. A Dylanesque figure to Latin Americans, he wrote anthems to the poor, and his ballads celebrating the working man mocked the political establishment, the Catholic Church and the money-making classes. (“This guitar has no song for the rich,” one of his songs goes. “It sings of the ladder we’re building so that one day we will all reach the stars.”)

“He composed very simple lyrics honoring the revolution, the people and the social changes occurring in his country,” said Isabel Allende, niece of Chile’s assassinated president and bestselling author. “With one song he could express more than the media would say in a year or a politician could in a lifetime. His songs became weapons against the political enemy.”

Thompson is holed up writing the screenplay for her as-yet-untitled film, a project she’s discussed with few people. But her involvement in such an overtly political piece should not come as a surprise. She is an active supporter of such causes as Friends of the Earth, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and a political action group for the election of female candidates to political office in Britain. She has campaigned in England for Labour candidates and served on committees for various political causes in Central and South America. She was also an outspoken protester against the Persian Gulf war. “Acting is the ultimate luxury,” she says. “Hard is going down a bloody coal mine or living in Somalia, or in a war zone. That’s hard.”

Thompson once remarked that she “likes human beings who have suffered. They’re kinder.” To those who knew him, Victor Jara was the kindest of men, and Thompson views his suffering and death as emblematic of the ruthless human rights outrages committed by the Chilean government during Pinochet’s dictatorial reign.

“I’ve been wanting to write this movie for some time,” she says of the screenplay that is currently engaging most of her professional attention, and for which she has put several commercial projects on hold. While Thompson was too young to become politically involved at the time of the Chilean coup, she did so later. “I began campaigning for the Chilean opposition in support of the movement for restoration of democracy, and the ouster of Pinochet,” she says. “Since then I have felt very involved with Chile and its people.”

During a visit to Chile in 1988, when she was 28, Thompson began to focus in earnest on the idea of making a film that would dramatize the junta’s inhumanities. But, according to at least one friend, she had become engaged in Chilean human rights issues long before that.

“Emma had some contact with Chilean exiles, going back as far as her time at Cambridge,” recalls award-winning British documentary maker Max Stahl, who has known Thompson since their college days. “When Emma told me that she was writing this screenplay, I was surprised that she was so knowledgeable about Chile. I can’t recall meeting anyone else here in England who has ever heard of Victor Jara.”

In Latin America Jara is still tremendously important, says Stahl, who grew up there, first as the son of the British ambassador to El Salvador and then as a documentary filmmaker on that country. “Jara was a moving singer and a man of his time—a combination of Elton John and Che Guevara.”

To ensure the authenticity of her treatment of Victor Jara’s story, Thompson is writing her screenplay in both English and Spanish, a language she says she’s been learning specifically for this project. She isn’t sure yet, but she is expected to also play the role of Jara’s English-born wife, Joan Turner de Jara, a former ballet dancer.

The actress’s Chilean project does not exhaust her commitment to socially responsible films. She is also involved in the making of Ming, a political thriller set in East Timor, a place many moviegoers would have trouble locating on a map. The former Portuguese colony, just east of Java, was invaded and forcibly annexed in 1975 by Indonesia, which has continued to wage unremitting war on the tiny nation. Based on the experiences of Stahl, who co-wrote the screenplay and brought the project to her attention, and other journalists there, the film aims to dra-
SUBSCRIBE NOW
Please enter my subscription to ON THE ISSUES:
The Progressive Women's Quarterly

- 1 Year (4 issues) only $14.95
- 2 Years (8 issues) only $25.00

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY / STATE / ZIP

☐ Payment Enclosed  ☐ Bill Me

Call 1-800-783-4903 to charge to your MasterCard, VISA or American Express card.
in Somalia, or in a war zone. That's hard.
matize the human rights atrocities that, over the past two decades, have claimed the lives of one third of East Timor's pre-invasion population of 600,000.

Thompson has agreed to take a featured role in *Ming*, playing an Australian woman, Melissa, who is transformed from a complacent housewife into a confirmed political activist during an eye-opening trip to Indonesia. In the film, Thompson's character makes her way to East Timor carrying a sapling that she has brought all the way from home to plant on the spot where her husband, a journalist, died. Impatient with the lies and misdirection fed to her by local political officials, she persists in her mission and eventually learns the true circumstances of his death: that he was killed at the beginning of the war by agents of Indonesia's President Suharto.

The tale has its basis in fact. In 1975, five young Western television journalists were summarily shot to death to prevent them from getting their footage of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor out to the world. The man in charge of their murder was Yunus Yosfiah, then a 31-year-old major in the marines. (Today, in a classic case of a fox in command of the hen house, Yosfiah is Indonesia's newly-appointed Minister for Information, charged with monitoring the media.)

Sixteen years later, Stahl, who has reported from many hotspots, including Beirut and Chechnya, had his own near escape in East Timor. In 1991, he filmed a genocidal massacre—the slaughter by Indonesian soldiers of more than 270 unarmed protestors in the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili, East Timor's capital—and then, to avoid military reprisal and possible death, buried his film in a fresh grave. (Unlike the husband of the character Thompson plays in *Ming*, who was "killed in a very gruesome manner," Stahl escaped arrest and was able to return two years later to dig up the evidence. His footage was the first proof of the massacre.)

"Thompson's role in *Ming* combines dramatic and comic qualities, and she will be very good in it," says Stahl. He felt Thompson would understand both the comedy and the pathos of the character. "She's a funny woman, a bit eccentric," Stahl says. "But that eccentricity reveals a courage, sincerity and imagination which normal people don't always possess. The very fact that she has managed to get into the country, after being banned for more than a decade, tells you something about her strength of character. That took a tremendous effort, but she's the sort of indomitable woman who, despite all the political lies and the bureaucratic red tape, has made it her business to find out the truth. She has a pretty good nose for when she is being lied to, and she becomes an enormous thorn in the side of major governments."

"Emma has a personal feeling for the role," says Daniel Stoecker, *Ming*’s producer. "She has an interest in the film and a passion for the issues."

In the cynical climate of Hollywood, where self-serving stars routinely lend their glamour to every faddish cause that comes down the pike, Thompson's commitment to human rights stands out in refreshing relief. But then, she has always been forthright—and remarkably inner-directed—about the professional and personal choices she has made in her life.

"I had no rebellious state," she says, "because my parents gave me so much freedom that I didn't need to rebel." Those unconventional parents were Phyllida Law, a classically trained stage actress who recently took top billing over her daughter in their film, *Winter Guest*, and Eric Norman Thompson, an actor and director who worked in children's television. Emma was 19 when her father had a stroke; he'd suffered from heart disease most of her childhood. In the four years before he died, she devoted herself to teaching him to speak again. "He was fantastically brave, one of the bravest men I ever encountered," she says emotionally.

Encouraged to find her own way, Thompson went off to Newnham College at Cambridge University with the idea...
of becoming a writer—a career calling that reasserted itself years later, when she adapted Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility for the screen, winning both an Oscar and a Golden Globe award. While at Cambridge, she also developed a social conscience. She became “faintly radical feminist,” shaving her head, co-writing and co-directing the first all-woman revue ever produced at the university.

“I had tremendous resistance to the notion of women as a kind of romantic ideal, as something to be wondered at, as something beautiful,” says Thompson. “The thing I wanted to be was that kind of woman who could be strong and independent, but make people laugh.”

Discovering that she had a gift for performing, Thompson combined her feminist sensibility with her comedic urge and became vice-president and leading female performer in Footlights, the legendary acting society that spawned such Monty Python stalwarts as John Cleese and Eric Idle. Thompson’s comedic sensibility, which more than one critic has called “subversive,” is firmly grounded in her feminist philosophy, with its wry view of an intelligent woman’s place in male-dominated societies. Even in moments of dramatic crisis, the independent-minded characters she plays have the spark of wit and a droll, ironic edge. As one friend put it, she creates female characters “whose personalities begin with their minds.”

This thinking-actor’s actor electrified the Academy Awards audience when she dedicated her 1993 Oscar “to the heroism and courage of women” in the world. “I hope this inspires the creation of more true screen heroines,” said Thompson, who speaks often of the need for “new writers to create roles where women are morally central to the story.”

Always, though, she articulates her views, and especially her unpopular ones, with verbal grace and intellectual wit. “I get bored with women being marginalized,” she told a reporter, apropos her performance as Margaret Schlegel in Howard’s End. “It was one of the best women’s roles I’d ever read,” she said of that freethinking woman. She was morally very central to the piece... a complex, ambiguous, and fully rounded human being, and also somebody whose raison d’être is communication and the desire to connect people to one another.”

That description also fits Thompson. Having accepted the role in Stahl’s film, she threw herself into researching the politics of East Timor. To that end, she began corresponding with José Ramos-Horta, the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who has been a leading force in bringing world attention to Indonesian oppression of East Timor. “I am not a filmmaker, but I believe Ming is a very beautiful, powerful and heroic story,” he told OTI from his home in Lisbon, Portugal. “I think and hope that the world audience will be moved by this film. So much can be accomplished when ordinary people are moved by a story.”

Since Suharto was forced out of office in Indonesia in May, Ramos-Horta’s expectations for the film have escalated. “I have high hopes that Max Stahl’s film will raise further public awareness on the East Timor issue, and that politicians will then have to take public opinion into account in their defining of state policy on East Timor,” he said recently. “I would very much wish this film to provoke an international solidarity campaign for the release of all East Timorese and Indonesian political prisoners.”

Max Stahl would like to believe it could happen. But, he says, “I fear there isn’t a great sense of roots in people’s perspective on international events.” In an ideal world, the projects that he and Emma Thompson are working on would have a direct and immediate impact on the social issues they treat—as the literary movement of magic realism has had in Latin America.

“The power of these movements,” he says, “is that they are not simply imaginative movements, but are connected to fundamental issues of social justice and national justice. The work takes on epic quality. Emma has chosen subjects that have that epic reach. It’s what draws me to her work. It’s what draws me and others to her.”

New Yorker Marilyn Stasio writes for national publications.


restoration of democracy, and the ouster of Pinochet.”
A pioneer of the feminist movement in the sixties and seventies, Charlotte Bunch was the first woman resident fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and a founding member of D.C. Women's Liberation, The Furies, and Quest: A Feminist Quarterly. Now working in the global women's human rights movement—what she calls the "new incarnation" of the women's movement—Bunch is the founder and executive director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, at Rutgers University.

OTI: The U.S. sees itself as the world's policeman, particularly on human rights, and yet we have failed to sign many international treaties on human rights. Why do we have such a dismal record?

Bunch: The U.S. is extremely hypocritical about human rights. On the one hand, we say that we are the defenders of human rights around the world. Yet, on the other, we are not willing to have the world hold us accountable. Quite recently, in April, there was the death penalty case of the man from Paraguay who was executed in Virginia. He had not been told of his right to contact the Paraguayan embassy, which is an international right. That people in the United States have toward international law. It's seen only as something we use against other people.

The international women's rights treaty, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), has been used in some countries to fight discriminatory laws against rape victims. If the U.S. ratified CEDAW, which it has repeatedly failed to do, what would this mean to the average woman here?

CEDAW contains a number of articles dealing with issues of equal pay and women's economic rights that are much more progressive than any legislation we have in this country, more progressive even than was the Equal Rights Amendment. CEDAW spells out in detail the principles of equal rights for women, and covers all areas of non-discrimination, including rights within the family and girls' rights.

Encouragingly, in San Francisco recently the Board of Supervisors, or city council, passed CEDAW as the law locally. This means they have committed to having all the laws and ordinances in the San Francisco area reviewed in terms of their compliance with the CEDAW convention. This could be a model for all of us of what the CEDAW could mean in the United States.
Are there human rights abuses in the United States?

Obviously, in the United States a major issue is violence against women, yet people go on thinking that somehow our country is where human rights are respected. I don’t know of any other nation in which young men go into schools and shoot young women who won’t date them. I don’t understand how these massacres have not been viewed as a feminist issue. It is so clearly an indication of the acceptance by so many people in the U.S. that men and boys have the right to demand of girls and women what they want.

Another instance of human rights abuse can be seen in the demonization of women of color on welfare. This is an issue that brings together both racial and gender discrimination and economics. Reproductive rights is, of course, an issue for American women. I always point out that it’s in the United States that people are killed for defending the right to abortion. And those are human rights murders.

What about the state’s complicity in the sexual abuse of women in U.S. prisons?

The UN’s Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women is currently in the U.S. examining sexual violence by their jailors against women in custody. In human rights terms we have succeeded in arguing that prison guards or policemen are agents of the government. Therefore, this constitutes American government torture.

Could you give OTI a report card on women’s human rights?

To examine the progress of the women’s human rights movement and the challenges ahead, you have to look at the history of this movement, which is the women’s movement in another incarnation. In the late ‘80s and early ‘90s a number of women, myself included, felt that women’s human rights were still viewed in male terms. And the issue that best demonstrated this male gendered bias was violence against women, which had been completely excluded from the human rights agenda. We needed to demonstrate that there is a specifically women’s experience of human rights. We pointed out, for example, that women who are not allowed to leave their homes for various reasons, like different family codes, are victims of arbitrary detention. They are also being denied their freedom of assembly and their freedom of speech. At the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, women’s rights were recognized as human rights for the first time in history.

We’ve seen significant progress in areas like political asylum and refugee status. For instance, the guidelines for refugee camps now include a recognition of sexual harassment and rape. Ten years ago, this was the not the case. And gender-based persecution is beginning to be recognized, as in the 1996 case of a woman who successfully sought asylum in the United States based on the threat of female genital mutilation in her home country [see our article on page 23].

Ten years ago, when we talked about violence against women as an abuse of human rights, people laughed at us. Today it is quite different. Many of the major UN agencies have now taken up this issue. How much they are actually doing about it is another matter. But at least at the conceptual level, there’s been a break-

Left: “Mothers of the Disappeared” demonstrate outside Argentina’s congress. Right: Teenage girls executed by the U.S.-supported right-wing death squads in El Salvador.

Yet we are not willing to have the world hold us accountable.
through in the understanding that what happens to women can be human rights abuse.

What are some of the challenges ahead?
The current global economy, with its ever-increasing trade and technology, is exacerbating the gap between the rich and poor, which means that more and more women are economically destitute. The ability to get the world's governments to recognize and do anything about economic and social rights is minimal right now. We have to have a global movement around workplace standards—for women and men.

And, as we saw at the 1994 Cairo conference on population and at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the global backlash against women is focused mostly in the area of reproductive rights. I'm optimistic but I'm also realistic about the barriers we face, such as the traditional powers of religion and some aspects of the economy, which work to keep women under control.

The next few years are going to be very important as to whether this movement keeps going forward. The globalization of communications and the economy is probably the biggest challenge we face. How to organize and respond is a challenge for American women.

Why should globalization be a particular problem for U.S. women?
Because the U.S. women's movement is still hopelessly parochial. It does not see its issues as global ones. I'm always amazed at how little women in this country use human rights and international treaties as a frame in which to pose their issues. The American women's movement suffers from what all of us in the U.S. suffer from: a very nation-centric view. If there isn't feminism around the world, there won't be feminism in the United States, either.

How is the personal turned into the political in terms of human rights?
Violence against women is political in the same way that racial violence is political. The focus of the human rights community has been on the state that carries out such violence. But when a woman is tortured at the hands of her husband rather than by the state, it's still torture.

How, specifically, do laws tolerate, or even condone, violence against women?
Men kill their wives or girlfriends and then use the "honor" defense to escape prosecution. For example, in some Islamic countries, when her family kills a girl the legal defense is that the family has found out that the girl had sex without being married. Such "crimes of honor" go unprosecuted in many states. Or no effort is made to enforce the law.

Or they prosecute the victims, as in Pakistan, where women who report rape may be charged with having sex outside of marriage and jailed?
Yes. In Peru and Costa Rica, for example, if a rapist offers to marry his victim he is no longer charged with the rape. In most countries with such customs, legally a woman doesn't have to accept, but in community terms in many parts of the world, most women who have been raped are forced by their families to accept the rapist's offer of marriage. So a woman is not only raped once, she's raped for life.

What should the Universal Declaration of Human Rights mean to the average woman?
That declaration was an attempt by the UN in 1948 to establish international ethical standards. Our 1998 Global Campaign is trying to give a gendered interpretation of those principles, in areas such as economic and social rights, health and sexual rights, violence, etc. These documents are very important tools for political struggle, for legitimizing what we see as a vision for a better way to live—for trying to convince others. I would hope for women in the United States who are currently facing a difficult situation that we would see the use of the ethical standards in the declaration as articulating a starting point for what we stand for, and what needs to happen for women.

New York-based journalist Jennifer Tierney was formerly the Mexico correspondent for International Financing Review magazine. She has also written for The New York Times, The Financial Times of London, and UPI, among others.

“A lot of people come to law school with a passive, consumer mentality”
Layli Bashir
Unexpected Crusader

by Kavita Menon

"...She said she would keep fighting for me until I was free. She was like an angel, someone who had come to rescue me from the living hell I had endured since coming to the United States."

—from Fauziya Kassindja’s Do They Hear You When You Cry?

She must have looked like an angel to Fauziya Kassindja as Kassindja languished in prison, after having entered the U.S. without papers, in desperate flight from a forced marriage and the threat of female genital mutilation (FGM) back home in Togo, West Africa. Layli Miller Bashir, with her small frame and child-like voice, blond curls, bright blue eyes and delicate skin, had come to the prison as Kassindja’s lawyer. But with her promises of enduring prayer and support, Kassindja regarded her as a sister sent from on high.

Bashir is one of those people whose lives seem to proceed eerily straight and clear down some preordained path—one of those bright young things who has done so much so fast that you begin to doubt your arithmetic. She was born on March 24, 1972. She left high school a year early, at 17, married at 18, finished college in 1993, and graduated with a master’s degree in International Relations and a law degree in 1996, just months after helping secure the much-publicized, precedent-setting legal victory for women and refugees whereby Fauziya Kassindja was finally granted asylum in the U.S. She contributed to the book that was written about the case, then used her share of the profits to found the Tahirih Justice Center, which provides legal, medical, and social services for immigrant women. She has jumped from slogging through the system at the Board of Immigration Appeals to working at the blue-chip Washington, D.C., law firm Arnold & Porter.

Photo above: Jailed for two years in a maximum security prison in the U.S. after fleeing FGM, Fauziya Kassindja (left) found a champion in law student Layli Bashir (right).

Now, at 26, Bashir says she doesn’t have a grand plan, and admits only that “I always have rules for everything...I look at where I can be most useful.”

More than anyone else, it was law student Bashir who was responsible for the legal and media campaign that freed Fauziya Kassindja and ultimately led the U.S. to grant her asylum. Thanks to Kassindja’s case, the torture of FGM, which had long been ignored, or euphemized as “female circumcision” and dismissed as a “cultural norm,” was finally recognized in the U.S. as a form of persecution, a violation of human rights. The case also established the legal propriety of women making gender-based claims of persecution. Kassindja’s story—of being treated like a criminal after her arrival in the States; of being held in maximum security prisons, where she was chained and tear-gassed during her nearly two-year wait for asylum hearing—also cast a revealing light on the brutality of the immigration service’s routine treatment of asylum-seekers.

Bashir first heard about genital cutting when, before entering law school, she spent three weeks in The Gambia, West Africa. When she asked her husband, then a medical resident, about FGM, he gave her several articles detailing the practice. At law school, she wrote a paper on whether a woman fleeing FGM could, theoretically, qualify for asylum in the U.S. It was that bit of expertise that qualified her to handle Kassindja’s case. She was just a summer intern working for an immigration lawyer, but she ended up not only doing the bulk of the research for, and drafting, the brief, but even arguing the case at the hearing.

She lost, but then assumed full responsibility for seeing that the case was appealed. “She is very young,” says Jessica Neuwirth, the president of Equality Now, a U.S-based human rights organization that helped draw media attention to Kassindja. “But I think that’s part of it. As you get older you become more cynical and jaded. She was so genuinely horrified by what
something about it....We try to mobilize people around outrage. There’s a certain quality about it that’s important to human rights activism.”

Bashir first heard of Equality Now while at the 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference, which she attended with her mother as part of the Baha’i delegation. She was Kassindja’s personal lobbyist in Beijing, telling anyone who would listen about the case she had just lost and the woman she was determined to save. And when she returned to the Washington College of Law at American University, she convinced the school’s International Human Rights Law Clinic to take on the appeal.

“A lot of people come to the law school with a passive, consumer mentality—like they’re watching TV,” says Jamin Raskin, an associate dean at the university during Bashir’s time there. “Layli came to the law school with a hunger for justice . . . She found that case during the summer, brought it back to the clinic, insisted the school take it on, and she never let go.”

Though the case was turned over to the clinic, then headed by Karen Musalo, Bashir remained fiercely attached to Kassindja. “When she described Fauziya being led out of that courtroom in shackles, and saw the terror, the hopelessness, the rage—she felt all that. And we felt it too,” her mother, Carole Miller, says.

Bashir’s commitment is easier to understand in the context of her family, and their faith. Her parents are both civil rights activists, nationally and internationally, working through the Baha’i community’s network. Carole Miller is a close friend of Coretta Scott King and Dick Gregory.

Baha’is tend to be concerned with issues like racism and sexism—believing in the idea of one human family, and the value and wisdom of all the world’s religions. Dorothy Nelson, a federal judge at the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California, and a Baha’i herself, has known Bashir since she was a child. “I remember Layli, at the age of nine or ten, came to me . . . and asked, ‘Can you be a good lawyer and a good Baha’i at the same time?’”

“In the Baha’i faith, work in the form of service is equivalent to prayer. It’s not enough to believe, you have to act.”

Kavita Menon works in the Asia program at the Committee to Protect Journalists in NY.

Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, was the recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize and the first person to win it while under detention. Clearly one of the world’s most exceptional women, she remains an enigma due to her forced isolation. Under the dark shadow of Burma’s omnipresent military junta, author Alan Clements spent five months conversing with her, knowing that each interview could be the last. Aung San Suu Kyi was, and still is, under constant threat of rearrest, and Clements could have been deported at any time. Since completing The Voice of Hope, he has been permanently banned from Burma.

Behind a gate guarded by the feared military intelligence—who monitor her telephone, control her movements, and haul her closest supporters off to jail—Suu Kyi, 53, lives in a large but modest, run-down home in Burma’s capital, Rangoon. It is here that she was kept isolated under house arrest for six years (1989 to 1995). For much of that time, she was allowed zero contact with her English husband, Dr. Michael Aris, a Tibetologist at Oxford University, and their two young sons, Alexander and Kim, who have grown up without her. Since then, the authorities have insured that her contact with her family has been sporadic at best. Aris, in fact, has been refused a visa to Burma since 1995. More recently, three of her top aides, all cousins, have been imprisoned—one tortured so badly that he had to be hospitalized. And Suu Kyi is increasingly cut off from those around her again by the regime, the road to her home barricaded closed, visitors turned back. She draws emotional strength, however, from the deep bonds with her close supporters, even when they cannot meet, and her lively sense of humor.

Burma’s brutal military junta, which was formerly known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), now calls itself the less threatening sounding State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) at the recommendation of two Washington D.C. public relations agencies: Jefferson Waterman International, and Bain & Associates, hired by the regime to improve its image. This is no small challenge; SPDC has been condemned the world over for widespread human rights violations against an increasingly impoverished nation. President Clinton has imposed economic sanctions on Burma, which Suu Kyi supports; she has also called for a boycott on tourism to her country. Meanwhile, the SPDC is successfully courting foreign corporations and using Burma’s lucrative drug trade to keep the crumbling economy afloat.

Burma’s regime has no intention of turning over power peacefully, but Suu Kyi—described by Vaclav Havel as “one of the outstanding examples of the power of the powerless”—remains committed to non-violence. Following is an excerpt from The Voice of Hope.

I do not believe in armed struggle because it will perpetuate the tradition th
How effective is non-violence with a regime that seems devoid of any sense of moral conscience? I do not believe in an armed struggle because it will perpetuate the tradition that he who is best at wielding arms, wields power. That will not help democracy.

Non-violence means positive action. You have to work for whatever you want. You don't just sit there doing nothing and hope to get what you want. It just means that the methods you use are not violent ones. Some people think that non-violence is passiveness. It's not so. I know it is the slower way, and I understand why our young people feel that it will not work. But I cannot encourage that kind of attitude. Because if I do, we will be perpetuating a cycle of violence that will never come to an end.

You once said, “Fear is a habit; I'm not afraid.” But is that true, are you not afraid?

I am afraid. I'm afraid of doing the wrong thing that might bring harm to others. But of course, this is something I've had to learn to cope with. I do worry for them though.

In fact, when people associate your name with bravery and fearlessness, you always say that your NLD colleagues have suffered more and been much more courageous than you...

When I was a child I was afraid of the dark, whereas my brothers were not. I was really the cowardly one in the family. This is probably why I find it strange when people think I'm so brave. Some of the things I do that others consider brave just seem normal to me.

Like walking into a line of armed soldiers ready to shoot you, as you did?

I don't know if I think of that as very courageous. There must be thousands of soldiers who do that kind of thing every day. Because unfortunately, there are battles going on all the time in this world.

How do you respond to SLORC's personal criticisms of you?

Their attacks are so crude that they win my sympathy rather than anything else. At one time I thought they were actually rather funny. Before I was placed under house arrest, we found that every time one of them attacked me viciously, we gained more support. We used...
to jokingly say to each other, “We have to present them with special certificates of honor, for helping us with our campaign for democracy.” Later, I realized this was not a good idea. It was rather serious, not because it was an attack on me, but because it was creating a greater gap between us and them—between those who wanted democracy and those who wanted to stand by the authorities. So I am against this form of propaganda warfare.

What does it feel like to be under such scrutiny all the time? The pressure from unseen eyes, a tapped telephone, the Military Intelligence (MI) men everywhere, and the ever present threat of re-arrest?

I’m not aware of the pressure all the time. But sometimes, of course, I am. For example, somebody from America, whom I had not met for years, rang up. He started talking about his brother’s recent meetings with some people in the government, and I said, “Do you realized that my telephone is tapped. Do you intend that everything you say be heard by the MI?” He hung up pretty quickly after that. On such occasions, I am aware of my unusual circumstances.

Soon after Nelson Mandela was released from imprisonment, the international media began labeling you “the world’s most famous political prisoner.” What are you comments on this?

I’m not one who thinks that labels are that important. Recently somebody asked if I felt that I had less moral authority now that I was free. I found it a very strange question. If your only influence depends on you being a prisoner, then you have not much to speak of.

You were cut off from life in a fundamental way during your detention. Cut off from your family, your husband, your children. Cut off from your freedom of movement, of expression...

I never felt cut off from life. I listened to the radio many times a day, I read a lot, I felt in touch with what was going on in the world. But I was, of course, very happy to meet my friends again.

I missed my family, particularly my sons. I missed not having the chance to look after them—be with them. With my sons, I was always running around with them playing together. Having long discussions with them. Sometimes I would argue with them—tremendously passionate arguments, because my sons can be quite argumentative, and I am argumentative, too. My elder son, being more mature, tends to discuss philosophical issues more, whereas with my younger son, we don’t talk about that sort of thing much—at least not yet. He’s very musical...

But, no, I did not feel cut off from life. Basically, I felt that being under house arrest was just part of my job—I was doing my work.

You have been at the physical mercy of the authorities ever since you entered your people’s struggle for democracy. Has SLO RC ever captured you internally—emotionally or mentally?

No, and I think this is because I have never learned to hate them. If I had, I would have been at their mercy. In George Eliot’s book, Middlemarch, there is a character who’s afraid he might no longer be able to love his wife who’s been a disappointment to him. When I first read that I found it rather puzzling. My attitude was—shouldn’t he have been more afraid that she might have stopped loving him? But now I understand why he felt like that. If he had stopped loving his wife, he would have been entirely defeated. His whole life would have been a disappointment. I’ve always felt that if I really started hating my captors, hating SLO RC and the army, I would have defeated myself.

People have asked me why I was not frightened of SLO RC after all those years of house arrest. Was I not aware that they could do whatever they wanted to me? I was fully aware of that. I think it was because I did not hate them and you cannot really be frightened of people you do not hate. Hate and fear go hand-in-hand.

Is torture still used in this country’s prisons?

Yes, torture goes on in all the prisons of Burma, and I have evidence of this. But it is more important to understand the mentality of torturers that just to concentrate on what kind of torture goes on, if you want to improve the situation.

If your struggle for democracy succeeds, will members of SLO RC face criminal charges?

I will never make any personal guarantees. It is only for our party, the National League of Democracy, a group that represents the people, to speak. But I do believe that truth and reconciliation go together. Once the truth has been admitted, forgiveness is far more possible. Denying the truth will not bring about forgiveness, neither will it dissipate the anger in those who have suffered.

Many people want to describe you in heroic terms, you’ve even been called ‘Burma’s Saint Joan’...

Good heavens, I hope not.

Fellow Buddhists have referred to you as striving for the attainment of Buddhahood—the perfection of wisdom, compassion and love, with the intention of assisting others to attain freedom.

Oh, for goodness sake, I’m nowhere near such a state.
And I'm amazed that people think I could be anything like that. I am one of those people who strive for self-improvement. I do try to be good (laughs). This is the way my mother brought me up. She emphasized the goodness of good, so to speak. I'm not saying I succeed all the time but I do try. I have a terrible temper. Although I don't get as angry now as I used to. Meditation helped a lot. But when I think somebody has been hypocritical or unjust, I still get very angry. I don't mind ignorance; I don't mind sincere mistakes; but what makes me really angry is hypocrisy. So, I have to develop awareness that I have got to control this anger. And that helps.

Do you ever step back from the immediacy of the struggle and contemplate your role in the bigger picture of existence?

Yes, in fact, it still surprises me that I'm supposed to be an important person. I don't see things that way at all. I don't feel any different now that I'm in politics compared to what I felt before. Of course, I've got more responsibilities to discharge. But I had many responsibilities as a wife and mother, too. Things may appear big and important at times, but I realize they are small when I consider that we are all subject to the law of impermanence. To put it in more blunt terms, I do contemplate my death. Which means to me an acceptance of the principle of change. And by reflecting upon your own death some of the problems which seem significant to you just shrivel into nothing nothingness.

Few people face the fact that they are going to die one day. If you contemplate your own death, in a sense it means that you accept how unimportant you are. It's a way of stepping back from the present, from the immediate concerns of the world in which you're engaged, realizing you are within the whole scheme of things. And yet, you are essential in your place, even if you may not be of great importance. Everybody is essential. But it is a matter of having a balanced view of your place in the world. Having enough respect for yourself to understand that you too have a role to play and at the same time, having enough humility to accept that your role isn't as important as you or some people may think.

The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has said, "In the grain of rice see the sun." Do you see yourself as just a seed-sower of democracy?

I once read a book by Rebecca West. She was talking about musicians and artists as a "procession of saints always progressing toward an impossible goal." I see my life like that—as part of a procession, a dynamic process, doing all that we can to move toward more good and justice; a process that is not isolated from what has happened before or what will come after. And I do whatever I have to do along the path, whether it's sowing seeds or reaping the harvest or (laughing) tending the plants half-grown.
THE ULTIMATE GROWTH INDUSTRY
TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

by Jan Goodwin

The California travel agency brochure could not be more blunt: “Sex Tours to Thailand, Real Girls, Real Sex, Real Cheap,” it reads. “These women are the most sexually available in the world. Did you know you can actually buy a virgin girl for as little as $200? You could fuck a different girl every night for the rest of your life.” There is even a prize for the man who has sex with the most girls during the tour. As for AIDS, the brochure continues, “Thailand is safe. And all the places we visit are police protected.”

What the ad copy doesn’t say is that these “virgin girls” are frequently children who have been kidnapped or sold into brothels. Forced into prostitution, sometimes even chained to their beds, they lead lives that are brutal, and frequently short. Averaging 15 customers a day, they work all but two days a month. They must perform any act demanded by their customers, most of whom refuse to wear condoms. If they object, the brothel owners beat them into submission. According to human rights activists working in Thailand, a large percentage of the prostitutes there are under 15, and girls as young as eight are sold into the industry. Within six months of being sold into the sex trade, a girl is commonly HIV-infected.

But you don’t have travel to Asia; sexual servitude can be found here in the U.S. too, as an 18-month undercover investigation by the Global Survival Network discovered. For example, women from the former Soviet Union can be found in brothels in New York, Bethesda, Maryland, and Los Angeles. Fleeing a collapsing economy at home, these women pay up to $3,000 in “processing fees” for what they are promised will be good jobs abroad; instead they are sold into sexual slavery. The industry is tightly controlled by the Russian mafia, whose contacts with their own government and immigration officials facilitate acquisition of the necessary visas and passports. Women trying to escape have been murdered, and the threat that family members back home will be beaten to death is also used to keep women in line.

According to GSN, which is based in Washington, D.C., every year trafficking in women and girls puts billions of dollars into the coffers of criminal syndicates worldwide—an amount rivaling their incomes from drugs and guns. And there is another plus in trading in human flesh: dope and weapons can only be sold once; a woman or girl can be sold again and again.

As the disparities in the global economy widen, girl children and young women are increasingly seen as currency and quick profits. The United Nations estimates that, around the world, some 200 million people are forced to live as sexual or economic slaves, the latter often involving sexual exploitation as well. In Southeast Asia alone, a reported 60 to 70 million women and children have been sold into the sex industry in the last decade. “Slavery is one of the most undesirable consequences of globalization,” says a UN spokesman, adding, “We regret that this is not considered a priority by any country at the moment.”

Nor is trafficking in women and girls limited to prostitution; it is also used to supply the forced-marriage industry. In China today, for example, there are now three males for every two females in the population over the age of 15. This as a result of the government’s “one child, one couple” policy, combined with the traditional, and still powerful, requirement for a son. If the first child is a girl, the fetus may be aborted, or the infant abandoned or even killed. As a consequence, young women and girls are being sold into marriage, in a revival of a once-standard feudal practice. According to Chinese government reports, in the first 10 months of 1990 alone, trafficking in brides increased by 60 percent over the previous year. Either kidnapped or sold by impoverished families, the young women are purchased by potential bridegrooms for up to $600. The government’s Office for the Eradication of the Kidnapping and Sale of Women acknowledges some 50,000 such kidnappings per year (although human rights organizations believe the real numbers are much higher). And the profits are enormous. In a five-year period, from 1991 to 1996, Chinese police freed 88,000 women and children who had been kidnapped for this purpose.

Particularly disturbing is the violence to which these forced brides are subjected. The abducted women, who can be as young as 13 or 14, are frequently gang-raped by the slave traders before being sold, a practice that is intended to terrify them into passivity, and is no doubt...
effective in many cases. Those who try to run from their new husbands are violently punished, even maimed, by the traffickers, in ways that are too sickening to be printed here.

**In some cases, sex tours from the U.S. to the Third World are offered as a means by which lonely men can find a mate.** Norman Barabash, who runs Big Apple Oriental Tours out of Queens, New York, views his tours as a social development program. Until recently, $2,200 bought 10 days and 11 nights of "paradise" in the Philippines; since last year, when Big Apple was banned from doing business in that country, Barabash has been sending American men to Thailand. Women in these countries have no jobs, and are dying to get American husbands, he says. "They are so set on landing one, they will do anything their conscience allows." According to Barabash, some 20 to 25 percent of his clients end up marrying women they meet on the tours.

Big Apple is only one of some 25 or 30 similar operations in the U.S. that ride on—and promote—the myth that "exotic oriental women are thrilled to meet American men, and know how to please and serve them," says Ken Franzblau, a lawyer for Equality Now, a human rights organization. Franzblau went underground for almost two years to investigate sex-tour companies in the U.S. "I posed as a shy man who felt insecure around women, and inquired about taking such a trip," he says. "I was told that all kinds of kinky sex would be available, and that the tour guides would negotiate prices for me with the pimps."

Franzblau points out that the operators demean women at both ends of their business. Reads one brochure: "Had enough of the American bitches who won't give you the time of day, and are only interested in your bank account? In Asia you'll meet girls who will treat you with respect and appreciation, unlike their American counterparts." These operators insist that American women are unloving, feminist manhaters, he says. "At the destination end, sex tours create the ever-increasing demand to bring young women and girls into the sex industry."

In the Philippines and Thailand, prostitution is illegal. Here in the U.S., as well as in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia—all countries where sex tours originate—such "tourism" is likewise illegal, although in this country, the law applies only to traveling with the intent to engage in a sexual act with a juvenile, which is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment. In the four years this law has been in force, however, there have been no prosecutions.
It is also illegal in virtually every state of America (including New York where Big Apple operates), to promote prostitution, or knowingly profit from it. Yet sex-tour operators openly advertise in magazines and on the Internet, and the websites of many feature hardcore pornographic photographs of promised “delights.” So, too, do the videos they send potential customers. An hour-long video sent to men interested in going on a Big Apple tour and viewed by OTI shows what is described as a wet T-shirt contest, but in reality is more a sex circus in which young women are stripped, and a mob of raucous overweight, aging American men suck on their nipples, perform oral sex, and otherwise explore their body cavities as they are passed around the crowd. The video also offers “daily introductions to ladies of your choice who will be your companion for the night or around the clock.” As two young women are shown cavorting naked in a jacuzzi, the voice-over cautions that if viewers don’t take a tour, they will “miss an afternoon at a sex motel with two lovely ladies.”

There is nothing subtle or obscure about the promotional video and its customer come-ons, but in a letter to Democratic Senator Catherine Abate last September, Queens County District Attorney Richard Brown wrote: “Our investigation [of Big Apple Oriental Tours], which has been quite extensive and included the use of undercover operatives as well as assistance provided by the FBI and the US Customs Service, has disclosed no provable violations of New York’s criminal laws.” At the time the decision not to pursue an indictment was made, the DA’s office was in possession of the video.

After that ruling, Equality Now met with the DA, and offered additional evidence, including records of Franzblau’s conversations with Big Apple’s owner, and the reports of two men who took the tours. The DA has subsequently reopened his investigation of the company.

Many other countries are also lax about cracking down on trafficking. The Japanese not only appear to condone the industry, they actively obstruct interference in it. Due to massive unemployment in the Philippines, even for those with college degrees, some 80,000 Filipinos work in Japan; 95 percent of them are women employed as “dance entertainers.” Commonly, the passports of these “guest workers” are confiscated on arrival and their salaries withheld; according to Mizuho Matsuda, the director of HELP, the only shelter for abused migrant women workers in Tokyo, many are forced into prostitution. Japan’s criminal syndicate, the Yakuza, is heavily involved in trafficking women for the country’s sex-and-entertainment industry, and like their Russian counterpart, have contacts in the government, and therefore often enjoy its protection.

A grisly side of a grim industry is highlighted by the death of 22-year-old Maricris Siosin, a graduate in modern dance. Five months after arriving in Tokyo, she was sent home in a closed coffin, with a death certificate stating she had died of hepatitis. When her family opened the coffin for the funeral, they discovered she had been beaten and stabbed. An autopsy conducted by the Philippines National Bureau of Investigation and confirmed, at the request of Equality Now, by a leading pathologist in the U.S., showed that a double-edged sword had been thrust into her vagina.

In Japan, S&M has a long tradition, and extremely violent S&M comics are readily available. Many male commuters openly read them instead of newspapers as they travel to and from work. One theory is that Maricris was forced to participate in a “snuff” movie (a porno flick
in which the woman is actually killed).

A Philippine government mission which was sent to Japan to investigate the murder was turned away by Japanese authorities. Similarly, Maricris’ family has been denied access to medical documents and police records. Some 33 Filipino workers died in Japan the same year Maricris was killed. At least 12 of these deaths took place under “suspicious circumstances.”

**In other countries, local authorities facilitate sex trafficking.** In the southern Thai town of Ranong, for example, brothels are surrounded by electrified barbed wire and armed guards to keep girls from escaping. The local police chief condones the practice, describing the brothels as an important part of the local economy. And while prostitution is illegal in Thailand, customers and owners alike have no fear of arrest. The police can be bought off, or accept payment in kind—free use of the brothels; a number of them also act as procurers for the traffickers.

The government periodically promises to crack down on the industry, but because of the amount of money it generates, invariably looks the other way. Of the five million annual visitors to Thailand on tourist visas, three out of four are men traveling alone, many of them from Europe, the Middle East, Japan, and the U.S. When raids are planned, the police often alert the brothels ahead of time. The only people arrested are the young prostitutes. Tragically, they are then frequently “recycled,” often with the assistance of the local police, who resell them to agents of a different brothel. And so the tragic circle remains unbroken, until the girls become too sick to work, or die on the job, like the five young prostitutes on Phuket island, a popular vacation resort for foreigners in southern Thailand: When fire broke out in the brothel where they worked, they burned to death because they were chained to their beds and unable to escape.

Tourism in Thailand generates $3 billion annually, and the country’s international image as a sexual paradise has made prostitution one of its most valuable economic subsectors. That international reputation is one even the U.S. Navy has recognized. The first port of call and liberty shore leave for much of the U.S. fleet after the Gulf War was Pattaya, a beach resort notorious as a center of Thailand’s sex industry. This apparent reward for service was given despite the fact that at that time at least 50 percent of the prostitutes in the region were HIV-positive. Another major destination for sex traffickers is India, where an estimated 15 million women and girls, many of whom have been sold into it from impoverished Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, work in the sex industry.

“Women and girls are moved between a lot of different countries,” says a spokeswoman for Human Rights Watch. Moreover, trafficking is not only a global phenomenon, it is “a hidden one.” For example, the organization reported recently, the U.S. gives Thailand $4 million a year to control the traffic in narcotics, but no U.S. aid is aimed at curtailing sex trafficking there. It is imperative that the U.S. government “recognize the severity of the problem,” says Human Rights Watch. “And the United Nations also needs to be very aggressive in fighting this modern form of slavery.”

Jan Goodwin, editor of On the Issues, is an award-winning journalist and author, and a long-time human rights activist.

---

Elderly Chechen woman (left) searches for fallen relatives. Algerian women (right) demonstrating against their country’s brutal conflict.
Glaring artificial light 24 hours a day, no sense of time, constant surveillance, every remark recorded, better conditions promised only upon “confession” or renunciation of political beliefs.

A torture chamber in some far-away despotic regime?
No. The U.S. today.

Such prison conditions exist in this country, and are used against political dissidents. Courts have ruled that a prisoner’s political beliefs and associations are a legitimate basis for placement in special prison units designed to break spirits, if not bones.

There are scores of men and women in U.S. prisons today for political reasons. Many have long histories of involvement in radical politics and struggles against injustice, and it is because of these political associations, rather than any specific acts, that they are serving draconian sentences. Here are just a few:

Susan Rosenberg: A supporter of the Black liberation and Puerto Rican independence movements in the 60s, she is serving a 58-year sentence for possession of false identification papers, explosives and other weapons. Neither charged with nor convicted of any act of violence, her sentence is the longest the U.S. has ever imposed for a weapons charge.

Silvia Balardini: Accused of aiding Black revolutionary and prison escapee Assata Shakur, she is serving a 40-year sentence under the Federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) for belonging to “corrupt organizations.” Three years were added to her sentence when she refused to testify before a grand jury investigating the Puerto Rican independence movement. Last year, her request for parole was denied, and she now faces another 10 years for refusing to provide information on her political associates.

Alejandrina Torres: A Puerto Rican independence activist serving 35 years for “seditious conspiracy,” a highly political charge based on guilt by association.

All three were imprisoned in the extremely punitive Control Unit in Lexington, Kentucky, until it was closed in 1988 because of mounting protests against its inhumane conditions, which included sensory deprivation and direct physical abuse to create a feeling of complete powerlessness. The women were told they would be imprisoned there indefinitely until they renounced their politics and squealed on associates on the outside. They refused to comply. (All three are currently being held at the federal prison in Danbury, Connecticut.)

Techniques developed at the Lexington unit, however, are still being applied in federal super-maximum security prisons. Some 30 states now have supermax pens where inmates are kept in isolation in tiny, concrete, bunker-like cells, considered one of the most psychologically debilitating environments.

Mumia Abu-Jamal: Well-known radio journalist and former president of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, Jamal is on death row at a maximum security Pennsylvania prison. He was an outspoken critic of the racist Philadelphia police department, which gained national notoriety in 1985 when they bombed a house, incinerating six adults and five children, and destroying a Black neighborhood. Jamal was convicted of the murder of a Philadelphia policeman, in an incident in which he himself was shot and nearly died. Since his sentence, key evidence has been refuted, witnesses admitted they were coerced into lying, and Jamal’s original lawyer has stated that he had neither the experience nor the resources to mount an adequate defense. Amnesty International and other supporters are campaigning for a new trial. If Jamal is killed, he will be the first political prisoner to be executed in the U.S. in more than 40 years.

Human rights activists also point to a growing number of what they call political prisoners of a different kind today. These include battered women like Jayne Stamen who have killed their abusers in self-defense yet are imprisoned for murder; Stamen has been imprisoned for 11 years and twice been denied parole although she has been a model prisoner at Albion, New York. They also include victims, many of whom are women, of unjust drug laws aimed primarily at poor, inner-city populations. Mandatory 15-year-to-life sentences for convictions under the “Rockefeller drug law” in New York state, for example, have sent mothers and grandmothers to jail for long terms for merely being in apartments where small quantities of drugs belonging to others were found.

There are scores of political prisoners in U.S. jails today.
A PLACE AT THE TABLE
WOMEN AT THE UN

The colossal bureaucracy of the United Nations, with its bloated underbelly of agencies, commissions and special advisors on the most pressing international problems, is arguably the greatest Good Old Boys Club in the world. Looking at the global representatives gathered at this venerable institution, one would find it hard to believe that half the world's population are women. Despite recent headway made in increasing the presence of women in the UN's higher ranks, the balance has remained dramatically tipped by an overwhelmingly male majority.

This is, after all, the institution known for having a glass ceiling so low than even short women were in danger of bumping their heads. The UN has also received intense criticism in recent years for ignoring or silencing through intimidation women staff who complained of sexual harassment, assaults, even rapes by male diplomats who too often view female employees as just another goody in their overly generous packages of employment benefits.

Today, however, the growing presence, if not the influence, of women can be felt on both levels at the UN. Within the UN system, which includes the secretariats and all the agencies, women now occupy eight top-level positions, most notably, the second most important position at the organization, Deputy Secretary General. The commissioners for human rights and for refugees are also women.

Women now head important agencies in charge of childrens' issues (UNICEF), world food assistance (FAO), health policy (WHO) and women's human rights (UNIFEM). A handful of special advisors, such as the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, are also directed by women. Among country ambassadors, there will be 11 women out of a total of 185 by the end of the year.

Given their minority status, women in both tiers of the UN have developed a keen sense of networking to keep women's rights at the top of the agenda in policy and within the halls of the UN itself. They meet together as a kind of solidarity posse, the brainchild of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright when she was the U.S. Ambassador to the UN. The group regularly invites other leading women within the UN system to figure out ways to press for better appointments for women. “We felt there was an absence of women in key political areas,” said Penny Wensley, the permanent representative to the Australian Mission to the UN, commenting on how women in high-ranking positions are concentrated in areas relating to social issues, as opposed to international security. “We're not asking for tokenism, we want qualified candidates to be considered,” she added. “Nor are we saying let us into your club and we'll blend in. We have a different perspective that deserves hearing.”

We're not asking for tokenism, we want qualified candidates considered.
There was some progress made this year with the appointment of Canada's Deputy Minister of National Defense, Louise Frechette, as Deputy Secretary General. Women were also appointed to high-level political representations to Bosnia and Cyprus. But despite heavy lobbying, there were no women inspectors on the mission sent to Iraq to investigate the chemical weapons supply. And women are not even a shadow in such important areas as the departments of political affairs and peacekeeping.

Some women take matters into their own hands. Dr. Nafis Sadik, executive director of the UN Population Fund, has almost singlehandedly changed the face of the agency, and to a degree, the entire UN system. Since she took the reins, the agency has promoted more women to leadership positions than any other part of the UN system. Due to Sadik's constant insistence, 64 percent of the senior staff are women. As one of them put it, “She really changed the Old Boys Club. Now when the men see her, they rush to tell her how many women they've hired.”

For her part, Noeleen Heyzer, the director of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has tried to use the agency as a catalyst for policy change. “As far as we're concerned, it's no longer about waiting to be invited to the table,” said Heyzer. “The whole international community has made particular commitments to women's rights. For me, it's a done deal. Now, [the issue] is the how-to of getting things done.” —J.T.

Left: A five-year-old bride at her wedding, despite child marriage being banned in India. Right: Young Kurdish protestors demonstrate on the anniversary of the use of chemical weapons by Sadam Hussein against the Kurds in northern Iraq.

Women constitute 1/2 the world's population.
United Nations reports showing that, while women constitute half the world's population, and labor nearly two-thirds of its work hours, they receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-tenth of the world's property. If that irony is "real life," then our ultimate task at the WAPPP must be not simply to sharpen the rhetoric, but to reshape reality.

It was to this end that, in the spring of 1997, while I was still serving as ambassador, the Kennedy School's Dean Joe Nye invited me to participate in the creation of a program that would advance the role of women in the global public policy arena. Essentially, he is calling for nothing less than a cultural shift in an institution in which 90 percent of the cases currently used for classroom instruction have male protagonists and the overwhelming majority of the instructors are also men.

To inspire female students, role models and mentors are essential. Several executive programs, such as the Institute of Politics, the National Hispana Institute, and the new Council of Women World Leaders, bring women leaders to campus. The council, which collects the wisdom of former heads of government and heads of state, held its first summit at the Kennedy School this past April, bringing together eight female current or former premiers, presidents, and prime ministers to explore the challenges of global leadership.

WAPPP is directing its earliest funding to researching public policies that have special significance for women (such as pay equity, childcare, women's health); women's perspectives on public policies in general; and the experiences of women shaping public policy. The program is based on the premise that, as we help women examine the challenges and opportunities they will face in the public forum, we are equipping the global leaders who will shape the next millennium. Strengthening the advocacy power of women at the grassroots and advancing women as leaders will affect the course of foreign and domestic policies in the 21st century.

There are also upcoming WAPPP-sponsored conferences, courses, seminars, and publications dealing with such issues as women, religion, and public policy; women and the revolution in information technology; and the global trafficking in women. The latter has spurred a WAPPP effort to create an international framework for legislation to protect women and children from commercial sexual exploitation. [See our article on page 28.] A program on women's international experience in conflict resolution will bring to the Kennedy School delegations of women who are doing this work on the ground, in locations such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Ireland, Latin America, and the inner cities of the U.S. Other programs will examine women in international development, including the economic effects of the private sector; public policy in popular women's magazines; and women's experience in U.S. foreign policy.

The power of the WAPPP program becomes clearer when we consider that women by the hundreds of millions are fueling the economies of the developing world through largely unreported home-based industry; that unlike the industrial revolution, which left women in the dust, today's high-tech economy gives them the opportunity to be at the forefront of change, and that the U.S. State Department is asking for the development and institution of concrete practices that will help American embassies advance the status of women worldwide.

Through the Women and Public Policy Program at the Kennedy School, hundreds of women every year will be directing their energies to fashioning economies and molding governments, and growing into their full capacity to shape the world.

Swanee Hunt is director of the WAPPP at Harvard. As U.S. ambassador to Austria from 1993 to 1997, she was an important advocate in improving the status of women throughout post-Communist Europe, particularly in Bosnia.
It's just after 3:00 a.m., and Lin Gentling is running at an easy clip. It has been perfect summer weather for Minneapolis—cool, dry and clear enough for a million stars to be visible.

"I'm tired," Lin murmurs.

Of course she's tired. Lin has been running on this path, a 2.7-mile loop around Lake Harriet, for 19 hours, since 8:00 a.m. the previous day. Having logged over 80 miles so far, the ankle on which she recently had surgery for tendon damage from overuse has begun to protest. At regular intervals we stick new Band-Aids on her multi-blistered feet, which so far have undergone four sock changes. To help keep her awake and provide motivational support, I have been running alongside Lin on and off for five hours since the beginning of this 24-hour "ultramarathon" fundraiser event.

The parameters of this particular ultramarathon include a running time of 24 hours; you can rest as long as you like, but the longer you rest the less scholarship money you raise for inner city kids (most pledges are based on miles completed). In addition, runners must check in at one of the two aid stations along the trail every four hours to have their weight and blood pressure monitored; any participant who loses more than seven percent of her body weight must drop out of the race.

Another factor that differentiates this event from your run-of-the-mill marathon is this: At 10:00 p.m. last night a Pizza Hut truck pulled up at one of the aid stations. The runners made neat work of the pies, though Lin has developed a taste for the station's boiled potatoes with salt. In the faster marathons, a runner's blood is diverted from the stomach to the extremities, making digestion a very bilious business.

We stop at a park bench. "Wake me up in ten minutes," Lin says. Before I can set my timer or try to talk her into resting a few minutes longer, she is fast asleep. I marvel at my 40-year-old friend and at the other 115 male and female ultra runners. What is it that makes them want to run this or any other ultramarathon, which can be a grueling 100-mile course or a staggering 48 hours, sometimes considerably longer. As ultramarathons go, this one is relatively easy. The terrain is flat, the tree-lined path around a scenic lake rather pleasant. Many ultramarathon courses are more arduous, like the one in California that winds down Death Valley and up 4,418 meters to Mount Whitney. Lin, a financial administrator at the Mayo Clinic, who has been running marathons most of her adult life, explained that since she recently found she wasn't running faster anymore, she decided to try running longer. While this might sound reasonable, it actually reflects a radical attitude toward sports, which according to Mary Jo Kane, Ph.D., director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota, is "the most gendered institution in our culture." After all, it is the male world that has determined that faster, higher, taller, harder is not only better but the apex of athletic achievement. If women were the arbiters of excellence in sport, maybe excellence would reflect different values. Maybe the Indy 500 would be an obstacle course to test drivers' agility rather than a speedway, or perhaps the most prestigious marathon would be determined by who can run the farthest rather than the fastest.

After waking Lin, I resume conversing; it helps keep her awake. We discuss the critical issue—where to eat after the race—and we calculate that she is in fourth place. The leader, another woman, is about four miles ahead of her. The fact that two women are leading the pack at this event is not uncommon, nor is it uncommon for one to win the event outright. Since 1972, when women first participated officially in the Boston Marathon, women's winning time has improved by 22 percent, while the men's time on the same course has improved by only 3.7 percent. These results demonstrate that women are catching up to men, and some predict that the performance of women in endurance events will surpass that of men in the not-so-distant future, if it hasn't already.

For years women were considered frail vessels whose weak bodies would be deformed by strenuous exercise. Concerns about sports damaging women's reproductive abilities and feminine charms were so entrenched that women were
not allowed to compete in the Olympic marathon event until 1984. But just as professional women have challenged negative and discrediting attitudes in the corporate world, so too have women athletes challenged male dominance in the sporting world—and been victorious. Sled-dog musher Susan Butcher, braving 1,049 miles of frozen land and 11 days and nights, steered her dogs to a victory four times in the 1980s and in 1990 in the sport's most important race, the Iditarod. And ever since 20-year-old American Gertude Ederle set a world record swimming the English Channel in 1926, women have dominated open-water marathon swimming, holding several records and frequently winning major open-water competitions.

Research published in 1996 in South Africa showed that in a group of 10 male and 10 female marathon-level runners, the men were consistently faster over distances of 10km, up to the standard for the marathon of 26.2 miles. But in the prestigious 54-mile Comrades Marathon, the women finished, on average, 53 minutes ahead of the men. The conclusion of the researchers was that women can maintain a higher rate of aerobic activity over a greater length of time. Similar results were found in an analysis of world-record times in running, swimming, and speed skating done by researchers at Northeastern University in Boston. "In all three of these sports," the researchers reported, "the superiority of men's performance diminished with increasing distance."

Exercise physiologists have for decades explained the performance gap between men and women in such sports as track and field, tennis and basketball, by cataloguing the advantages of the male physique: more muscle mass, 5 to 7 percent less body fat, greater lung capacity, and more efficient biomechanics. Women's athleticism, however, is mostly uncharted territory. That our physiology is being studied at all in this regard is in large part a response to the recent phenomenal finishes of top female endurance athletes. Their success clearly indicates that women, too, have physiological traits which are advantageous for sporting events, especially those based on endurance, and that these attributes are not simply lesser versions of the attributes of males.

One of the most widely held theories explaining women's prowess in endurance events is based on the results of a study by David Costill, Ph.D., former director of the Human Performance Laboratory at Ball State University in Indiana. Dr. Costill's study found that women in general were more efficient than men at metabolizing their much-maligned fat stores for energy, which would give them an advantage in events requiring great amounts of energy over a long period of time. In effect, this capacity delays exhaustion by staying off the depletion of the carbohydrates that fuel the body's activity—by keeping the "gas tank" from hitting empty.

It is probable that women's higher estrogen levels are a key factor in their greater stamina. For example, studies have shown that elevated estrogen levels have an antioxidizing effect on muscles, reducing the risk of degeneration from various diseases. In addition, research cited by Charlotte Tate, Ph.D., president of the Indianapolis-based American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), shows that "as a result of higher levels of estrogen, females have more of compound 2,3-diphosphoglycerate, which helps provide oxygen to working muscles." The more oxygen, the less fatigue.

A report in the June 1997 Chronicle of Higher Education finds that women "appear to have more efficient mitochondria, the cellular structures that are the power plants of the muscles." The Chronicle also reports on a study conducted by Pedro Pujol, M.D.,—continued on page 55
A crop of ads has been appearing in the secular and religious press, challenging the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on artificial contraception. Placed by Catholics for Contraception (a project of Catholics for a Free Choice), the ads are well-crafted and informative; they reveal that the Church’s reactionary position is basically aimed at keeping women subservient—making childbearing their primary function. In an essay on rethinking single-sex education, the conservative monthly Catholic World Report opined: “Of all tasks that present themselves to young women, the most important is surely the care and formation of souls. When a young mother holds in her arms her new baby, she holds a tiny barbarian with the potential for becoming a saint.”

An equally important feature of the debate—about which the non-Catholic world is largely ignorant—is that, for decades, hostility to birth control has been the touchstone of papal authority. The Vatican has long believed that if it lost control of this issue, the whole edifice of papal infallibility might collapse like a house of cards.

At the end of the second millennium, the monarchical papacy is looking increasingly bankrupt. With the Church under siege on many fronts—the ordination of women and mandatory celibacy come to mind—it might seem odd at first that it should so fanatically stake its authority on holding the line on contraception. But the sanction is highly effective, because it works on a powerful, primitive level. By intruding on the most intimate part of life, the hierarchy keeps the laity insecure and conscious of its subordinate nature. It is an axiom of maturity that we protect the privacy of our sexual selves; there is something terribly unsettling about having the Pope, so to speak, in the bedroom. Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles, scion of the baleful House of Dulles—his father, John Foster Dulles, and his uncle Alan Dulles, who were both Cold War hawks during the McCarthy era, worked respectively as Secretary of State and Director of the CIA under Eisenhower—was unusually direct on the subject at a recent Common Ground conference. (Common Ground is a cautious attempt by the Catholic hierarchy to bring progressive and conservative Catholics together to discern areas of moral agreement, especially in the explosive arena of abortion.) The laity, said Dulles, who teaches at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., should not be consulted on matters of doctrine because “in the modern secular world . . . it is hard to determine who are the truly faithful and mature Catholics deserving of consultation.” In ripping Stalinist form, he went on to state that authority is not obliged to give reasons for its edicts or decisions: “Faith,” he proclaimed, “is acceptance on the basis of authority not reason, and furthermore, proposing reasons may stimulate contrary reasons, leading to fruitless debate.”

In 1968, in spite of a thorough investigation by a blue-ribbon Vatican commission, which had concluded that the Church should reverse its teaching on contraception, the Pope at the time, Paul VI, decided otherwise in his encyclical, Humanae Vitae. The commission’s report was ignored and the Church’s opposition to birth
control was reiterated. Rank and file Catholics were stunned. How the Pope’s decision was reached is shrouded in secrecy, but we can be sure that he didn’t make it alone. In all likelihood it was drafted by powerful cardinals, particularly those with links to the Catholic fascist cult Opus Dei, whose resistance to any change is fierce. Opus Dei, which is highly secretive, was founded in the late 1920s by a Spanish priest, Jose Marie Escriva, later a fervid supporter of General Franco. The organization claims that its raison d’être is to promote holiness in lay people; but from the beginning its true goal has been to recover something of the politico-religious hegemony Rome enjoyed in Europe from the time of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, in the fourth century, to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth.

Today Opus Dei has enormous wealth and a global reach. Its sexism and austere orthodoxy on the pelvic issues—birth control and abortion—correspond exactly with the views of the current Pope, John Paul II, who has been in office 20 years. Bishops with ties to Opus Dei are now in place all over the world, with a major concentration in Latin America—where, in the recent past, the organization supported the junta in Argentina and helped to bring General Pinochet to power in Chile.

Things might have been different. After the death of Pope Paul VI in 1978, the surprise choice for his successor, who became John Paul I, was Cardinal Albert Luciano, a modern man from a socialist, working-class Italian family, who had no use for the anti-modernism that had dominated the Church for nearly a century and entrenched the monarchical papacy. Luciano had made no secret of the fact that he was uneasy with the arguments in Humanae Vitae condemning artificial contraception. For example, in a talk he gave to parish priests of the Veneto region during a 1965 spiritual retreat, he stated: “I assure all of you, that bishops would be more than happy to find a doctrine that declared the use of contraceptives legitimate under certain conditions.”

The new Pope lost no time in grasping the birth control nettle. Soon after his election, he told his Secretary of State that he planned to see U.S. Congressman James Scheuer, who was vice-chairman of the U.S. chapter of the UN Population Fund. Scheuer wanted Vatican support for the plans of the UN Population Fund to stabilize world population at 7.2 billion by the year 2050. An audience was scheduled for October 24, 1978.

The meeting never took place. After only 33 days in office, on September 28, 1978, Pope John Paul I was found dead in bed. The death has never been adequately explained, though the circumstances suggest murder by poisoning. Following an examination a couple of weeks before, the Pope’s personal physician had told him that he was in good health: “Non sta bene, ma benone.” (“You’re not well, but very well.”) Interestingly, the Pope’s doctor was refused permission to examine the body. The reactionary and Cardinal Silvio Oddi, Opus Dei’s cardinal protector and a senior member of the Curia, the Vatican’s administrative body, would not allow an autopsy. This murky and troubling story is explored in David Yallop’s book In God’s Name, and has been revisited by the distinguished Canadian journalist Robert Hutchison, in his book Their Kingdom Come: Inside the Secret World of Opus Dei, published last year in the United Kingdom.

The upshot of all this was that Vatican conservatives, whose maneuverings were orchestrated by Opus Dei, were in a position to engineer the election of a new
This war over reproductive issues—women's control of their own fertile clerical mind is terrified of women; this is very threatening to the Catholic ma—
pope—someone who was not wobbly on birth control and who could be relied upon to consolidate the power of the papacy. They found their man in the Polish cardinal, Karol Wojtyla, who took the name John Paul II. From the word go he aggressively reaffirmed *Humanae Vitae*, making apocalyptic utterances associating birth control with the culture of death. This would become the *leitmotif* of his papacy. Reportedly, John Paul II is exploiting unease about abortion to "covertly push an anti-contraception agenda."

If the Church's active opposition to family planning affected only its own followers, the situation would be less dire. Unhappily, papal reproductive politics are played out with devastating effect in vulnerable, developing countries, where women must incubate babies they cannot feed—much less educate adequately. Multiple pregnancies also mean that these women have little chance of loosening the bonds of traditional patriarchal cultures.

In its assault on contraception, the Roman Catholic Church regularly targets the United Nations. Any UN conference on population or ecology may expect the Vatican, usually in the person of Joachim Navarro Valls, its chief spokesman (and an influential member of Opus Dei), to use its observer status to sabotage programs and funding for family planning. Moreover, having the Vatican in his corner has helped Senator Jesse Helms in his successful campaign to block the payment of the U.S. dues the UN. When defending this fiscal delinquency, Helms consistently cites the UN's support for population management. The Vatican's take on reproductive issues also played a role in defeating the McCain-Feingold bill on campaign finance reform. The Right to Life organization believed that even this lame attempt to limit the corruption caused by money in politics went too far. Arguing that the bill would curtail speech, they lobbied against it, their aim being to protect the unlimited funding of anti-choice candidates prepared to push the Vatican line.

There is, it seems, no end to Rome's reach when the reproductive issues that underpin papal absolutism are threatened. Even in our community, South Bend, Indiana, the Vatican's pressure has been felt. At a recent meeting of the board of the local UN chapter, the person responsible for raising funds for UNICEF (the United Nation's Children's Fund) lamented that this year the coffers would be short $4,000—the result of an action taken by the Ladies of Notre Dame, a body which represents spouses and women faculty at Notre Dame University. For years the LND have sold Christmas cards to benefit UNICEF, but 18 months ago the Pope got the erroneous idea that UNICEF is in the family planning business. As a result, the LND have declined to sell any more cards.

Given that UNICEF is categorically not involved with population programs, the basis for the Pope's own action—he withdrew the nominal $2,000 the Vatican used to donate to UNICEF each year—seems to have been an endorsement by UNICEF of a UN manual addressing the needs of women in emergencies and in refugee camps. The manual said that such women "have the same rights as others to access, on the basis of free and voluntary choice, to comprehensive information for reproductive health, including family planning, . . . ." This statement should be placed alongside the Pope's admonition to women who were raped in Bosnia. An editorial in the conservative Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* quoted him approvingly as calling for these women to "accept the enemy and make him flesh of their flesh." He had adamantly opposed the use of the "morning-after pill,"
is one Rome is not prepared to lose, for it leads to women's empowerment. The idea of real equality between the sexes is threatening to the Catholic male shaman.
BRAVE NEW GIRLS
THESE TV HEROINES KNOW WHAT GIRL POWER REALLY MEANS

by Debbie Stoller

Move over Spice Girls—there's a new breed of girl in town, and when she says "power," she means business. In the last few seasons, television shows like "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Xena: Warrior Princess," "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," and "The Secret World of Alex Mack" have brought us heroines who give real meaning to the words "girl power." Whether they're chucking spears faster than a speeding bullet, kung-fu kicking unruly vampires into kingdom come, or simply breaking the laws of physics, these characters all share a common strength: the ability to leap over sexist stereotypes in a single bound.

Buffy, Xena, Alex, and Sabrina arrived on the cultural landscape just as adults were realizing that the world of teenage girls wasn't all pajama parties and pimple cream. Carol Gilligan, professor of gender studies, sounded the alarm in 1991 when she and her team of Harvard University researchers reported that girls undergo a "crisis in self-esteem" in adolescence from which they never fully recover.

Whereas young girls of nine or ten are self-confident, happy, and assertive—made of more piss and vinegar than sugar and spice—at puberty, a majority of them claim to be "unhappy with the way they are," an effect which is more pronounced among white girls than it is among Black and Hispanic girls. As a result of this loss of self-esteem, many girls become withdrawn and demure, starving their bodies and suppressing their talents in an effort to fit in.

Then, in 1994, Mary Pipher's book Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls became a best-seller among parents concerned with how to keep their bratty, outgoing young girls from becoming anorexic, self-mutilating teens. In the book, Pipher, a Ph.D. and practicing therapist, describes how, at puberty, "girls become 'female impersonators' who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces. Girls stop thinking, 'Who am I? What do I want?' and start thinking, 'What must I do to please others?'" She lays a good portion of the blame for girls' withering sense of self flatly at the feet of the media, calling to task a "girl-hostile culture" and its ability to crush their self-esteem.

"American culture has always smacked girls on the head in early-adolescence," she writes.

Seen from this angle, presenting girls in the larger-than-life roles of vampire slayers, teenage witches, and warrior princesses may be just what Dr. Pipher ordered. And, judging from their popularity, these shows have been hitting a nerve among girls of all ages.

First on the scene was Nickelodeon's "The Secret World of Alex Mack," a show about a teenage girl who gets into an accident with a chemical truck that leaves her with bizarre powers—like the ability to shoot electricity out of her finger and float things around the room, à la Uri Geller, and the even stranger capacity to transform herself into a puddle of liquid. Alex uses these skills to help herself through the day-to-day difficulties of being a teenage girl, but there's one complication: she needs to
keep her powers secret, not only because she doesn't want the other kids to think she's a freak, but also because the chemical company responsible for her misfortune is out to get her. (Not insignificant is the fact that the company, which is presented as being 100 percent evil, is in the business of making diet drugs.) It's this plot twist that makes Alex's situation a neat metaphor for the circumstances that most teenage girls find themselves in. As Pipher points out, girls at this age "are expected to sacrifice the parts of themselves that our culture considers masculine on the altar of social acceptability and shrink their souls down to a petite size." In other words, teenage girls can easily identify with the character of Alex Mack, because, like her, they too have far more power than they are willing to let on.

Sabrina, of "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," is another female character who has magical powers that she is trying to keep secret from the kids at school. And, like Alex, Sabrina basically uses her powers to help herself through the more mundane challenges of teenagerhood. When, for example, Sabrina decides to hold a Halloween party at her house, she begs her aunts, who are also witches, to promise they won't do any magic stuff during the party. The friends come, the aunts work at maintaining appearances, and everyone's bored. It's only when the magical powers can no longer be kept under wraps—the furniture starts yacking away, monstrous looking houseguests arrive from "The Other Realm," and a river of candy corn pours from the kitchen—that the party really comes alive. "Cool!" says the cute boy, at which point Sabrina decides to pull out all the stops and conjures up a live band in the middle of the living room. The message to young girls? Stop trying to cover up who you are. Revealing your true self might even get you the boy.

But it is "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" that is far and away the most successful show in the average-teenage-girl-with-extraordinary-powers genre. Buffy is quite different from either Sabrina or Alex Mack. For one thing, her skills are more physical than magical in nature—she accomplishes her slaying through what seems to be a combination of kung-fu and gymnastics. And Buffy's powers serve as more than party tricks; in fact, her survival and the survival of her closest and dearest friends and family members depend on them.

Buffy is the kind of heroine most girls can relate to: she's neither the most popular nor the most nerdy at school, neither the prettiest nor the ugliest. She doesn't come from a perfect home: She lives alone with her mother; in fact, the only male authority figure in the show is the softly sexy British librarian who serves as Buffy's mentor.

The pretext of the show is that it is Buffy's destiny to fight the undead. But, as is suggested by each episode's subplot, what she's really doing is fighting back against the run-of-the-mill sorts of sexism on the issues - 43
faced by all teenage girls. When her boyfriend suddenly goes cold-shoulder on her after they've finally slept together ("Lighten up—we had a great time, let's not make a big deal out of it."), Buffy doesn't just get mad—she gets even. Of course, her drop-kicking outburst is actually inspired by the fact that the boyfriend is also a vampire, but still, it's satisfying to watch Buffy avenge her pain and frustration in such a direct manner. Other objects of her wrath have been a domestic abuser ("You just went O.J. on your girlfriend!") and anyone who threatens the safety of her best friend, the sweet and nerdy Willow. The brilliance of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" is not just that it shows us life from a teenage girl's point of view, but that this point of view is vindicated. Sure, maybe you're not a teenage vampire slayer, the series tells its viewers, but we understand that your daily battles can be just as trying.

And then there's Xena. In many ways, she doesn't fit with the others: For one thing, she's certainly no high school student—in fact, she doesn't even live in the present. She's also not hiding anything about herself from anyone. Xena is powerful with a capital P, and she kicks plenty of butt. No one would ever make the mistake of calling large-and-in-charge Xena "petite." But Xena is not simply a male superhero in drag. She's all girl, and with her blue eyes, long dark hair, and severe bangs, she resembles no one so much as legendary pin-up queen Bettie Page. In her costume—a molded breast-plate contraption that would make Madonna's mouth water—she is an interesting combination of curves and combat. She's also a woman who indulges her hungers—for food, for fighting, and for men. When Xena sees a rival female make a play for one of her gorgeous, full-lipped, long-haired male conquests, she doesn't bother mincing words, or actions. Flinging a knife at her opponent, she hisses, "That's my piece of meat you're reaching for!" Xena is the farthest thing from a "Rules" girl; she is a girl who rules.

Xena's best friend is the ultra-feminine Gabrielle. While Xena is from Mars, Gabrielle is from Venus. Gabrielle is the voice of peace-loving,
female maternal wisdom, playing the role of the long-suffering wife to Xena’s aggressive, bully-dyke husband. When Gabrielle tries to prevent Xena from going on yet another violent rampage, Xena just pushes her aside, saying, “Gabrielle, this is something I have to do.”

For girls who are getting socialized to think of their bodies as the reward they give to others, it’s great to see Xena’s re-working of the female body as an active and aggressive subject. After Xena punches out some mealy-mouthed enemy guys, she has the chutzpah to raise her arm, sniff her pit, and sigh, “I love the smell of warrior sweat in the morning!” And while we almost always think of a naked female body as vulnerable, Xena never seems more powerful than when she is armed in nothing but her flesh and muscle, slinking like a cat across enemy territory. It’s a fantasy we women rarely have access to, and it’s a particularly empowering one.

Sabrina, Alex, Buffy, and Xena are all representatives of a new kind of pop-culture heroine, one that is at once powerful and undeniably girly. This idea—that girlishness and strength aren’t mutually exclusive—was first brought to light by a loosely-formed movement of young women who called themselves “Riot Grrls.” In the early ’90s, they gathered in latter-day consciousness-raising groups in Washington, D.C., and Olympia, Washington. With their roots in punk-rock music, and their motto, “Grrls need guitars,” the Riot Grrls resurrected old feminist themes for a new generation, and also reclaimed the word “girl” itself by injecting a ferocious, double-r growl into its center. Riot Grrls celebrated the fierce, tantrum-throwing little girl as one of the last examples of socially-acceptable female aggressiveness, before girls are taught to be “perfect little ladies” and instructed to suppress any display of anger.

In the Riot Grrls’ wake, numerous all-girl rock bands were born, and the slogan “girl power” began to be bandied about. T-shirts with pro-girl sentiments like “Girls Rule” and “Girls Kick Ass” started to show up at malls across the country, and slowly but surely, the idea of a mass girl-power movement—one that could instill a sense of pride in girls and allow them to embrace their own power—has been taking shape. And the media, finally, have taken notice. “What female teens want is empowered female teen characters, which is something that has been missing for a long time on television,” said Jamie Kellner, CEO of WB Broadcasting, in a New York Times article on the growing economic power of teenage girls.

Today, even Disney, that bastion ad nauseam of traditional male and female roles (Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming, and so on), is jumping on the girl-power bandwagon with their latest animated film, Mulan. The story of a Chinese girl who breaks with tradition and poses as a boy to become a respected warrior, Mulan is being touted as projecting Disney’s first really powerful role model for girls. But the claim is, at the very least, problematic: Mulan only gains access to power when she’s disguised as a boy—she’s a heroine who relies on that old strategy, if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. As important as it is to encourage girls to get in touch with the “masculine” part of their nature, and to be comfortable with the role of tomboy, we must be careful of the message that is on the opposite side of that coin. When Mulan suggests, as it does, that the best way to be a girl is to act like a boy, it supports the sexist notion that to be truly girly is to be a whiny, helpless, sissy.

In her book Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media, feminist scholar Susan J. Douglas points out that the TV shows “Bewitched” and “I Dream of Jeannie” hit the airwaves just as women were beginning to realize that there was more to happiness than housework. While The Feminine Mystique was making its way up the bestseller lists, both these shows were suggesting that if the little lady at home was ever allowed to actually unleash her powers, she could probably destroy the world, or at least do some serious damage to the male sphere.

So it is probably no coincidence that today, as teenage girls are beginning to come into their own as both a social and an economic force to be reckoned with (the financial success of the box-office hit Titanic has been attributed to the power of their purses), shows like “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” “Xena: Warror Princess,” “Sabrina the Teenage Witch,” and “The Secret World of Alex Mack” are hinting that there’s a wellspring of untapped girl power out there, with the potential to change the world if it could only be released. You go, girls.

Debbie Stoller holds a PhD. in the psychology of women from Yale University, and is co-editor of BUST, a feminist magazine that bills itself as “The Voice of the New Girl Order.” She has written for New York Newsday, Shift Magazine, Hues, and MTV Online.
She crouched behind the bed and whispered into the phone. She had called the police, she said. A voice outside the bedroom door threatened, demanding that she pull the chair from beneath the knob. The voice belonged to her father, a man who had pressed a pistol to his handcuffed wife’s head, crushed his child’s hand in his own—who most recently had lifted the sheets under which this girl, his younger daughter, had feigned sleep.....
A confusion of sounds. She would call me back, she said. But my phone didn’t ring, and no one answered her’s. She could be downtown, she could be dead. I sped along dim freeways, past the yellow lights of the factories on her side of town. I imagined her father as powerful and crazed. I knew he was a member of an evangelistic church, but his was a sect I knew little about.

In the courtyard of the apartment complex I heard only the scuffing of my shoes—no sobs or shouts, no ambulance, no crazed intruder. Then a flick of a curtain, a tap on glass. Teresa was peeking through a window, beckoning me inside. I hesitated beyond the threshold. I was only her teacher, after all. She leaped out the window to check the apartment’s front door. Her voice was small, her brown eyes red-rimmed and shocked. But no, I protested, I could not come in. She seemed half her 16 years, though, and she said please. If good judgment prevailed, she would grieve alone. It didn’t. The cops had come, she explained as we huddled in the dark, but they’d just missed the father. Her mother had unplugged the phone—her child’s isolation the punishment for communication; “he never raped you,” her best wifely defense. Court documents would later confirm the incest.

Fear prevented more than a minute’s reassurance. I knew how this looked, and I would not be able to explain it, especially in light of that other complication even Teresa didn’t know about.

The next evening her last refuge coughed her up; her sister wanted her out. I would fetch her, I told the caseworker; we would figure out something tomorrow. My patient partner of six years slept alone that night while I took the couch and Teresa stayed in the spare room under the roof of her English teacher: Miss Brockway—pretty cool, too smart, hard, funny, a real bitch, I bet she’s a dyke.

In the morning Teresa embraced her bag of belongings and I drove her to school to wait for the miracle we both knew wasn’t going to happen. Later that afternoon the caseworker lingered outside the door of my classroom. He was returning Teresa to a shelter, he said; then she would be sent off to a “home” for girls in another city to sit out the last 18 months of official childhood. I can’t let that happen, I told him. I’d promised her that much. But her options, he stressed, had been exhausted.

“She can stay with me”—a reaction merely, immature perhaps, failing to consider the implications or even to call home first. The caseworker was young, but he’d been in the business long enough to know nothing was going to come up for Teresa, not even foster care. If she refused to go with him, he wasn’t going to drag her out to the county van; but he saw the bigger picture, and he challenged me: “Are you willing to keep her till she’s 18?”

I contemplated the empty hallway. I had a contented, child-free life and a doting girlfriend. I could not make that commitment, not here, surrounded by lockers and school bells ringing and the 150 teenagers I called work. But the shelter—that was not acceptable. It would mean the final corruption of a surprisingly uncorrupted kid.

So I took her home that day, with no plan, nor much hope for one—two lesbians, two cats, and a straight girl without a clue. Even I prayed.

I met Teresa in the English class I taught in a high school in an area where working-class people had once lived rather well. My seven years in public education had blunted the shock of poverty and pregnancy, child abuse, incest, crime. Kids came and went. Teresa, too, had appeared, leaden-eyed, gum-cracking, then disappeared. When she returned in January, after a month’s absence, I had scribbled a list of assignments. The drifters rarely made up missed work, but Teresa surprised me. She read the literature, passed the semester exam, turned in a notebook. And what a notebook: With poetic cruelty she described four weeks at a government shelter—the anonymous bunk-bed rooms, common showers, chicks tougher than she who sought power in acid and crack, comfort in promiscuity, the tears of all in the honest night.

Teresa had come back to school via a compromise with county authorities: She could stay with her sister, herself just 21 and so very few blocks away from the parents’ home, provided that the father stay away. By that time, she had little left: a few school chums, a position on the student paper. And talent. It separated her from the many ruined others. For Teresa, there was hope. There had to be. Because if there was no hope for her, then why bother?

I suggested we try to publish her story. She agreed, less for the project, I suspected, than for the promise of companionship. Soon she was slipping me envelopes—“Miss Brockway” in blue curlicues outside; inside, confessions of weariness and rage and bulimic disgust, of solitary nights shared with a tiny niece while her sister worked in a bar for tips. She missed her mother. I gave her my number. From the beginning the gay issue offered the most dramatic potential in our relationship. As my sense of
responsibility outgrew the teacher-student confines, I agonized over professional propriety. There was ethics, I decided, and there was compassion. But would Teresa, so young, from such a past, accept the purity of feelings I myself could not yet comprehend? Yet she had no one else.

“Where do you sleep?” the caseworker asked, clipboard in hand, scrutinizing our home soon after Teresa moved in. He peeked into the pantry, opened the refrigerator, studied her room—once my room, or the room of my things—with a door she could close nights. I slept with my friend, I said, cringing behind implausible nonchalance. He noted this without comment. Weeks passed. Teresa craved contact, pouncing like a favorite cat the moment I slowed my pace, plopping down beside me wherever I rested, touching my arm, holding my hand. “Always keep a pillow between you and the child.” a county worker emphasized, “regardless of your sex.”

One night we faced each other cross-legged on the couch. Teresa rolled mascara off her eyelashes, flecked pink nail polish onto a tissue, wiped her nose with the back of her unlined hand. “I love you,” she said. I cried. I loved her, too.

But what if she found out? She’d grown up following the Bible her father’s way. Only 144,000 people were going to Heaven. And, according to her father’s Bible, I was not counted among them. But she’d renounced that world view the day church elders dismissed her father’s gropings as mere “body chemistry”; sin, they said, but not mortal sin. But isn’t homophobia—the only obstacle between us, it seemed at the time—always the last to go?

Coming out to Teresa would put so much more than my own personal rejection at risk. I had a job in a conservative school district. More important, I didn’t want to complicate Teresa’s first safe breathing space with fears promulgated by a culture that didn’t know me. Legally, we needed a judge’s authorization for Teresa to stay with me, an unrelated person not certified as a foster parent. Just days before the court date, Teresa’s ad litem attorney called. “It doesn’t matter to me,” she began, my gut twisting at her tone, “but I have to ask you: Are you and your roommate any more than best friends?” The parents had voiced suspicions. I envisioned journalists dogging me up courthouse steps, Teresa hauled off to the Lazy R Home for Girls. I could survive the infamy, if necessary, but what good would making the good fight do Teresa? Only the most courageous and least ambitious of judges would risk defending a gay foster parent in this state, still home to an obstinate sodomy law, regardless of the child’s other options. I lied—terrified that I would be asked the same question under oath the following week.

On the day of the hearing, Teresa and I entered the courthouse dolled up and trembling. We sat in the judge’s chambers as Teresa’s attorney and the parents’ attorney, from their church, dickered. Hours later we peered up at the bench, relieved. The lawyers had reached an agreement. Today, I would not commit perjury; all I had to say was “Yes, sir,” and we were out of there. Teresa and I exited the courthouse doors, past the beds and blankets of protesters—some other cause, not ours—into the soothing sunshine.

Later, during home visits, low-budget government counselors excavated the dramas of my family—had I “confronted” my parents about this or that, standard questions that seemed inappropriate, given Teresa’s experiences. Then that question again: “Is there a sexual component to your relationship with your roommate?” The lie was scarcely credible: my partner and I the last of the great spinster virgins?

It was a game of chicken, and we squawked, forgoing the monthly stipend granted upon foster parent certification for the vestiges of privacy and relief from the taint of illicitness.

“Nothing’s for free,” Teresa’s sister warned her—Teresa’s sister, for whom, indeed, nothing ever had been free. “Keep your bedroom door locked.”

“Her love for you is perverted,” her mother insisted, ascribing her own pain to everyone except the tyrant with whom she still slept.

Finally Teresa approached me with the familiar words: “It’s really none of my business...”

Afterward we wept—the truth and I were out. We laughed, too. Wasn’t it funny that I, who’d sworn off children so young, the big talker who was now, it seemed, acciden-
tally a mother?

I wrestled with the role and the affection I felt for the childlike girl who tickled my arm with still-plump fingers and constantly proclaimed her love, who erupted in giggles at my enduring ineptitudes. I could not defend the other mother, but I respected her resentment and frustrated maternal yearnings. Who the hell was I?

Teresa, too, pondered motherhood, slipping pages of her writing into my hands, watching me read. Of her birth mother: “She gave me just enough to comfort me after one of my father’s terrible beatings, but she never had enough to stop it. She had enough strength to wipe the blood from
Alice Walker on God, Magic and the Pagan Self

Bosnia: A Nation of Widows

Kate Millett's Unknown Art

Tara and Other Lies

My name is:

NAME
ADDRESS

My 1st gift to:
NAME
ADDRESS
CITY
STATE
ZIP

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

Include my subscription

☐ New
☐ Renew

Total Order at $14.95 each $____________

☐ Payment enclosed
☐ Bill Me

My 2nd gift to:
NAME
ADDRESS
CITY
STATE
ZIP

Gift will be mailed in your name. New subscriptions begin with the current issue.

Canadian subscriptions add $4; other foreign add $7 (surface mail) or $20 (air mail) payable in US funds. ON THE ISSUES is published quarterly.

36BG48
my lips with a cold wet wash cloth, but she never had enough to stop the punch to begin with.” And of me: “This is the mother who never hangs around me when I’m sick, because she knows I’m really not. The mother that would rather save me from a madman rather than a headache.”

In February Teresa handed each of us a card. To my partner she wrote, “Thank you for taking me into your home and for being so kind. You literally saved my life.” On my card a kitten floated on a raft trailed by a printed message: “You’re a real lifesaver!” The note inside said, “You took me in a year ago today with no intention of keeping me. Guess what? I’m still here. And I’m NEVER leaving.”

Teresa’s two Moms smiling over lacy Mother’s Day cards, perched on damp bleachers with binoculars and spotting their kid’s robe among a sea of green seniors, jostling with other parents at the Library of Congress for just the right photo as the daughter reads her work—her story, the project begun when she was merely my student, winner of a national writing award, one of several scholarships she received that year.

But after that, it all went wrong. Suddenly our home was engulfed in tender nerves and distraught passions, unnerving flashbacks to the mother-daughter frictions of half my life ago. I saw lies and manipulation; Teresa saw paranoia. In two years we’d gone through a decade of emotional growth, from sweet clinging childishness to this: adolescence. I had urged Teresa, sometimes dragged her, to this point, through driver’s ed, SATs, work. I had not yet made peace with being so very much needed, and now it was time to let go.

At 18, a college freshman, Teresa met a boy, a high school student she poured herself into. I panicked, stupidly surprised to realize that the education meant to fix everything provided no guaranteed escape from the misery of her mother and sister, their emotional and financial dependence, their restricted roles—victim, vixen. My ultimate fear, my mother’s fear for me once: a pregnancy that denied the other’s desperate appeals—who had failed, pitifully, to protect her children from persistent brutality. How had she remained in Teresa’s heart, while I, apparently, had not?

It is, I think, because she is her mother, despite all. I was just a woman with a lot of will and a craving for justice. I showed some courage. Maybe Teresa did owe me more. But in claiming that debt, I relinquished the maternal role. I was just a schoolteacher who had done a good job, a good job. But when it was time to lay aside the armor, I discovered more weakness than I had ever expected. I was 32 when Teresa arrived, my mother’s age when I was 16. Too young.

Teresa’s dishonesty paled in comparison with my own teenage antics. But in the context of our short past, it was devastating. My struggles, the risks I had taken, loomed now: the dread on the courthouse steps; the bureaucratic probes; the lost privacy, time, space; the household mess. Bitter betrayal bit through muddled comprehension. I could not go through this again.

One lonesome night Teresa ran shrieking out of her room, hyperventilating from a bad dream or the nightmare of actuality. That was the last time I held her, the first time in weeks. I walked through most of that night, and in the morning clutched a pillow and longed for conflagration. This was too extreme. A doctor put me on an antidepressant, and I asked Teresa to move out. We would help, I said. But she vanished. Afterward, I vacuumed from under her bed the accumulated hairballs and baby powder and polished fingernail clippings, a shredded photograph: my eyes, my lips.

I haven’t seen Teresa in three years. A letter or poem, a phone call, then she slips away again. I read the obituaries, the small notices in the newspaper of young women dying in car wrecks or from domestic rage.

The gay “problem,” the focus of so much anxiety, never became an issue. So much for victory.

A friend saw Teresa recently, holding the little girl she gave birth to one year after moving away. She was standing beside her mother, the woman who had watched one daughter flee and another disappear. "This is the mother-daughter relationship. This is the mother-daughter frictions of half my life ago," said the friend. "Lucky me—I had an out."

Michelle Brockway is a freelance writer and former teacher who lives in Houston, Texas.
For both parties, the stakes in this November's off-year election are higher than usual. The 11-vote Republican majority in the House of Representatives is the narrowest margin in half a century. Republicans control the Senate by 10 votes, but don’t have the numbers to break a filibuster. Polls and pundits predict the GOP will hold the Senate, but the House is up for grabs—the Democrats must defend 16 open seats, the Republicans, 17.

And their high stakes are women's high stakes. If Democrats and moderate Republicans are replaced by Republicans who support religious-right positions, the 1998 election could cause further erosion of women's right to choose, further cuts in education and social programs that disproportionately affect the poor, and the privatization of Social Security, among other things. At the state level, much tougher divorce laws and control over the redrawing of Congressional boundaries after the 2000 census are on the line.

Women are the target of a new GOP strategy that aims to keep right-wing women in the fold and persuade centrist women to turn back to their Republican roots, and at the same time, so turn off traditional Democratic women to their party that they'll stay away from the polls in disgust. This plan builds on the big lesson of 1996: The Republican war-against-women strategy so alienated women that, for the second time, women voters won the White House for Clinton. Democrats, needless to say, are hoping to hold together the centrist and traditional Democratic women to their party that they'll stay away from the polls in disgust. The outcome of campaigns around the country will be determined by the number of women who care enough about their rights to get out and vote.

Other issues to watch: attempts to defeat a bill cosponsored by U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe (R-Me.) and Rep. James Greenwood (R-Pa.) that would require private insurance to cover contraceptive drugs and services, and an expected overturn of Clinton's veto of the “partial birth” abortion bill that will lay the groundwork for a ban on most second and third-trimester abortions.

The turnoff portion of the GOP program began in late spring, when Republicans deliberately shifted the public debate in Washington away from education, health care, and the budget to morality and political scandal—Monica Lewinsky, campaign finance irregularities, the China defense technology flap. Many women are furious with Clinton. He has given Republicans ample opportunity to label Democrats immoral in the same way Democrats managed to convince the public to identify the GOP with extremism.

Republican leaders are betting that going after allegedly corrupt Democrats will not backfire. They hope that enough American swing voters, especially centrist women, will be sufficiently sickened by the Democrats' lax ethics to vote Republican—or stay home altogether and yield control of many elections to the conservatives, as happened in the 1996 House races.

The approach may be working. In spring, polls showed Democrats with a modest lead in House races. But by early summer, as the Republican morality offensive took off, the Pew Research Institute reported that Democrats and Republicans were statistically tied; and white women and older voters, the groups that are the mainstay of Democratic victories, were leaning toward the GOP. Unless the Democrats can move the debate away from scandal, they may lose out.

To win, the Democrats must get their voters to the polls. Outside the South, the majority of voters tend to support Democratic positions on education, health care, jobs, reproductive choice, gun control, child care, and protection of Social Security and Medicare. The problem for Democrats is to energize their base, and these mainstream issues alone aren't doing it. Campaign finance reform and tobacco legislation are potential vote-getters, but so far the—continued on page 59
TEN RACES TO WATCH

Religious morality and a push for public policies to encourage virtuous behavior, especially limiting reproductive rights, will be central campaign themes in the elections discussed below. All are expected to be close, with voter turnout the key factor.

CALIFORNIA

Governor: Open
Lt. Governor Gray Davis [D] vs. State Attorney General Dan Lungren [R] Lungren will back the agenda of the religious right. Davis will attack Lungren as being too extreme for the nation’s most diverse and populous state.

U.S. Senate: Incumbent Barbara Boxer [D] vs. State Treasurer Matt Fong [R] Boxer is viewed as one of the most liberal senators, and Fong will attack her support for abortion and gay rights, affirmative action, gun control, and tobacco laws he believes hurt the taxpayer. Boxer will run on her record of helping all Californians.

46th C.D. (Orange County area)
Incumbent Loretta Sanchez [D] vs. former incumbent Robert Dornan [R] This is a replay of the 1996 election, in which Sanchez defeated Dornan by less than 1,000 votes. Dornan is one of the right’s most vitriolic campaigners, and Sanchez is popular and expected to activate the newly assertive Hispanic voters in this once very conservative southern California district, especially over economic and social justice issues.

COLORADO

The races here are probably the hottest in the nation. Colorado is at a political crossroads, as James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family, whose national headquarters is in Colorado Springs, moves to take over the state’s once moderate Republican party.

U.S. Senate: Incumbent Ben Nighthorse Campbell [R] vs. the winner of the August 11 Democratic primary. Dottie Lamm, wife of former Governor Richard D. Lamm and a strong advocate for women’s rights, is favored, although she has an uphill fight against several Democrats in the primary. Campbell was elected as a Democrat and switched parties in 1995 after the Senate went Republican.

Governor: Candidates determined in August 11 primary. Colorado Treasurer Bill Owens, a religious-right Republican, is expected to be the GOP nominee. His opponent should be either State Senator Mike Feeley or Lt. Governor Gail Schoettler. Either way, the fall campaign will be a knockdown, drag-out fight between those who support women’s rights and those who don’t.

ILLINOIS

U.S. Senate: Incumbent Carol Moseley-Braun [D] vs. Peter Fitzgerald [R]. A strong opponent of reproductive choice and gay rights, State Senator Fitzgerald, a millionaire businessman, will run a controversial social-issues campaign against Braun, who will seek to hold her base and position him as outside the mainstream.

INDIANA

10th C.D. (Indianapolis). Incumbent Julia Carson [D] vs. Gary Hofmeister [R]. This clear contest pits an African-American advocate for women, children, and the poor against the far-right fringes of the Republican party. Ralph Reed, former executive director of the Christian Coalition, is advising Hofmeister, a jeweler and conservative activist; Oliver North has raised funds for him.

WASHINGTON

U.S. Senate: Incumbent Patty Murray [D] vs. winner of September 15 Republican primary. The Republican primary fight pits moderate Republican Christopher Bayley, a former King County prosecutor, against right-wing U.S. Representative Linda Smith and former State Senator Gordon Harr. If Smith wins, the subsequent campaign and election will be the first in the nation pitting two women representing polar-opposite viewpoints of women’s role in society against each other. It has been called the potential battle between the “mom in tennis shoes” and the “mom in hobnailed boots.”

WISCONSIN

U.S. Senate: Incumbent Russell Feingold [D] vs. U.S. Representative Mark W. Neumann. A member of the revolutionary GOP Congressional class of 1994, and a notable budget-cutter, Neumann will make scandal and morality big issues. Feingold will hold to the centrist course, playing down his liberal record on cultural and foreign-policy questions.

1st C.D. (Southern tier): Open. Candidates determined in September 8 primary. Kenosha City Councilmember Lydia Spottswood [D] is expected to face arch conservative Republican Paul Ryan, a former U.S. Senate staffer. Spottswood is concentrating on health care, education, and jobs; Ryan’s focus is on cutting government and implementing the Christian right’s family-values agenda.
The Resurgence of the Real:
Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World
by Charlene Spretnak
Addison-Wesley, 276 pages, $22

In this well-written, carefully argued and thoroughly researched book, Charlene Spretnak, social critic, feminist, and author of many previous books (among them The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics; Lost Goddesses of Early Greece; and States of Grace), sets out to examine the principal ideological paradigms that underly the structure of the modern world, and the causes of its most profound problems.

With the self-assurance of an accomplished scholar, she marshals examples and argument from history, politics, sociology, psychology, and economics in support of her thesis that the crisis of disaffection and meaninglessness confronting the old industrial societies, and even the new countries trying to catch up, can be traced to the persistence of certain of the tenets of modernity that have outlived their usefulness—that aspects of reality denied or ignored by these ideas have emerged to challenge the established order and the reigning world view. Of the fundamental assumptions of modernity, the one Spretnak scrutinizes most thoroughly is the mechanistic model of the cosmos first described by Isaac Newton. According to Spretnak, this view not only reduced the universe to dead matter, mathematically measurable, but also resulted in the notion that humans are no more than biological machines, to be repaired or technologically enhanced at will so long as the means are available. As dead matter, nature can be freely exploited, polluted, even destroyed; similarly, without a spiritual dimension, humankind can be viewed simply as homo economicus, with the expectation that nothing more than the proper arrangement of economic endeavors is required to bring universal contentment. Thus, the scientific theory of economics assumes that the impersonal forces of the market will inevitably work to the advantage of society—and is unable to account for such realities as excessive, unnecessary consumption, the dislocation of workers, and the loss of local control over production, which have resulted in the material impoverishment of many communities.

Another essential ideological element of the modern world is the conception of the nation-state as the most rational, the most efficient and, therefore, the most legitimate unit of power. As a consequence of this idea, "national" borders established by the victors of the world wars and by the colonial powers have been respected; within these borders, violence is condoned or tolerated, while ancient nations and ethnic groups are divided and disenfranchised. No wonder that traditions, a sense of belonging to a place, and the desire to be left alone have played such an important role in the overwhelming majority of the regional wars and local armed conflicts that have broken out since the end of the second world war.

Of the many examples the author cites to demonstrate the inadequacy of the scientific and technical assumptions of modernity, none is more eloquent than this quotation from a speech given in 1994 in Philadelphia by the once-dissident playwright and post-communist president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel: "We may know measurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet it increasingly seems that they knew something more essential about it than we do, something that escapes us. The same thing is true about the nature of ourselves. The more thoroughly all our organs and their functions, their internal structure and the biochemical reactions that take place within them, are described, the more we seem to fail to grasp the spirit, purpose and meaning of the system that they create together and that we experience as our unique self."

In providing a framework for understanding what ails modern society—where the undeniable benefits of science and technology have left off and their destructive consequences have begun to dominate—Spretnak cautions against uncritical acceptance of claims of "national sovereignty" and the proclamations concerning the "sanctity" of borders that are frequently issued by central governments busy destroying some ethnic group within them. Likewise, she urges profound skepticism in the face of the repeated assurances on the part of the powers that be that globalization of trade will, in the long run, enrich individuals and enterprises other than large corporations and the men who control them.

It is of special interest that the book ends on a positive note. Spretnak reports enthusiastically on the expanding awareness of the interdependence of human beings, nature, and culture as reflected in holistic beliefs and practices, which stress the necessity of integrating intellect, spirit, and wisdom in the service of the individual. She chronicles the constructive efforts of diverse groups to counteract the effects of the denial of modern reality, be it as "green" activists protecting the earth's ecology, or as women in villages in Africa and India who are setting up cooperatives to improve their economic condition. With its comprehensive bibliography and informative index, The Resurgence of the Real is a fine, readable source for understanding many of the themes of contemporary social analysis.

Reviewed by Mahin Hassibi, M.D., professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College in Valhalla, New York, and medical director of Choices Mental Health Center in New York City.
The book begins in 2048, the 200th anniversary of the first Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls. A young philosopher named Annie has invoked the spirit of Mary Daly in order to learn about the horrors of the now extinct patriarchy, in anticipation of the 50th-anniversary edition of Quintessence. In Annie's world, women are living together on a rediscovered continent (which may be Atlantis), after having magnetized their collective psychic powers and thereby saved the planet from destruction in the early 21st century. Daly encourages Annie to add a "modern" commentary after each essay, but what is planned as critical notes turns instead into long, involved conversations, which take place mainly in an organic garden where the author discovers she can (gasp) drink the river water.

Isolated from the examinations of patriarchy that have preceded them, these forays into the effulgent future can sometimes be irritatingly pollyanna-ish, rife with passages describing Daly dancing with animals or grinning slyly as her naive host exclaims desperately, "But why didn't women fight back?" However, combined with the insightful stretches of philosophy at the beginning of each chapter, these narrative passages make Daly's occasionally labyrinthine arguments accessible and even amusing.

Defending her fictional device, Daly writes, "It may seem that my Act of claiming to have such Foreknowledge of Future acceptance is rash. Why not simply say that I have hope that there will be such enlightened Future Foesisters? The point is well taken that such knowledge is also hope. It is, in fact, Desperately Hopeful knowledge, and it is rooted in an understanding of our history, our Past."

More than a utopian fantasy or vision, Annie's nouveau-Lesbos continent represents a defense plan for the future of women. According to Daly, the Annies of the future will be influenced by their fore-sisters not just through writing and art, but through the literally magnetic power that comes with psychic and creative energy. Time itself, as defined by clocks and calendars, is irrelevant in the face of this collective dynamism. To Daly, where we have come from is represented by the Sphinx, and by the tales of goddesses rewritten by men. Where we are is in a constant state of siege, struggling against the encroaching enemy for our political rights, and for biological control. There are numerous battlefronts, which she relates to one another. For example, she intertwines a discussion of genome research and rape as a military act, and adds in rising religious fundamentalism, including the misogynistic rhetoric of the Promise Keepers, and the intellectual oppression found in "academentia."

Into this amalgam of issues, past and present, she also stirs her precepts about the natural world, and the predominance of "5" as a mystical signifier of change. As well as the fifth element, she cites the fifth dimension, the fifth cause in classic philosophy, the fifth province of Ireland (the territorially elusive Mide), and the fifth spiral galaxy, into which she wants us all to careen with Unconquerable Courage. This repetition of 5s is interconnected and consistent, with each example supporting the last and setting up the next. In a way, this is analogous to Daly’s vision of what women could do for one another to transcend patriarchal programming and tap into ancient intuition by loosening concepts of time and place.

Suffused by her inimitable word play and stunning intelligence, and embodying a balance of mysticism and critical theory, Daly's clarion call to uncover the quintessence of the universe is quite an intriguing tune. ■

Reviewer Elizabeth Millard is a freelance writer in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in Ms, Publishers Weekly, and the Boston Phoenix.
A New Kind of Party Animal: How the Young Are Tearing Up the American Political Landscape

by Michele Mitchell
Simon & Schuster, 224 pages, $23

In the early 1990s, fresh from a stint working at a political research institute in Jerusalem, and in the throes of founding a nonprofit organization for inner-city kids back in the U.S., I was regularly pummeled by media accounts of how lazy, apathetic, and cynical I was.

I often wondered how the generations preceding mine expected those of us just coming of age to gain confidence and "amount to something" when we lived under a nearly constant media assault. According to the headlines and talking heads, those of us born between 1961 and 1981 didn’t vote, didn’t read, didn’t even know how to dress.

In her unfortunately titled book, A New Kind of Party Animal, 28-year-old Michele Mitchell chronicles well the media’s "unrelenting rush" of articles full of ill-conceived, stereotypical notions: little good, most bad, about my generation. The book also provides insight into the political "gulfs" between "18-35s" and "boomers" and seniors, by telling her own Capitol Hill tale (she landed her first job at 22 as communications director for Congressman Pete Geren) and the stories of seven other young, up-and-coming activists around the country.

At its worst, Mitchell’s book is a superficial, too-broad account that continues to simplify, or gloss over, some of the more subterranean and vastly various economic and social issues affecting the 70 million young adults best known as Generation X. Mitchell herself relies too heavily on stereotypes of both 18-35s and boomers, giving readers one-dimensional views of bright-eyed, bushy-tailed young can-do-ers like Chicagoan Jerry Morrison, who takes on the legendary Democratic “machine” in a local political race. Having done time on the Hill herself, Mitchell also includes three young congressional aides who begin as either Democrats or Republicans, but evolve to see the light in Political Independence.

To represent boomers in Washington, Mitchell includes “old-school” staffer Joe Morgan (a pseudonym), who has not one redeeming quality, keeps booze in his bottom drawer, and “divided women staffers into two categories: those he wanted in his bed, and those who had turned him down, also known as ‘bitches.’ This kind of black-and-white caricature lends a canned feeling to the book, especially when combined with doses of cliché-ridden dialogue such as, "If we don’t do something, who will? The clock is ticking," from one source.

However, at its best, A New Kind of Party Animal is an intelligent, even inspirational, opening salvo in what could result in further discussions of the many true and diverse states of young political minds, and where they will lead us in the next century.

Mitchell is particularly on-target when discussing two of the early national-level attempts made by Gen-Xers to combat the negative hype with, well, hype. One of the two groups Mitchell cites as examples is Lead or Leave, a half-baked idea for a membership organization built around the issue of budget deficit reduction. Originally declared by the media to be the Next Great Youth Movement in politics, Lead or Leave fell into oblivion three years after its birth when co-founders Rob Nelson and Jon Cowan quit.

The second political advocacy group was Third Millennium, which Mitchell and I both played a role in founding. Mitchell relays how (particularly in the beginning) the group’s New York-based chiefs were far more interested in the media coverage, as opposed to the actual carrying out of their agenda, which primarily centered around reducing the deficit and ending Social Security as we know it. As Mitchell writes, “Instead of cultivating membership, [Third Millennium] poured its limited resources into polls. ‘If we release the polls, we get press, and that leads to more money,’ the 29-year-old executive director said.”

Mitchell also cites the group’s “carefully declared” nonpartisan status as the reason she “wandered” in.

The problem here is that Mitchell’s account skips over messy details, such as the fact that despite the group’s claiming to be non-partisan or “post-partisan,” nearly all the money in the coffers the first few years was funneled in (sometimes anonymously) by conservative foundations, which resulted in a heavily Republican-style agenda. Consequently, liberal members dropped out in droves.

Mitchell’s comments on the relationship between 18-35 feminists and their older, boomer sisters should raise some eyebrows. Describing the choice that young, politically-minded women have
when it comes to joining up with older feminists, Mitchell writes, "Depending on which theory [at either the liberal or conservative end of the spectrum] 18-35s bought into, young women...are either shortchanged or face lives of wantonness.

It is a bewildering choice presented by the women who went first—and who don't want anyone to forget that." Later comes, "When [the young] founder of the community action group Public Allies asked at a meeting of older feminists what wisdom they would like to pass on to younger activists, one replied, 'say thank you. The room burst into applause...18-35s are brush aside by veterans who say, 'I'm not dead yet' or, 'that's my issue; I've been working on it for twenty years.'

A New Kind of Party Animal goes to the heart of common misconceptions, proving that 18-35s do vote and do get involved. Gen-Xers may not buy into "placard-bearing protests," but we volunteer in higher numbers than any generation before us. As Mitchell writes, "When it came to politics, we said, 'show me' when offered a promise. We believed in only what we could see with our own eyes.... We did not unconditionally offer up our loyalty.'

At their best, Mitchell's words are a call to action, inviting 18-35s to continue evolving politically and to make their unique contributions. The book is a roadmap showing young people ways to enter politics by starting locally, either in community activism or running for office.

Quoting Charles McKinney, an activist working with kids, Mitchell reveals what must have been her reason for writing this book: "Just once I want to see someone stand up and say, 'this is what I believe in. You might not agree, and this might not be a popular thing to see someone stand up and say, 'this is what I believe in. You might not agree,'" Mitchell writes. "When it came to politics, we said, 'show me' when offered a promise. We believed in only what we could see with our own eyes.... We did not unconditionally offer up our loyalty.'

That may be reason enough to read A New Kind of Party Animal.”


continued from page 37—

A physician at the Olympic Sports Medicine Center in Barcelona, which found that among male and female Olympic marathon runners, only the women had no increases in free radicals—tissue-damaging compounds produced by oxygen metabolism—after completing a race,” Dr. Pujol also notes that the neurotransmitter serotonin increases with the presence of estrogen, and studies have indicated that serotonin delays fatigue among endurance athletes.

The significance of the confluence of these physiologic factors cannot be overestimated. Yet what truly makes the female endurance competitor distinctive among the athletically elite is the way she trains her mind to override the pain that is almost always an accessory to ultramarathoning. It's not just never matter, nor is it as simple as visualizing oneself crossing the finish line. Rather, the ability to vanquish physical distress—in other words, to simply get over it—seems to be a particularly female quality, whether innate or a psychosocial construct. While anecdotal evidence suggests that women naturally have a higher tolerance for pain than men (attributed to their being physiologically equipped to withstand the demands of childbirth), a recent study undertaken by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) seems to contradict that idea. In the NIH findings, women reported 40 percent more pain than men. However, the women studied coped better with their pain, and they did so by distracting themselves, venting their emotions, or seeking support. Men used fewer such coping skills; they were also found to suffer greater ill effects from a negative mood.

Still, while many see women as front-runners, not everyone thinks they are doing as well as the data indicate they should be doing. As Dr. Barbara Drinkwater, research physiologist at Pacific Medical Center and an authority on women's sports, says, "So far, predictions about women catching up with men have been off. Those predictions were made when women were just getting involved in sports, and the learning curve for them was much higher than for men who have been involved in sports all along."

Some insist that comparing men and women at all is problematic. Dr. Lich Cadwell, sports medicine physician for the U.S. National Ultradistance Team, based in Indianapolis, points out that comparing men and women as distinct categories can be misleading. As he says, "There are more similarities among elite athletes regardless of gender than there are similarities among all men or among all women."

While it is essential that women be able to construct their own ideas of success and celebrate their achievements apart from men's performances, it may actually be men who are being protected, by an unwillingness to make comparisons. Dr. Kane notes, "There is too much at stake to not think that men are superior athletes. Seeing women compete and sometimes beat men is too threatening to a patriarchal view of the world." Dr. Kane also points out that, while women are in the top one percent of finishers at nearly every marathon, this fact is rarely, if ever, highlighted. Instead, the marathon is portrayed by the media as an event separate from a men's event—and the idea of male athletic dominance is left unchallenged. She adds: "If performance were simply, or even primarily, about physical difference, the contrasts between men and women would be unneeded and unfair," says Dr. Drinkwater. "Women and men are simply different. Whether or not women beat men is unimportant. What is important is that women are doing things that were thought impossible."

Many who have studied women endurance athletes for years look beyond the contrasts between men and women. "It is foolish to make these comparisons because they set up women in ways that are unnecessary and unfair," says Dr. Drinkwater. "Women and men are simply different. Whether or not women beat men is unimportant. What is important is that women are doing things that were thought impossible."

At the 24-hour mark, Lin has run 105.6 miles. The top finisher clocked in at 112 miles. That competitor is, you guessed it, a woman.

Anneg+ Delaney makes her home in New York City and writes about sports when not participating in them. She is a recreational long-distance runner and cyclist.
Fountain of Youth

for Men Only

by Molly Haskell

Every once in a while women flock to a movie, and Hollywood, "shocked" to discover there's a female audience out there, resolves to make more movies for this potentially profitable market. The latest eye-opener in this regard was Titanic, whose huge popularity with panting girls—tied to the matinee idol status of star Leonardo DiCaprio—has supposedly inspired Hollywood execs to ratchet up production of movies with "chick" appeal. According to one report, Fox greenlighted a number of women's projects because Titanic's numbers raised the studio's confidence in the vastness of the women's market.

What this usually means is that one or two "women's" films dribble out, and that's the last we hear about it. I've been around long enough to watch this little ritual occur with cyclical regularity—say, about every seven years. A few years ago, it was Little Women. Then Waiting to Exhale. Before that, Thelma & Louise. In the 70s, it was Julia and The Turning Point, and Private Benjamin in 1980. These films all disproved the axiom that only a big-star male on the marquee could guarantee a film's commercial success, but did that really change anything? Hardly. Apparently it takes more than irrefutable evidence to penetrate the bottom-line thinking hooked to a reliable roster of bankable male stars. Now the women in those 70s pictures—Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave, Shirley MacLaine and Ann Bancroft, Goldie Hawn—are either past 60, still have the clout—or long gone from the screen or lucky to get exposure to the Western sun, gives himself the outsider role, losing "the girl" (38) to her husband, Sam Neill. In other words, the two men slyly play a double game, deprecating their star appeal while exploiting it for all it's worth. After all, despite his rueful age-awareness, Beatty does get the beauty almost young enough to be his granddaughter. And Sam Neill, who was every thinking woman's pin-up as the squire to Judy Davis's writer in My Brilliant Career, is a steadfast wimp here, the man to whom Thomas must return, in her daughter's interest, though she leaves her heart on the Montana range.

Okay, so Beatty and Redford are world-class seducers and, whatever their defects, still easy on the eyes. Film is a visual medium, and, for all the advances of feminism, men are still perceived as acquiring allure with age, while women, judged more on appearance than experience, lose the advantage of sheer radiant youth. But this is getting ridiculous!

Stars in their fifties like Harrison Ford, Nick Nolte, and Michael Douglas are paired with increasingly younger women, in their thirties or even their twenties. Though fairly common in "real" life, the older woman-younger man relationship rarely appears on screen. Remember The Graduate's horrified attitude when "older woman" Anne Bancroft (she was 36 in real life) had a flirt for young Dustin Hoffman (who was actually 30). The reverse is now routine: Michael Douglas, the Gordon Gekko-like bond salesman and would-be wife-slayer of A Perfect Murder is 53; Gwyneth Paltrow, his heiress wife, 25. Stranded in the desert together in 6 Days 7 Nights, Harrison Ford is 56, Anne Heche, 29.

Of course, exceptionally good-looking and/or successful men, the Alpha males of the tribe, have always enjoyed a wide latitude in mating privileges and trophy wives.

These May-December pairings might have to do with straight commercial calculation, i.e. casting the widest generational net for audience appeal. But it seems more likely a reflection of the age anxiety and collective narcissism of the male power structure. As baby-boomer movie executives advance into middle age and beyond, reaching for the Rogaine and Viagra, they need to buttress their fantasies of staying young forever with the stars who've aged with them, contemporaries whose allure, and potency at the box office, is proof of
their own. This is further certified by pairing them not with women of their own age and luster, but with a kind of James Bond harem of interchangeable starlet types who haven’t yet developed personalities of their own.

Of course, exceptionally good-looking and/or successful men, the Alpha males of the tribe, have always enjoyed a wide latitude in mating privileges and trophy wives. Hollywood is no stranger to the spectacle of men remaining magically ageless as the women they started out with fall by the wayside, having lost that dewy desirability deemed essential to female sex appeal. Cary Grant and Fred Astaire are prime examples of male stars so charismatic and irreplaceable that they could play leading men well into their fifties and sixties, while partnering successive generations of women: in the ’30s, Ginger Rogers and Katharine Hepburn; Rita Hayworth and Ingrid Bergman in the ’40s; Audrey Hepburn in the ’50s, and so on. But generally youth went with youth, age with age. An endless supply of fresh faces waited in the wings, under studio contract, to replace the reigning stars, male and female, who were forced to convert to character parts or retool their images. (Bette Davis and Joan Crawford stand out as women who survived in the ruthlessly competitive studio system by sheer determination and by virtually inventing a sub-genre of mature women’s films.)

Now, with most movies being made for kids, and with Hollywood happiest when addressing expensive brainless movies to the adolescent audience around the world, a strange kind of calcification has taken place. Where once there were actors and actresses under contract and screenwriters penning witty dialogue for an endlessly changing variety of types, now the same stars appear in film after film, their presence a presumed guarantee of box office returns in movies whose only innovation is increasing the decibel level or upping the ante on electronic gimmickry and mayhem. —continued on page 58
Actually, one of the reasons for the staying power of Beatty and Redford is their appeal to those of us “of a certain age”—i.e. not bowled over by Leonardo DiCaprio—who can insert ourselves into the fantasy world they represent. Young women, at least the ones I’ve talked to, wonder what on earth we see in these old guys, while those of us who vividly remember Shampoo and The Way We Were, Bonnie and Clyde and The Candidate, Splendor in the Grass and Downhill Racer, know what their appeal is all about, bring fond memories to bear on their present roles, and see in their resiliency the justification of our own sense of continued vitality.

Definitions and expectations of age-appropriate behavior have changed radically for both sexes. Like men, women are younger longer, and what used to be the twilight years for both sexes are now a time for working on groundstrokes, rethinking one’s life, starting a new career, taking on a lover or changing sexual orientation. But this sense of expanded female vitality, of our enjoying sensual and intellectual life every bit as much as men, is one that movies do little to reinforce. Not only that: the irony is that the double standard of aging seems far more cruel today than in that “benighted” pre-feminist era when male studio moguls ruled the roost. Now, women executives—producers, writers, directors—are a robust presence in Hollywood, yet movies don’t reflect a feminist era when male studio moguls ruled.

For an idea of just how preposterously the numbers, rather than sustained or nuanced dramas of character. Hope Floats, a Fox movie made before Titanic, was produced by Lynda Obst (and three female producers) and stars Sandra Bullock as an ex-prom queen from Texas who returns home to Mom (Gena Rowlands) to regroup after being shattered by her husband’s adultery. In one of those anomalies of the film industry, the director of Hope Floats is none other than Forest Whitaker, the beefy and talented black actor (The Crying Game) who, having directed Waiting to Exhale, the rousing black women’s revenge melodrama, seems to be making a career of women’s films.

The first scene has a kind of crude, if funny, savagery that doesn’t really fit with the rest of the picture: Bullock’s Birdee Pruitt arrives blindfolded on the set of a nationally televised daytime talk show supposedly to get a makeover, and finds herself seated beside her best friend (Rosanna Arquette) and her husband (Michael Pare), who reveal they’ve been having a year-long affair and are in love. It’s hard to imagine the brassy Arquette as Bullock’s best friend, much less a rival; nor do we believe Bullock as a bimbo type, snubbed by the women of Chicago for being an ex-beauty queen. There’s a good idea here: a woman who has been rewarded throughout life for her beauty, whose ego has been the reflected admiration (and envy) in other peoples’ eyes, suddenly bereft of that approval. Who is she if she’s not the town beauty? But Bullock is too solid and likeable a performer; she radiates an inner confidence that’s at war with her supposed vacuousness. In the film’s best scene she goes to an employment agency now run by a sleek woman who was once the class joke, made to feel especially snubbed by the once-dazzling Birdee. “Polka Dot” gets her revenge by keeping Birdee waiting 40 minutes, but when she realizes how unfit she keeps stuffed animals in the front yard) she radiates an inner confidence that’s at war with her supposed vacuousness. In the film’s best scene she goes to an employment agency now run by a sleek woman who was once the class joke, made to feel especially snubbed by the once-dazzling Birdee. “Polka Dot” gets her revenge by keeping Birdee waiting 40 minutes, but when she realizes how unfit she is right out of Southern-eccentric central casting. Rowlands is one of those high-octane ’70s stars who has survived, by playing character parts that spin off the exuberantly neurotic dame she played for her late husband, John Cassavetes, in the series of edgily improvisational films they made together. (Side note: Sharon Stone is playing the Gena Rowlands part in a remake of Gloria. But the character here feels ersatz—a prop, like the two male
continued from page 50—
general public has not responded.
In shaping their strategy, Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott have to deal with how that agenda plays in the national arena. The GOP's national delegate and presidential convention machinery is indeed solidly in the hands of the religious right, who are loudly declaring that their political time has come.

Christian right leaders Gary Bauer and James Dobson have put the squeeze on the Republican congressional leadership. In mid-June, they heated up a national Republican meeting in Iowa by decrying, as reported in USA Today, "a godless America 'in moral free-fall,' where kids kill their newborns and each other." They attacked tolerance of homosexuals, violence and sex in the media, abortion, and premarital sex.

Calls for men to dominate
The same week, Trent Lott said he believes homosexuality is a sin and that gay people should be helped to deal with it "just like alcohol... or sex addiction... or kleptomaniacs." Some potential presidential candidates, such as Bauer and Alan Keyes, are using Promise Keeper and Black Muslim rhetoric, calling on men to take their rightful place at the head of the family.

The nation's electoral politics are too diverse and regional for results to be determined by any single issue. Many elections will turn on the personality and record of individual candidates, and incumbency tends to be an advantage. But, as the "Ten Races to Watch" Box (see page 51) shows, key elections in a number of states will be decided, often with razor-thin margins, by who goes to the polls and who stays home.

The outcome of campaigns around the country will be determined by the number of women who care enough about their rights to get out and vote. If they don't, the religious right will be in a position to seriously bully the majority of Americans who don't hold to their views. As the millennium dawns, the nation could find itself debating yet again whether women should return to their traditional role as housewives subservient to, and dependent on, their husbands. With all the problems America and the world face, this is a fight we don't need to have.

Film critic Molly Haskell is author of Holding My Own in No Man's Land (Oxford University Press) and From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies (University of Chicago Press).

There may be hidden ingredients in the products you use... cruelty, pain, suffering.

Let us send you a free Cruelty-Free Shopping Guide so you can make compassionate choices on your next trip to the store. To receive a copy call us toll free at (800) SAY-AAVS or write to The American Anti-Vivisection Society, 801 Old York Rd. #204, Jenkintown, PA 19046.

The Elizabeth Stone House
A Feminist Health Alternative

The Elizabeth Stone House is known internationally for its innovative ability to empower women in emotional distress as well as their children.

Residential and Non-Residential Programs
Resources and Training Available.

Call for information
P.O. Box 59 Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(617) 522-3417
Memories of Seduction
When abuse seems like love

by Marilyn Stasio

I love good theater because it makes me want to fight, not so much about production values, like the quality of a performance or the validity of the director's concept, but about the meat—the ideas—of the piece. A good play with provocative ideas can always get me going.

Strangely though, I haven't been able to find anyone to fight with me over How I Learned to Drive, the winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize for drama. When you consider the controversial subject matter of Paula Vogel's play—it examines in probing detail the intimate relationship between a troubled woman and the uncle who seduced her when she was 11 years old—that's pretty amazing.

It's not that people didn't pay attention when the play was originally presented Off Broadway at the Vineyard Theater in 1997, in a production that starred Mary-Louise Parker and David Morse. The critics were unusually united in their praise (a "wonderful play," Ben Brantley called it in The New York Times, a "heartbreaking play of damaged lives") and the production won several major awards that season, including the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Obie for best play.

Nor was the attention confined to New York. How I Learned to Drive has been performed at the Berkeley Repertory in California, Trinity Rep in Providence, Baltimore's Center Stage, and the Intiman Playhouse theater in Seattle. This season, it will be performed domestically at the Madison Repertory Theater in Wisconsin (October), the Alley Theater in Houston (October), the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles (February 1999), the Denver Repertory (January 1999), and the Arena Stage in Washington (May-June 1999), as well as in Europe.

Everybody seems to like this remarkable play. They just don't seem to want to fight about it.

Why not? My own theory is that How I Learned to Drive received what I think of as "the Lolita kiss." By which I mean that people are so unsettled by how much they like the pedophile depicted in the play, so disconcerted by their sympathy for him, that they are avoiding a more unnerving issue: the child's understanding of, and or complicity in acts of bondage that are both sexual and emotional.

Through the flash-back memories of a 40-ish woman who is called Li'l Bit, How I Learned to Drive tells the story of Li'l Bit's seduction by her Uncle Peck and how this perverse relationship continued over the years because of mutual needs that, in some important respects, were not the least bit perverse. Li'l Bit longs for the affection and support that her vulgar family of southern crackers is unable to give her, while Uncle Peck, who is far too sensitive for this rough crowd, is starved for a gentle companion.

"Uncle Peck [is] surely the most engaging pedophile to walk across an American stage," Brantley said in his Times review, reflecting the primary response of the critics and, from what I can see, of audiences as well.

But How I Learned to Drive is not Uncle Peck's story. It is not told in his words, or by some objective narrator. It is related in the voice of a grown woman who never relinquishes her control of the narrative. Clearly, Paula Vogel wanted audiences to share Li'l Bit's ambivalent feelings toward her seducer, to experience not only her revulsion for this man, but also her affection for his tender manner and understanding ways. It was always her intention, the playwright said, "to get the audience to go along for the ride they wouldn't ordinarily take, or don't even know they're taking." She succeeded so well that we, like Li'l Bit, are seduced into identifying with the seducer—but, curiously, not with the child.

Something similar happened in 1955 with the publication of Nabokov's novel Lolita, that confessional memoir of a middle-aged pedophile who kidnaps a 12-year-old girl and winds up becoming her love slave. Although the controversy over that seminal work (and Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film) swirled mainly around its depiction of a sexually precocious, overtly seductive child, there was also considerable discomfort with the almost endearing nature of the pedophile, Humbert Humbert. That controversy has been revisited by the new film version of the novel, directed by Adrian Lyne and starring Jeremy Irons, which has yet to be released outside Europe. (Showtime has bought U.S. rights and plans to show it on cable television, with possible later release to movie theaters.) "What people find troubling in America," Lyne has said, "is that they like Humbert Humbert and they don't want to."

To a large degree, this queasiness was forced upon readers (and viewers) by Nabokov, who tells the story from
Humbert Humbert's perspective. Because Humbert is the narrator, his voice and view inevitably become the reader's own. With the pedophile in control of the narrative, no wonder we come to empathize with him (however uncomfortable that makes us) and to accept his view of Lolita as the "precociously seductive girl" that has become the dictionary definition of her name. In point of fact, however, we don't really know that Lolita is a little sexpot—any more than we can say with certainty that Uncle Peck is the sweet, sad creep he appears to be in *How I Learned to Drive*, in which the events and revelations of character are filtered through the memories of a narrator who is still emotionally attached to her seducer.

I find it strange that, in the heated discussions of Paula Vogel's play which I have heard or read, there is such an easy acceptance of the adult Li'l Bit's perceptions of her uncle—and so little inclination to consider his character from the perspective of his victim, not as a grown woman, but as an 11-year-old child. Certainly the relationship looks different when we view it from a child's perspective. Although the out-of-synch chronology of Li'l Bit's memories softens the nature of the events and obscures the time frame in which they take place, there is a definitive scene at the end of the play when Vogel finally lets us see the moment when the grown man overcomes the resistant child. It is not a pretty scene. ("That day was the last day I lived in my body," Li'l Bit says, in the most revealing and chilling line in the play.) But because the scene shows the pedophile for what he is—and acknowledges the child's acceptance of the pact he is offering—it is stunning theater.

In the end, Paula Vogel's haunting play is not groundbreaking for its compassionate portrayal of a dirty old man, but for its unflinching look at a woman who has been damaged by an emotional pact she made as a child. What is really harrowing about the story of Li'l Bit and Uncle Peck is not the persistence of Li'l Bit's memories of her seduction, but the persistence of her love for her seducer.
It all began when I, Kattus Philosopher, was perusing the public record... She was sleeping on the Sunday paper while I was trying to read it.

My philosopher's heart was stirred by the ridiculousness of the thing known as Viagra.

Actually, she ran and hid under the bed when I screamed, but I had my reasons...

Actually, she ran and hid under the bed when I screamed, but I had my reasons...

So they've got their pill with the maco name: Vigor Plus Niagara.

How 'bout a pill that's totally ours? With a name combining power and... grace.

We could call it Prograce.

Just one a day gives ya job equality... subsidized daycare...

...immunity to breast cancer... a black belt...

Plus the ability to never again end a sentence with "but I'm probably wrong."

No side effects... pleasant-tasting... there's just one difference.

We ain't dumb enough to think we can get all that power from a pill.

Which is?

Amen to that, Kattus baby.
Subscribe to HERIZONS and:

› Find out how feminists in Canada are making the world a better place for women.
› Read about the new debates on issues facing Canadian women.
› Get the latest on important legal cases affecting women.
› Explore the changes going on in the women's movement.
› Receive absolutely no beauty tips.

Sounds Great. Now What?

Order your subscription today. Send your cheque to:

HERIZONS
PO Box 128
Winnipeg
MB CANADA R3C 2G1

Then sit back and relax.

We’ll Deliver.

Right to Your Door.

As a subscriber, you’ll read loads of feminist articles that you won’t find anywhere else. And you can save $8 by ordering a 2 year subscription. (8 issues)

HERIZONS brings you:

› Great interviews
› Tons of book reviews
› Feminist satire
› News from around the country

Send in Your Subscription Order Today!
Words Worth Reading

Lizard Light: Poems from the Earth
by Penny Harter
1-890932-02-7
Tradepaper $14.00

Nature
Celebrates our sacred physical connection to the planet.
"There is something to love or tremble for in every line that I read."
—NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

Family
"Rings with honesty."
—SANDY BOUCHER
Explores childhood, sisterhood, and the legacy of grief.
A memoir that persists in turning to face what we cannot bear with a great slow courage.

Small Mercies
A memoir by Barbara McCauley
1-890932-04-3 Harback $20.00
1-890932-05-1 Tradepaper $13.50

Peace
How do we create peace in our lives, in our relationships, and on our planet? Poetry to teach, inspire and awaken us.
"This extraordinary collection is a voice of peace."
—JOAN HALIFAX, PHD

The Practice of Peace
edited by Judith Rafaela & Nancy Fay
0-9644196-7-X Tradepaper $15.00

Sherman Asher Publishing
Change the World One Book at a Time