

FOCUS

a journal
for gay women



April '74

BOSTON DAUGHTERS of BILITIS

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FOCUS: A JOURNAL FOR GAY WOMEN

April 1974

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FOCUS STAFF:
reviews: Judy S.
feature: Cathy Baker
cover: Geri Bidwell
editing: Wendy Bauman,
Janine Bernier
advertising: Cathy Baker
typesetting: Lois Hurst
layout: Laura Robin

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FOCUS welcomes contributions from everyone, including drawings. Include SASE for return. All letters must be signed, but names can be withheld for publication.

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SPRING PROSE AND POETRY
FROM EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

by Cathy Baker

Spring

*"To what purpose, April, do you return again?
Beauty is not enough.
You can no longer quiet me with the redness
Of little leaves opening stickily.
I know what I know.
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
The spikes of the crocus.
The smell of the earth is good.
It is apparent that there is no death.
But what does that signify?
Not only under ground are the brains of men
Eaten by maggots.
Life in itself
Is nothing,
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers."*

Spring of this year was to be the only spring of our lives together. I knew when you came to me that there never was nor would be another like you.

Our love was like a beautiful flower which grew in such a short time but like all flowers begins to die as soon as it is picked. Our love was picked when we found each other.

You were so beautiful that I was afraid to touch you. I thought you'd break or perhaps disappear with my touch.

*"She is neither pink nor pale,
And she will never be all mine;
She learned her hands in a fairy-tale,
And her mouth on a valentine."*

Our nights by the fire, our days in the sand, often made me wonder if this could possibly be real. I would pray for it to be real.

*"Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year..."
I know not how such things can be.."*

Your pastime was your garden and I would watch you there. Hour upon hour I saw the way you lovingly drew the beauty from the earth.

*"That day-that day you picked the first sweet-pea,-
 And brought it in to show me! I recall
 With terrible distinctness how the smell
 Of your cool gardens drifted in with you.
 I know, you held it up for me to see
 And flushed because I looked not at the flower,
 But at your face; and when behind my look
 You saw such unmistakable intent
 You laughed and brushed the flower against my lips."*

Once I dreamed with you beside me, that you were no longer there.
 When I awoke I found you near me, it was the first time I had truly
 felt the fear of losing you.

*"Love, if I weep it will not matter,
 And if you laugh I shall not care;
 Foolish am I to think about it,
 But it is good to feel you there.*

*Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking,-
 White and awful the moonlight reached
 Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere
 There was a shutter loose,-it schreeched!-*

*Swing in the wind!- and no wind blowing!-
 I was afraid; and turned to you,
 Put out my hand to you for comfort,-
 And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,*

*Under my hand the moonlight lay!
 Love, if you laugh I shall not care,
 But if I weep it will not matter,-
 Ah, it is good to feel you there!"*

Spring turned into summer and the early flowers were gone. And
 as spring turns into summer, one day I woke and you were gone,
 Gone to wherever but leaving me alone, I would wake each night and
 hope and reach to feel only the emptiness beside me.

*"You are not here. I know that you are gone,
 And will not ever enter here again.
 And yet it seems to me, if I should speak,
 Your silent step must wake across the hall;
 If I should turn my head, that your sweet eyes
 Would kiss me from the door.- So short a time
 To teach my life its transposition to
 This difficult and unaccustomed key!-
 The room is as you left it; your last touch-
 A thoughtless pressure, knowing not itself
 As saintly- hallows now each simple thing;
 Hallows and glorifies, and glows between
 The dust's grey fingers like a shielded light."*

Memories of you flashed through my mind. Questions never answered came to me. I thought of that first sweet-pea and wished that I had kept it.

*"That first sweet-pea! I wonder where it is.
It seems to me I laid it down somewhere,
And yet,- I am not sure. I am not sure,
Even, if it was white or pink; for then
'Twas much like any other flower to me,
Save that it was the first. I did not know,
Then that it was the last. If I had known-
But then, it does not matter. Strange how few,
After all's said and done, the things that are
Of moment."*

I sometimes wonder if it really happened, or if it was a dream. I question if I really loved you or perhaps it was too short to really feel love and caring as we felt it. But in my heart I know it was real because we couldn't have dreamed something as beautiful as our love. Living this love was beauty.

*"After all, my erstwhile dear,
My no longer cherished,
Need we say it was not love,
Just because it perished?"*

It has been a year now that you have been gone. My memories of you are as clear as when we were together. There are no sweet-peas this year although I picture you in your flower garden.

"And while your head was bent I kissed your hair,"

Only now I am dreaming; reliving my past with you, but April will never be the same.

Song of Second April

*"April this year, not otherwise
Than April of a year ago,
Is full of wispers, full of sighs,
Of dazzling mud and dingy snow;
Hepaticas that pleased you so
Are here again, and butterflies.

There rings a hammering all day,
And shingles lie about the doors;
In orchards near and far away
The grey wood-pecker taps and bores;
And men are merry at their chores,
And children earnest at their play.

The larger streams run still and deep,
Noisy and swift the small brooks run;
Among the mullein stalks the sheep
Go up the hillside in the sun,
Pensively, - only you are gone,
You that alone I cared to keep."*

"I had you and I have you now no more."

BEYOND SISTERHOOD:**"Gayer Than Thou" at the New England Conference****by Judi Stein**

The Lesbian rap at the New England Gay conference had a significance and a lesson far different than its anticipated results. As a feminist and a Lesbian, I (like most women there) had expected the rap to be a place of loving and joyful sharing among women. I eagerly awaited that good-time high called sisterhood. What happened instead upset me into realizing that like any other ideology, in order to be politically viable, feminism must be open to growth and evaluation.

At the rap the women present broke down into small rap groups to discuss the topic 'If when and but I call myself a Lesbian, what do I mean?'. The rap group I was in moved far from the topic, and it was the process of our discussion that pushed me farther in my analysis of my feminism. While our conclusions were not new with us, they are critically important to the feminist movement. Hopefully, what I have to share now might aid in the feminist growth of other sisters.

My rap group talked about power, on all levels (political, social, personal etc.). The discussion was rapid-fire and heated, the disagreements very intense. Women were interrupting each other, being angry with each other, feeling dumped on by each other. One sister was so upset by the tone and heat of the rap, and the lack of sisterhood (more on that word later) that she left the room to go and cry. As the allotted time for the workshop ended, the other raps came back in. We listened to reports of their small raps, and some women left to go to the next event. Some of us stayed to talk some more, and to try and figure out why we were so upset and surprised by what had happened.

And I think it was from the examination of some of these expectations and our surprise that they were not met that I (and many others there) learned. Most of us went into that rap expecting a reiteration of our sisterly feelings. After all, not only were we all women, we were all Lesbians. And we all remembered with fondness the first time we were with a group of women and felt that rush that comes from recognizing our commonalities. Sisterhood to me (and I think I was not along) meant that smiling loving high of being with other women.

What we learned from each other at our post-mortem rap, was that sisterhood (that good-timey feeling) is not any kind of force for reform/revolution on any serious level. It is a (big) first step, but sisterhood itself is not any kind of end. Those of us who are committed to women (whether we are Lesbians or not) must move past good feelings for each other (especially the uncritical, indiscriminate feeling that all women are our sisters) if we are able to begin to formulate the plans for change. We have learned to be supportive and caring for each other, now we need to learn to argue, to be critical, to disagree and dislike each other when those things are necessary. We need to learn tactics and theory and how to get and use power on what ever level we choose to

work. We need to learn how to confront one another without trashing, and we need to argue and think ourselves a feminist theory that will carry us beyond the loosely based collectivity of sisterhood.

What I learned at that painful rap (and the joyous post-mortem) is that our growth as a movement is long overdue. We know many ways that we are alike, but we need to learn our differences (both political and personal) so that we may continue to move forward in a struggle that is based on knowledge and strength as well as love and joy. We need to rethink our positions and develop a theory about a feminist future so that we can move from vision to reality.

SODOMY REPEAL

The following testimony was presented on March 20, 1974 at the State House in Boston in support of H.2601, a bill to repeal our ancient sex laws.

Dear Senators and Representatives of the Judiciary Committee:

Speaking in support of H. 2601, it would appear that Massachusetts is behind its reputation. Chapter 272 is used against homosexuals, although these laws are not homosexual laws per se. It is an historical fact that American attitudes towards homosexuality are the exception, not the rule. With the possible exceptions of Hitlerian Germany and certain Communist nations, America's attitudes, and the laws that accompany such attitudes, are among the LEAST tolerant, more inhumane, and harsher than any in the world. Do you know that the penalty for sodomy is greater than the penalty for second degree murder in the state of Georgia?

On the other hand, Napoleon abolished the very laws that you are now considering 164 years ago in 1810. France has not fallen! Before the turn of the 20th century, the Napoleonic principle has been followed and adopted in such nations as Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, Greece, Mexico, Brazil, and even in the home of the Pope's, Italy. In non-Judaic-Christian nations that are free of Anglo-Saxon law, consensual homosexual acts are virtually never mentioned in the legal statutes, and never have been.

Even the other Anglo-Saxon nation, Great Britain, saw fit to abolish its similar laws in 1967 following the recommendations of the Wolfenden report. Will you continue to respond to fear, the fear within yourselves, of the fears of what your constituents may be thinking, or will you take a step for humanity that so many other legislatures have already taken. The United States and Germany are the only two single Western nations who continue to have the anti-sex laws on the books, and Germany's laws date only from Hitler after having been abolished for a period of time. It was American and British influence during occupation that prevented the Germans from reforming these laws in the 1950's.

In 1961 Illinois repealed similar laws, and for the past two years other states have been repealing their laws against acts between consenting adults. So called offenders are not subject to the value judgements and biases of various law enforcement offices, and various legislatures, and the lives of too many are broken and end in tragedy. I urge you to put an end to this fear for all citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Sincerely, John Lawrence

"The days of women asking politely for a crumb of human dignity are over."

—Robin Morgan

They have taught me to mutilate my body
to pull out hair that belongs
and push on powders and colors and cremes
that do not belong.

They have shown me how to make
a mockery
of my beautiful face
by covering it with a
plastic mask.

They have plucked me from my sisters
chanting, chanting,
she's black and you're white
she's old and you're young
she's gay and you're straight
she's feminine and you're feminist.

They have estranged me
from the sister I should be closest
to—my mother, who parrots their values
and hates me for not being a lady.

For how can I be a lady
when the hair under my arms
grows wild like a field of
marijuana weeds?

They have told me God is a Man.
I have become an atheist.

They have raped me and then forced
me to genuflect before phallus power.
My reaction now is amputation.

They have said the women's movement has
made me lose my sense of humor.
Dear Jesus, where can I find it?
In jokes about my big tits?
Or in jokes about my juicy cunt?
Decisions, decisions.
A woman's work is never done.

They have put me in jails where
the stench of sexism
made me retch till every
pore of my body breathed
kill, kill.

Slowly I have gone through the metamorphosis
of rejection of political oppression.
The caterpillar does not
change into the butterfly overnight.
It takes a
struggle
to break
out
of the cocoon.

—Mary Rita Woodward

Workshops

As part of D.O.B.'s feeling of wanting to share with our sisters, we are conducting four workshops in learning.

We are not trying to compete with adult education sessions, but are trying to share some information we have attained.

The sessions will be given by four D.O.B. members who have interests in these areas:

CARPENTRY/ELECTRICITY	HEALTH
HOUSE Plants and Gardening	PHOTOGRAPHY

Registration fee for these sessions is \$5 or \$1.50 per session. The classes will last about two hours each.

Carpentry/electricity – Fri. April 19, 7:30pm office

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Lamp re-wiring | 4. Overloading sockets |
| 2. Replacing fuses | 5. How much wood to buy for a project |
| 3. Fixing sockets | 6. What tools are necessary. |

Bring questions on problems you are having in your home or apartment in carpentry or electricity.

Health— Friday April 26, 7:30 at office

Discussion of health matters of concern to women:

1. How to know when you are getting a good physical examination.
2. How we as lesbians can transmit infections to one another.
3. When to douche and when not to douche.
4. Doing your own monthly breast examination.

Photography – Saturday, May 4th, 10:30 outside office.

The group will be spending a couple of hours in the Boston Common being instructed on how to take pictures in composition.

The following Wednesday (May 8, 7:30 at office) Terry will develop these pictures and will discuss them with the group.

Saturday May 11th, 10:30am – the group will go on another field trip applying what they have learned the previous time.

Wednesday May 15th, 7:30 office there will be a discussion again.

A small fee will be charged for the developing paper used.

Bring only plus X film. Although only black & white film can be used (because of processing costs) any theories learned can apply to either color or black and white film.

Plant care and Gardening, Fri. May 24th 7:30 office.

Discussion on:

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. propagating | 4. plant types |
| 2. germinating | 5. books to consult |
| 3. soil types | 6. plant feeding |

Bring ailing plants if temperature permits and any questions you may have on plant care.

C A L E N D A R
APRIL 1974**DAUGHTERS of BILITIS****—419 Boylston St., Rm. 323, Boston, Mass. 02116— 617 262-1592—**

All D.O.B. events are open to all women regardless of their membership in D.O.B.

TUESDAYS, 7:30 pm **Rap session on being gay.** Share feelings about being gay, everyone welcome. There are always many new people every week. At the D.O.B. office, near the Arlington MBTA stop, between Arlington & Berkeley sts.

WEDNESDAYS, 7:30 pm **Rap session for lesbian mothers,** and phone-in time for lesbian mothers. Mothers with grown children invited to share with other mothers. At office.

THURSDAYS, 8 pm **Rap session for older gay women.** No ages are defined. Come if it sounds right for you. At office.

THURSDAYS, 9-10 pm **GAY WAY Radio program** WBUR-FM, 90.9.

SUNDAYS, 10:30-11am **CLOSET SPACE radio program,** WCAS-AM 740.

WEDNESDAYS, 1st & 3rd, 8pm, **GAYBREAK radio program,** AMHERST, WMUA-FM 91.9.

SUNDAYS, 2-4pm **Women's Basketball and Swim,** Cambridge YWCA, 7 Temple St. (Central Sq.) Cambridge. 75¢ ball, 25¢ swim. Not a D.O.B. event.

STARTING APRIL 9 **RAPS WILL COST 50¢ non-members and 25¢ to members.**

MONDAY, April 15, 8pm MASS. REACTION Channel 7
"Sexual Equality"

MON., April 15 **Business Meeting** at D.O.B. office, 7:30pm.

TUES. April 16 — **POETRY RAP** in addition to regular rap. Come and share yours.

FRI., April 19 Instructions on Electricity & Carpentry at office 7:30 (*see article—this month*).

FRI-SAT. April 19 & 20: **Maine Gay Symposium** at the Univ. of Maine. Sponsored by the Wilde-Stein Club, Memorial Union, U of Maine, Orono, Me. \$5.00 registration fee. Registration is 6:30-8pm Friday at Memorial Union. See flyer at office.

- FRI-SAT. April 19-21 **RUTGERS Univ. Homophile League presents its 4TH Annual Conference on Gay Unity**. Speakers include Barbara Gittings, Del Martin, Elaine Noble. \$4.00 reg. fee with reg. Friday 9:00 am. Free housing—Bring sleeping bag. See flyer in office.
- MONDAY, April 22 **FOCUS Meeting** 7:30pm at D.O.B. office.
- THURSDAY, April 25 Homophile Community Health Service sponsors its **2ND ANNUAL CONF. ON HOMOSEXUALITY**. Among the speakers will be Dr. Howard J. Brown, M.D., Professor of Public Administration at New York Univ. He was also a member of Mayor John Lindsay's Administration, as Health Services Commissioner. He is the founder of the National Gay Task Force. Also, E. Carolyn Innes; founder of the Gay Nurse's Alliance. Fees for individuals is \$15.00; STUDENTS \$10.00 and groups (5 or more persons from same agency)—\$10.00. Old West Church, 131 Cambridge St., Boston. (Near Mass. General Hosp. and Gov't. Center) *Contact John Lawrence, R.N., Chairperson HCHS, 419 Boyls. St., Rm. 403.*
- FRIDAY, April 26 Lessons in Health at D.O.B. office 7:30pm.
- FRI.-SUN. April 26-28 **The Women's Weekend to Celebrate Spring**. Stahaey Camp in New York. \$9 for the weekend. Raps, workshops, exercise, instruction. Contact Women's weekend, c/o Willa Bickham, 26 S. Mount St., Baltimore, Md. See flyer in office.
- SAT. MAY 4 Photography Field Trip, Boston Common. Meet at office 10:30 am.
- WED. May 8 Photography discussion 7:30pm at office.
- THURSDAY;-SUN. May 9-12 Ann Arbor Gay Community will sponsor a **Spring Conf.** in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Forum for Gays to react to the Am. Psychiatric Assoc. position. Housing provided, bring sleeping bag. Reg 8am Thurs. Thurs. May 9 in Michigan Union, see flyer in office.
- SAT.,-May 11 **FIELD TRIP** — PLACE to be determined by group. Meet at 419 Boylston 10:30pm
- WED., May 15 **Photo discussion** on processed film, 7:30pm office.
- SUN. May 12 **By-Law Meeting** to vote on proposed By-Laws. Also starting at **5:30 POTLUCK DINNER & BUSINESS MEETING** All at St. John's Church, 33 Bowdoin St., Boston
- MAY 15 **BANNER CONTEST ENDS** (over)

FRI., May 24

House Plants & Gardening 7:30 pm at office.

End of May or
Bg. of June

**1st NAT'L WOMEN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL IN
URBANA:** Champaign, Illinois. Examine women
in music. See flyer in office.

PLANS FOR WOMEN'S CONFERENCE:

At the New England Gay Conference held on March 15-17, beginning plans were made for organizing a women's conference to occur later this year. Two planning meetings were held at the conference, and a group of about 30 women gave their names as contact persons.

Tentatively, the conference will be held October 11-14, at a place to be decided as soon as possible. Many of the women present (about 100 at the first meeting) were very enthusiastic about the idea of a conference which would involve lesbians from all over New England or (better still) from throughout the country. A number of exciting possibilities emerged: workshops ranging from the arts to relationships to political concerns; the use of talent from within the lesbian community to provide all services needed (such as food) and the idea of creating a lesbian resource booklet to be distributed after the conference. The event seems to be emerging as a celebration of lesbianism, rather than being limited to a series of workshops.

In order to begin involving as wide a spectrum of women as possible, we (a core group of several women from the Boston area) have sent fliers to women's groups throughout the country, asking for their suggestions and active participation. On the local level, about 80 invitations to the first official planning session have been limited to groups in New England, and to women who attended the New England Gay Conference and requested information.

This meeting will be held from 10:00 to 1:00, Saturday morning, April 6, at Old West Church, 131 Cambridge St., Boston. Any women who are interested in making a serious commitment to help plan the conference are invited.

If you can't attend, but are interested in planning or have any suggestions about workshops, speakers, etc., please let us know! The mailing address is:

Box 2000
c/o GCN
22 Bromfield St.
Boston, Ma. 02108

Additional planning meetings will be scheduled on a regular basis in months to come, at locations where other women's or gay groups already have scheduled conferences. Watch FOCUS for further news!!

REVIEW:

PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE – Nigel Nicolson

(Atheneum Press, NY, 1973 \$10.) review by Gerry Azzata

In Portrait of a Marriage, Nigel Nicolson writes about the 50-year-long marriage of his parents, Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson. At first glance, it seems to be the "model marriage" for the early 1900's – young, wealthy, aspiring diplomat Harold and young, wealthy, aspiring poet Vita. But then, complications arise: years after the death of his parents, Nigel Nicolson discovers his mother's journal, written during the eight year of the marriage. Through the journal and other sources, he finds that both of his parents had carried on a series of homosexual affairs throughout their marriage, and that their own relationship was punctuated by a series of separations, and an absence of sexual contact with each other after the first three years. And yet I came away from reading this excellent book with the feeling that Vita and Harold were basically happy together, and that their relationship was a loving one. It is the handling of the tension of their bisexuality, and their ability to maintain respect for each other's independence, that makes Vita and Harold's story so fascinating and so moving.

Nigel Nicolson has included Vita's entire journal of 1920, and this definitely is the high point of the book. Only once did Vita consider leaving Harold permanently – during her long affair with Violet Trefusis, which is described in this journal. Vita struggles with her lesbian feelings, which have been a part of her experience since childhood. She sees them as the darker side of herself.

"I see now that my whole curse has been a duality with which I was too weak and too self-indulgent to struggle.... I admit everything, to my shame, but I have never pretended to have anything other than a base and despicable character."

Vita and Violet briefly run away together, away from their quickly-pursuing husbands. When the four confront each other, Vita returns home with Harold, and Violet goes with her own husband. Af After this crisis, Vita had many affairs with other women, but her relationship with Harold remained a constant. Although she spent months at a time living with such lovers as Virginia Woolf, she inevitably would return to Harold.

The story raises many important questions. In a different society would Vita have felt less guilt about her lesbian feelings and leaving Harold? Was it just security that kept her with Harold? Eventually, Vita led a highly schizophrenic existence. All of her passionate feelings were reserved for her women lovers; but her commitments were reserved for Harold. Was Vita merely a confused product of post-Victorian times, or was there a solid basis, beyond security, for her relationship with Harold? Nigel Nicolson believes that Vita and Harold eventually achieved peace together. I can't help but wonder what happened to Vita's anger at her own feelings, and I would like to have read more about Harold's relationships with other men.

(continued)

(REVIEW continued, PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE)

But, beyond these nagging questions, there is an issue that reaches me, as a lesbian, very deeply. How do we, as women loving women, deal with the whole issue of fidelity and infidelity? Is fidelity physical or emotional? And how do we maintain commitments if our romantic feelings are going in more than one direction? Portrait of a Marriage answers none of these questions for me, although it does give a solution that worked for two people. For that reason, as well as others, Portrait of a Marriage makes beautiful reading.

Dawn

In fantasy, I reach for you
and where you lay, I lie,
recalling your firm skin
soft breasts and fragrant hair
my dreams possess
the comforts love should share.

To Dr. R.--

The sea bird's cry
sinks between the waves
as waves return and break
upon the sand.
Lady, I watch
the closing of the tide
and fear the love
that washes through my hands.

Gay Ladies

O my gay ladies
with your shirts and pants
how good you look
beside so many
made up make up women.

—by Paula Bennett

seasons by M.Z.

it's not as though
I don't
think of you every minute
February sitting
at a window-traced
sunshine place
and it's like springtime
when we first
talked. it can still
touch me like
soft middle aged women
remembering.
every season
salts
it just grows
quieter.
I'm not the type
to read old letters or
yellowed photographs
but even Fall's
leaves now can
swiftly
crush me.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

From Attorney General Robert H. Quinn's letter to Anthony Scalli, Chairman of the State House Co. on Commerce and Labor: "Passage of H.2601 would open the floodgates for other laws on sexual conduct which would do irreparable harm to our society and eventually erode the foundations of the family unit. ... I feel that our primary concern as public officials should be to protect the family and the young rather than endorsing a license for abnormal sexual conduct."

Boulder Gay - Liberation, Inc. is fighting for a gay civil rights bill pending before their city council and will be voted on by the people May 7. This is the first time a gay civil rights issue has gone to the vote of the people. Money is needed to combat the opposition which has mounted a campaign to recall each council member who voted in favor of the bill. Please send whatever you can to: Georgia Borgens, 4977 Moorhead Av. #314, Boulder, Colorado 80303.

Gay Families. The Case Western Reserve University Institute on the Family and Bureaucratic Society is undertaking an in-depth study of personal contracts made by individuals prior to or after establishing a gay household for developing arguments which are likely to fall within the "Public Policy" interpretations made by jurists. Researchers especially interested in the economics of partnerships without written contracts. Write: Marvin B. Sussman, Director, IFBS Haydn Hall, Case Western Reserve Univ., Cleveland, Ohio 44106.

"Gay Health Night" Physicians needed for a "Gay Health Night" sponsored by the Homophile Community Health Service. If free Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00 p.m., call the Fenway Community Health Center, 18 Haviland St., Boston or call 267-7573.

Coming - Psychoanalysis and Feminism by Juliet Mitchell, lecturer and teacher at the University of Buffalo, will be released April 30 '74 for \$8.95 through Pantheon. Ms. Mitchell's book examines the analysis of sexuality, femininity and the family in the works of Freud and others suggesting conditions which could lead to the overthrow of the patriarchal culture.

Republican Platform Hearings. Senator Bob Hall has invited the Republican Platform Committee to hold hearings in Northern Worcester County. Hearings, open to anyone who would like to testify on any plank they would like to see included in the Mass. Republican Platform, are scheduled for April 16 at 7:30 p.m. — Franco-Americans Veterans' Hall, Winter St., Leominster. For info. call 345-2888.

FOCUS Note: This is the 1st opportunity for gays to speak out to the Republican Party in Massachusetts.

ADS

HELP! I've room for a capable soul (or two) interested in simple life style, large garden, handy crafts, low expenses, Mild climate. Karen Guerin, P. O. Box 116, Malabar, Florida. 32950.

Join Dignity, a National group of gays. Write: 755 Boylston #514, Boston.

WAKING UP SLEEPING BEAUTY by J.S.

The lesbian re-telling of Sleeping Beauty is first and foremost a very funny piece of work. You remember the thirteenth, uninvited fairy? Ostensibly left out because of a shortage of china, she is actually left out of the christening feast—as the new version of the story makes clear—because of her butch hair-cut, masculine walk, aggressive manners, and generally dykey peculiarities! The thirteenth-fairy-as-dyke stomps in a satisfying way through the story, and lends the whole an air of delightful absurdity. And when the beautiful princess falls asleep under the injunction not to wake up until kissed by her “own true love,” we watch with satisfaction as man after man kisses her without effect, and it the touch of another woman which at last awakens her.

Aside from the sheer humor and fun of the thing, I found that for me this lavender version cracked wide open the archetypal implications of the old fairy tale. You have your beautiful, innocent young girl, blessed with all the gifts of nature and education, and because of her parents' folly she falls under a harsh sentence: she will prick her finger on a spinning needle and die. Or, anyway, fall asleep for a hundred years until rescued by the prince in shining armour. She will prick her finger and die—that is, her first sexual experience will kill her. The fall from maidenly innocence will have the same results as that first fall from innocence in Eden: death will come into the world. Sex kills. The little princess' life had held nothing but hope and promise (look at all those gifts from the godmothers) until her parents offend a deity, who responds with a curse (the sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children, yea, unto the tenth generation.) The deities are offended, everybody is checked out of Eden and somebody says: Let there be sex. She shall prick her finger on a spinning needle and die.

But no. The king and queen will burn all the spinning wheels, do their best to keep the princess in an environment purged of sex. If sex is dreadful and dangerous and fatal (in Adam's fall, we sinned all; everybody knows how awful sex is; look what happened the first time they tried it), we will stamp out sex. Young girls will be protected from all contact with spinning needles, kept in fortress-like castles, kept in such ignorance that when they do see the inevitable spinning needle (you can't really stamp out sex) they won't even know what it is, or what dangers it may hold. They will be sitting ducks, and they will get their fingers pricked every time (with no birth control either, you can bet). That first experience, that first prick, will be a traumatic and nearly fatal event. Incomplete, really. The princess will sleep and sleep and sleep, because God forbid she should enjoy sex, or be alive in her body, before the ideal, idealized, romantic prince in shining armour shows up. The one perfect knight, the ideal romantic partner, is the only one who can and should rouse her from her slumber. Women are not supposed to enjoy sex, even know about sex, or respond to their bodies at all, until suddenly this one perfect partner appears on the scene.

The story of Sleeping Beauty contains all the elements of sexual and sensual oppression which women have suffered under from Day One. Sex is looked upon as a fatal experience, from which young girls are to be protected by an enforced and ignorant chastity. The passivity and lack of response which are idealized in women are represented by the hundred years' sleep, and our culture's emphasis on the one ideal, romantic (marriage) partner is seen in the picture of the single worthy, brave, virtuous, boy scoutish prince who wakens her with his kiss. A woman is not supposed to have any sexual response on her own account. She remains torpid, unawakened, sexually speaking ASLEEP, until the husband-to-be comes along, when she is supposed to awaken magically and become, presto! chango! passionately responsive to him and him alone. Small wonder that many a sleeping beauty remains sleeping, and even the brave prince can't manage to wake her up. She stays asleep; she has been taught too well, and frigidity is the price she pays. The ignorance, the fear (of that fatal first experience), the godawful passivity and sensual unresponsiveness which Western civilization has cultivated and exalted as the model of femininity, are all right here in this fairy tale. I like the idea in the new gay version of a woman being awakened by another woman, when a man has failed to possess the touch and the love which will teach her how to respond sexually: ultimately, however, the tale can't be made to suit us, as lesbians, either. The somnolent asexuality deliberately fostered in Sleeping Beauty is something we just don't want to put on women any more. It is time to wake up to our bodies. I suggest we write yet another fairy tale, one in which the princess doesn't have to fall asleep (lose touch with her own sexuality) at all, but instead can enjoy loving, sensual experiences without waiting a hundred years.

(Sleeping Beauty: A Lesbian Fairy Tale, Sojourner Truth Press,
432 Moreland Ave N.E., Atlanta, Georgia 30307)

"What do you think?"

I surprised myself
when I didn't recognize
your voice over the phone
after loving you
all this time.
I wonder if I'd do better
if it came
to recognizing your touch?

—by Desi Seagull

March 14, 1974

Dear FOCUS,

Well CONGRATULATIONS on going from the shitty little job you usually are to a SHITTIER category. What the hell happened to YOU this month? What the hell was that mess on the cover supposed to be - a girl with a book on her head? How could old Bidwell bear to have her name seen on it?

I really crack up laughing when I see you put in deadlines for the next issue - it implies that you take time to put it together but it sure doesn't look it. FOCUS is a big void. Can't you get any more fictional-poetry material. How about just having the newspaper staff or DOB membership write personal coming out sagas, how about photos - of the office, of the backs of people (if they can't to have their mugs in print. Do something. Christ, you've got a real rag there.

You shouldn't make it so small. I slithered into Gene Salerno's joint the other day in my usual closetsy way and I had to look, catually look at books before I could finally see that FOCUS DID come in. For me FOCUS has all the appeal of a cumquat (I know that's not a bad fruit but the name soulds . . . it gives my statement imagery.

So o.k. I'm cursing the darkness. But i'm only one person and not noted for literary talents but you do have a staff there and with so many people you should have a better output.

What I'm going to do is write a story for yez and hope it gets printed. See yer next month (maybe). In the meantime get something doing there. I don't see any more editor-letters. You could have a question and answer sensationalism column. Well anyway FOCUS is blahhhh, beechhh P.U.

- S. Rosati

STAFF NOTE: We would be glad to receive the story you mentioned. We haven't printed any letters because we haven't gotten any. We are glad to get some feedback, and would welcome more letters.

1) written after re-reading old poems

Looking back 'on the spiral that is my growth
I say "My my, how I've grown!"
And pinch my rosy cheeks.

2) Melancholia -

oh yes, a drink of 2 parts grief
1 part nostalgia
poisonous in large doses.

I have been drinking a swallow a day
for several years.
it does nothing to me anymore
except for a temporary loss of illusions

24 hours, lots of rest and 2 aspirin fix me just fine

-Judi Stein

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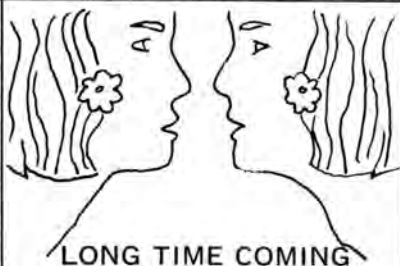
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