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Ms. chief

Overcoming Education

'Let Them Think Opinions Are Accursed'

Women's Studies: A Positive Difference



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Make Your Library Work for Women

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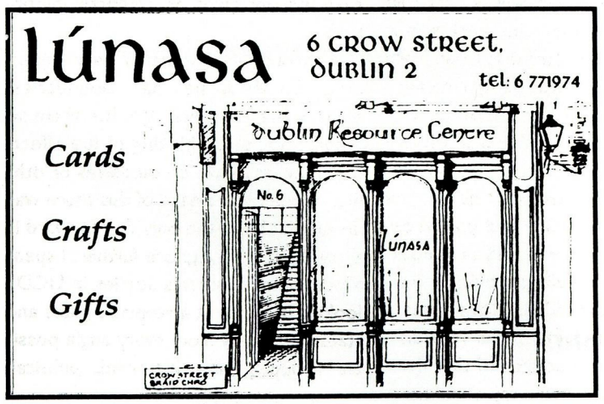
Deirdre O'Byrne reflects on her education

'Let her think opinions are accursed' w b yeats

If my father had had a premonition of the way I'd turn out, he probably would have carved Yeats' 'A Prayer for my Daughter' into my cot. Not that I didn't get on well with my father, as long as I kept my mouth shut. I didn't tell him that in school Marie and I sat on the coal-shed roof, round the "boys' side" of the playground, throwing crusts at the protesting lads. They played round the "girls' side" all the time, and we thought it wasn't fair. We hadn't heard of equal access, but we damn well wanted it. Next thing was the football field. Not that I was bothered about playing football. I was late back after lunch because I'd gone two fields beyond that, and caught my hand-me-down dirndl skirt on barbed wire. The head-master said "Give them an inch and they'll take a mile.'

At secondary school, we read Padraig Pearse's poems and stories full of martyred mothers and gormless girls, but I kept my opinions (and my nausea) to myself. I raged silently at Yeats (So, you want a *stupid* daughter, is that it?) but the classroom was a place where I had learned to say what the teacher wanted. I was a 'good scholar,' I kept my real thoughts about Yeats to myself and waffled on about symbolism with the best of them. You got better marks that way. And so it went on: Teachers' Training College, which I loathed, led to a job which I hated and was hopeless at. Education on either side of the desk was a process of learning how to lie. Opinions were accursed unless they fitted in with the *cigire's* ideas, and mine never did. I'd like to think that I hated teaching because I couldn't bear reproducing all that bullshit for another generation. Maybe that's partly true, but I felt myself to be a failure. I got sore throats frequently and sometimes couldn't speak.

Women's Studies changed all that for me. In my thirties, I began to study women's writing as part of an English degree. For the first time within the classroom walls (rather than on the roof), I found that I could say what I really thought, and felt, and believed, and it was ok, it was listened to, it was valued. I couldn't stop talking. It was like a love affair, the intensity, the passion, the highs and lows, sleepless nights of euphoria or despair. I'd never been as happy, or felt so much at home, even though I was miles away from Ireland and paradoxically, often homesick.



Since then, in a brief spell of teaching women's writing myself, I have seen that same shift and recognition taking place in other women - *' it's ok to have my own opinions!'* - and each time it's a joy to behold. Students, especially older women, tell me that their friends and partners complain about people (who, me?) 'putting ideas into their heads', but they are adamant, as I am, that the ideas were there already. Women's studies gave the space, the language, the confidence to express them.

I don't want to pretend that academic Women's Studies has all the answers. After my English Degree, I began a course on feminism - or, as it has become fashionable to call it now, feminisms. (Why does nobody talk about socialisms, Marxisms, capitalisms?) To support myself, I worked as a nanny, looking after several families' children and an elderly grandmother. I was infuriated by a student who turned down a similar job because she wanted £4 an hour, and gave me this spiel about childminding being underpaid because it was women's work. This from a 'feminist' who lived in a large house, got a computer as a present, and went on Continental holidays. Big theory, small practice.

I didn't feel exploited. My employers, like myself, were women coming back to study after years away. We were doing very different subjects, from Acess courses, to French, Geography, and Homeopathy, but we became friends because we were all struggling towards similar goals. I don't want to sound altruistic, I'm sure they would have succeeded with or without me, but I was glad and proud to be part of the process. I felt an empathy and solidarity with those mothers that I found lacking in some Academic Feminists. And if Women's Studies doesn't include looking after small girls and grandmothers (as well as gerbils, a goose called Rosie, and Toto the terrier), then what's it all about?

The course I was doing that year reminded me of being back at school: I felt there was a predetermined agenda with 'right' and 'wrong' answers, and the fact that it was called a feminist agenda didn't make it any better. It made it worse. I lost my voice and my nerve, I stopped speaking in seminars, and I found myself unable to write. Maybe that showed that I had learned something after all - that it is better to say nothing than to toe the party line.

That painful experience taught me something else: I resolved to do it differently. Teaching women's writing, seeing other women finding their voices, as I first found mine, gave me faith and hope for the future. If students don't talk in class, I don't assume, as I once did, that they haven't read the text. I wonder what has happened to silence them. I know what it's like to lose your voice. I have sat quaking with nerves, steeling myself to speak, and then shaking with embarrassment because I had spoken. Had opinions. Broken the silence.

I have been in 'school' of one kind or another for exactly 35 years now, sometimes as a success, sometimes a failure. It's a long time since I sat on a coalshed, but I still tear my clothes on barbed wire. I made it over the fields and inside the walls of academia, but I don't want to lose sight of me and Marie, up on the roof.

Artist **Beatrice Stewart** discovers her own mind

Within

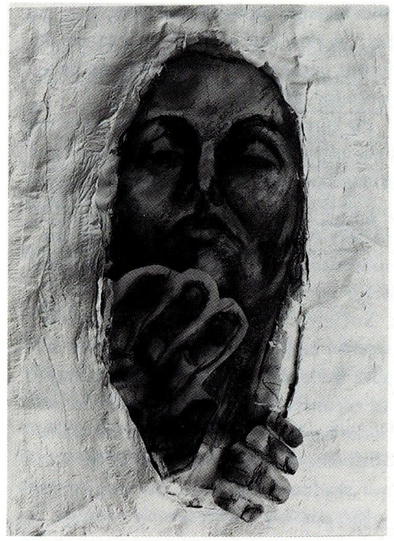
Making art is a need in itself, but it is more than creating art objects or a means of self expression. The process of creating an art work can provide a way of reaching the hidden depths of one's mind including its stored experiences. The resulting piece can prove to be quite a surprise and sometimes shocking, but always very, very revealing.

This is a most amazing experience for someone of mature age who has led a full satisfying life with a wide range of interests. It came as a complete shock to me that on immersing myself in art as a full time occupation I would reach depths within myself that were thitherto unknown.

My work as an artist over the past five years seemed, at the time, to have no focus or meaning. It felt scattered as I explored different mediums from oil paint to photography, sculpture to video. There was always a frustrating feeling that there was something missing. I was not quite hitting the mark, not saying anything of value. Drawings and painting showed much anger and pain. Where on earth did this come from?

All my work focuses around the body: restraining the body, entombing the body, bodies in pain and an attempt to penetrate the dark, deep and mysterious layers below the surface. A series of self portrait drawings show a woman stuck in a wall, entombed, trying to break through but not getting very far, frozen solid, embalmed like a mummy. Understanding came slowly as I realised that concealed within the work was a frustration that the fact that I was born into a female body had controlled and determined the path my life had taken.

They were hidden feelings, of which I was not consciously aware. They included anger and resentment about the restrictions that society had placed on me as a daughter, a wife and as a mother. I knew these feelings would be dangerous to acknowledge. Dangerous, because it would show I was very discontented and the source of that discontent seemed outside my control. A



Within I.
Mixed media three dimensional wall hanging

further realisation that had to be confronted was that I myself had colluded with society, firstly by accepting its culturally imposed gender criteria and, secondly, that by conforming I had probably helped to perpetuate them.

These feelings precipitated in a video and a series of sculptures which focused around the prime source of discrimination, the very first words we hear at birth, male or female, girl or boy. This work drew attention to the accepted dictionary definitions of female/male, definitions that I had observed so totally that I never really questioned them or even thought them as remotely important.

But words are important, very important. They define our boundaries, express our thoughts. We use them so readily, not even thinking of the effect that they may have on ourselves or others. Once I was aware of this there was no turning back; the only way forward is a revolution. To explore further, I spent a year doing women's studies in UCD, looking in depth at a woman's place and status in society from every angle possible including, the historical, political,

financial and legal points of view. This year study validated the underlying thrust of my feelings and gave me a truer understanding of my art pieces.

I believe that art images can work in the same way as music does. They both cut through the logical mind, bombard us with feelings, thoughts and ideas. This can help us view our world from a totally different perspective. Art work can be a force for change.

My current work still exudes from the area of pain and anger, confinement and frustration. This is an attempt to explore my position as a female within patriarchal society which I believe will mirror the subconscious feelings and fears of many other women.

Society's values have to change. As women become more powerful we will have the opportunity to have more say in its reconstruction, but we need to be honest and clear about what we want. That means confronting ourselves and our shadows, our fears, our hopes, our anger, possibly our desire for revenge.

Beatrice Stewart's recent exhibitions have been 'Within/Without' and 'Process'.

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Mná agus Páistí
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3.30pm - 6.30pm

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A Positive Difference:

Women's Studies in the community and the university

One of the most concrete results of the Women's Movement of the last 25 years has been the instigation of Women's Studies programmes in universities and colleges around the world. A good Women's Studies course will constantly question the assumptions, the pedagogy, and the ideology of the academy of which it is a part. Women's Studies is challenging and disturbing, not only intellectually but also emotionally. The intellectual awareness of the depth and strength of patriarchal ideology that is fostered in Women's Studies is not going to leave any intelligent woman unscathed. It is not - at least not initially -idyllic or therapeutic, because the Women's Studies classroom can often force women to confront their own misogyny or that of other women. Facing up to the demons precedes "Empowerment." Women's Studies -if it is truly feminist -is revolutionary.

Ailbhe Smyth is the head of W.E.R.R.C (the Women's Education Research and Resources Centre), which organises Women's Studies in U.C.D. It is the oldest, and perhaps the liveliest Women's Studies program in Ireland. On meeting Ailbhe for an interview, it is easy to see at least part of the reason why this is the case. Her passionate commitment to feminism is obvious and infectious. Since Women's Studies is set up in fundamental opposition to the structures of patriarchy which dominate our society. I begin by asking Ailbhe about the inevitable resistance which she encountered when WERRC was being set up.

"We started doing Women's Studies here in 1983, and at that stage here was huge resistance, which manifested itself by the ignoring of Women's Studies, by refusing to give us access to classrooms when we wanted to do things. But by the time we actually came to establish the centre in 1990, there had been seven years of very hard work and also quite high profile activities in Women's Studies, so the centre grew out of a very long period of work and a quite strategic breaking down of some of those resistances. This was at least to the point where the college authorities had to acknowledge that Women's Studies had an academic importance and also a certain market value. We didn't start cold as has been the case in some universities, it was kind of organic progression: that's not to say that it was easy to establish the centre because of course it wasn't, but it was part of a process, and I see that very much as an ongoing process.

I am curious to know the specific nature of the resistance to which Ailbhe refers, familiar as I am with the strategies of disdain, condescension and questioning of the value of Women's Studies which students doing such courses often encounter. Strategies of opposition, according to Ailbhe, include "people, particularly men, making jokes about the nature of Women's Studies -these jokes are made as a way of making you feel much less confident in the academy about what it is you're doing. One classic question is "What do you mean by Women's Studies, why can't we have Men's Studies , too? I remember standing up in the Faculty of Arts one day and answering that question, and saying "But we do have Men's Studies and it's called University College Dublin and it's called Trinity College Dublin and it's called D.C.U. and the University of Limerick and so forth." So you're always conscious of having to push back these deliberately trivializing questions. A lot of this is semi-implicit and to some extent fairly covert resistance is actually a very powerful stategy within institutions of this kind."

Ailbhe had found that, despite her academic credentials. She has been denied promotion over the years. This, she suspects, is because of her highly visible role in the feminist movement.

"There has," she maintains, "been a reluctance to recognize the research that is done by scholars in Women's Studies as valid research, and that you can see in terms of the non-promotion of women scholars who have done an enormous amount of work in this area. That, I think, is something that is shared by all of the universities in Ireland, the U.K. and elsewhere. I haven't been promoted to a senior lectureship, despite the fact that I have endless pages of publications and research. And that is very much about making a decision not to see feminist Women's Studies as academically authoritative and credible, and as having no status."

Ailbhe is particularly interested in how Women's Studies can gain visibility and status within the university setting without compromising feminism and its politics; an interesting question, given Audre Lorde's oft-cited belief that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Outreach and the creation of educational opportunities for those who might not otherwise have them, however, has never been one of the master's tools, but it is a tool utilised by WERRC Ailbhe explains that "the outreach courses are very, very important to the ethos of WERRC which has a major commitment to making real bridges and connections for women who are currently in adult education, and to expanding access to university-based education. You can't really do that unless you are prepared and willing to try to be where women are. This is particularly so because the funding infrastructure for women's adult education is still abysmally low. We made a very conscious decision to develop a certificate in Women's Studies which is non-graduate. This is being used as an access route to Third Level education generally -not only to Third Level Women's Studies. In the past this only happened on campus, and was limited to a select group of women -those who were free to come in the evenings, who had some source of independent income and who could get transport to Belfield. Those conditions do not apply to the majority of women in this country, so it seemed to us to be absolutely crucial to work with groups and networks in their locations, and communities, with the same aim of providing a full certificate in Women's Studies as a means of access to further education for women.

Ailbhe explains how some of these courses came about, such as the ones in Balbriggan and Longford. Both involved women's groups approaching WERRC rather than, as Ailbhe puts it, Belfield "moving out into the countryside in some arrogant way, and saying "we have something to give you."

WERRC is involved in three important projects at the moment, explains Ailbhe. These are a module in Women's Studies on a NOW (New Opportunities for Women) programme in the Northside partnership, the validation of a certificate in Women's Studies delivered by the Wexford People's

College, and the development of a North-South certificate in Women's Studies. The latter project is being undertaken in tandem with Eilish Rooney of the University of Ulster Adult Education Department, the Women's Support Network in Belfast and the National Women's Council in Ireland. Women, Ailbhe believes, are 'hungry for education." She argues that "it is the responsibility of the universities to look at innovative ways of ensuring that third level education is genuinely accessible to diverse groups in the community; I think that's very much a part of the ethos and politics of Women's Studies.

Ailbhe speaks a little about the many students who enter Women's Studies courses with major inhibitions about feminism, only to discover that feminism is a much more expansive philosophy than they had been given to understand. This phenomen, she maintains, reflects the fact that "the ways in which feminism is represented by the dominant culture are quite deliberately narrow, constraining and stereotypically and consistently negative. Also, those women who are fairly visibly involved in Women's Studies are also very negatively represented. You have to work very hard indeed in order to overcome these representations."

She explains that she cautions students who come to see feminism as reasonable not to make the mistake of thinking that it's not radical. "Feminism" she argues, is an incredibly radical politics, "dedicated to changing hetero-patriarchy. On the terms of the ruling powers, she contends, feminists are radical, left-wing extremists. "I understand almost viscerally," says Ailbhe, "why it is that women, often in particular, can be so antagonistic to feminism: it's about saying "the ways in which we think of ourselves as people have to utterly change." This fact is deeply acknowledged on Women's Studies courses.

The final subject which I broach with Ailbhe is a contentious one in feminism: where to draw the boundary between acknowledging diversity and having a feminist agenda. I sense immediately a distrust of the more extreme forms of post-modernist feminism. She concedes that "as women diversely become aware of the many different ways in which we experience oppression, feminism has to keep expanding and growing.

Feminism must be an expansive philosophy and politics, an all expansive vision. I have enormous difficulty in talking about "difference." because difference is typically used in a way which effectively erases the real power inequalities between women and how they produce different positions, but they are inequalities, they

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are not just equal differences: we don't live in a world of equal differences, However, much postmodern theory may say that we do."

Difference and diversity, argues Ailbhe, means that "Some few women have more power than others, and that the vast majority of women don't , and that the reasons why they don't have to do with the material structures, which are about capitalism, racism, imperialism, heterosexism and so on."

Ailbhe is worried about what she refers to as an increasing "cerebral abstraction" in Women's Studies courses, most particularly in developed Western countries where she believes that material privilege can blind women to the very real political work which needs to be done. "Some ideas within postmodernism I find very exciting," she admits, " it's more the total divorce between some kinds of theory-making and the more material analysis that I find disturbing, and I don't think that needs to happen because I think that there must always be an absolutely seamless connection between the two, they are different aspects of a whole. Theory is an instrument and a tool."

Ailbhe concludes by providing what I see to be two notes of hope. One is her strong conviction that the current counter-assault on feminism is a sign that Women's Studies is making a difference.

The second is her obvious pride in the fact that former students of her department are now out in the world making a positive difference. "It's incredibly encouraging when you discover students in all kinds of unlikely places, who have such a positive commitment to seeing all kinds of ways in which people are oppressed as a very central part of what they're about, wherever and whatever they're doing. And you have got to believe that that is where the hope of the future lies."

Deirdre Clancy interviewed Ailbhe Smyth

We welcome your letters about what's in *Ms.chief* and what's happening in the world. Send letters to:

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Changing History?

Deirdre Morrisey attends the Irish Association for Research in Women's History annual conference

The Irish Association for Research in Women's History held its annual conference at the Queen's University campus in Armagh on 20-21 September. The theme of the conference was "Women, Politics and the State."

Papers included "The Uses of Motherhood in Defining Citizenship in 20th Century Spain" (Prof. Mary Nash, University of Barcelona); "Feminists, Citizens, Mothers: Debates about Marriage and Citizenship in 19th Century Germany" (Dr Lynn Abrams, University of Aberdeen); "Gender and Welfare" (Dr Jane Lewis, All Souls, Oxford); and a symposium on Women & Politics in Ireland since 1920" with contributions from Dr Kate Beaumont, Dr Frances Gardiner, and Dr Monica McWilliams of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

The politics of motherhood dominated most of the papers, and so are central to this review. The same arguments recurred throughout Europe from the 1870s, gender ideology being used in the construction of concepts of citizenship and women's rights. There was a widespread biological essentialism which presented motherhood as the inevitable religious and biological destiny of women, and as a common good which transcended their individual human rights.

This was the core of the debate in Spain from c 1900, as in Germany from the 1870s. In both countries, the concept of a differentiated citizenship based on women's role as wife and mother rather than their equality as humans, developed. The same happened in other European countries such as Great Britain, where both suffragists & anti-suffrage women used arguments about women's place in the family, and thus the state. It was also an issue in the Irish Constitution of 1937, where the roles of 'woman' and 'mother' were conflated, denying women validity in other roles. The consequence can be summed up in a poster from the Irish Countrywoman's Association: women's responsibility in marriage was 'To love, honour and carry water.'

The ways in which this view of women's position in society has had lasting impact was demonstrated by Jane Lewis. In many countries, the welfare system is based on the implicit assumption that woman's role is to be a wife and mother, and that therefore she will be supported by a male breadwinner. This assumption also conditions debate about welfare reform in those countries. However, this is not the only alternative, as the Scandinavian model of worker citizen shows. This means that, for example, lone motherhood is not a categorical problem there as it is in the United Kingdom.

A noteworthy point is that the terms of the debate as it developed excluded unmarried/ widowed women. Single women were largely invisible, both to campaigners for women's rights and to those who saw women's emancipation as a threat to the family/ the state/ civilisation. Women really only existed in relation to men, a marginalising perspective which limited options for political change.

The conference was a rewarding and enjoyable experience which brought up a wide variety of issues surrounding women's rights and position in the state. I was particularly struck by the resonances between arguments made in the past and today, especially by the religious right. Definitely a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same.

World News

Forging Feminism

An international conference to discuss the forging of new feminisms in the context of militarised situations around the world will take place 16-18 January, 1997, organised by the Centre for Women in Coalition at the University of California. The conference aims to link feminist activists and grass-roots organisers with scholars and policy-makers. The organisers hope to network between local and national activists and scholars around the world. Those interested in the conference should send their address to the organisers. Conference costs may be waived in case of need.

Write, fax or e-mail: Piya Chatterjee and Marguerite Waller, Dept of Women's Studies, UC Riverside, Riverside, CA 92521. Fax: 909 7876386

Article courtesy Women's News

National Domestic Violence Hotline

The National Domestic Violence Hotline, located in Austin, Texas, opened in late February 1996. The freephone line takes calls from all U.S. states, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. There is also a free telecommunication device for the deaf (TDD) available, and accesss to translators in 139 languages. The line is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It directly contributes to positive working relationships among local, state, national and federal service providers.

The service will assist callers by providing the following:

Crisis intervention - identifying and exploring caller's needs; routing call to appropriate service agency in an emergency; on-line help in development of a safety plan

Referrals - battered women's shelters; social service agencies

Information - about the sources that can provide assistance to individuals, their friends, families and employers wanting to learn more about domestic violence, the effects on children, child abuse, sexual assault, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, intervention programmes for batterers, working through the criminal justice system and other issues.

Women's Health on the European Agenda

Founded in 1993, the European Institute of Women's Health will keep Europe's mind on women's health.

Recently, the Centre launched a paper entitled *Towards healthy Ageing*, which focuses on older women's health. Europe has the highest proportion of older women in the world; one in four women will be over 60 by the year 2010. The paper focuses on four major health problems; coronary heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis and mental illness. Coronary heart disease, in particular, is generally regarded as a disease for men, but it is a leading cause of death for all European women. Because of the focus on men and CHD, there is a shortage of data on how prevention and treatment may differ for women.

Ecuador Passes Law Against Violence Against Women

The Law Against Violence Against Women and Family was approved in Ecuador. the Draft was presented on July 5, 1995 in the presence of women from all parts of the country who came to Quito to accompany the president of the Parliamentary Commission on Women into the Legislative Palace, in a demonstartion of their support. The drafting of the law was the result of several years of work by women's organisations and research centres on gender violence, who also campaigned all through the parliamentary debate.

According to statistics from various sources, 60% of women in Ecuador suffer from domestic violence. It is hoped that this law will help activate the work of the Women's Commissioners, existing in five cities since 1994. However, for the law to be enforced it still needs to be regulated and women are still waiting for Congress to approve reforms to the Penal Code - presented in November 1990 - that are prerequisites for the new law as well.

article courtesy WGNRR/ Mujer/Fempress, Chili, Jan 1996

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Don't Abandon Us

Mexican Women gain rights within the Zapatista movement

'We understand the economic and human rights cost his (Carlos Salinas de Gortari) regime inflicted on you included torture, detention, extra-judicial execution and the disappearance of Community activists.' The above is an abstract from a letter being distributed by the Irish Mexico Group calling on all to sign in support of the Mexican activists who are fighting for basic human rights.

Mexico is in a financial crisis, real wages are falling every month and half the population lives in poverty. None of this was helped by the massive corruption of the Salinas regime, Carlos Salinas was the president of Mexico until December of 1994. His brother, whom he put in charge of a semi-state company is now in a Mexican jail facing separate charges of masterminding a politician's murder and of "inexplicable enrichment".

The EZLN was born out of people's anger and frustration at the corruption in their society. The women of Mexico felt they did not have rights or value in the eyes of the Mexican government and so decided to organise with the men to achieve rights for all indigenous people. They believe that by uniting they will achieve freedom. The EZLN incorporates women in the revolution regardless of their race, creed, colour or political affiliation, requiring that they meet the demands of the exploited people and that they commit to the laws and regulations of the revolution.

As well as taking account of the situation of the woman worker in Mexico, the revolution incorporates the just demands of equality and justice in the Women's Revolutionary Law. When the EZLN first began organising, women realised that they have to fight on another front. They had to put an end to the discrimination they suffer within their own society, a traditional and extremely macho society in which they are considered inferior being swith no right to a place in public life or to education.

In the EZLN the participation of women is key. There are two main groups, a political body, the Indigenous Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (CCRI) that works in the communities, and the combatants or insurgents who voluntarily give up having a family so as to enter into the armed struggle. Workshops are given to adolescents on reproductive and sexual health by the compañeros of health services. Although there is family planning many women have children; however, they have had to leave them with their parents so as not to abandon the struggle. 'I'm an insurgent. I've dedicated all my life and time to the cause,' affirms Ana Mara, a twenty six year old infantry major. 'I entered the EZLN when I was very young. I was 14 years old when I entered into the struggle...I learned reading and writing and how to speak Spanish. Later they taught (me) tactics of combat and poliotics so we could speak with people and explain our cause to them. We asked for land and the government didn't give us any and so we began the takeovers.'Major Ana Mara had charge over the command that took San Cristbal de las Casas, the second city of importance in Chiapas, an operation considered a success by the EZLN because of no human losses. Women play an equal part in the attacks, from the seizure of land and the liberation of prisoners to the making of uniforms. In the EZLN everything is done equally. One day the men cook and the following the women do. This lessening of inequality is a great triumph, we're speaking of indigenous communities where the inequalities are very strong. 'Our hope is that some day our situation will change, that they'll treat us with respect, justice and democracy,' says Commander Ramona. "Don't abandon us!" is the desperate cry of the women of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, hoping to be heard both within and beyond their communities.

Sonya Mulligan

The Irish-Mexico Group has an office at 10, Upper Camden St., Dublin 2.

The Women's Revolutionary Law

- Women regardless of their race, creed, color, or political affiliation, have the right to paticipate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.
- Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.
- Women have the right to decide how many children they have and care for.
- Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.
- Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.
- Women have the right to education.
- Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.
- Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.
- Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organisation and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.
- Women will have all rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.



Women waiting for a partner at the dance at the Zapatista International Gathering for Humanity. Some of the women would be Zapatista insurgents. Photo: Andrew Flood

Speaking to the World


A WOMEN'S NEWSLETTER

WOMEN'S MESSAGES FROM JAPAN

AS A TOP JOURNALIST
EIKO OYA
ジャーナリスト：大宅映子さん

(Received by 79 countries)

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NO.15

In this way her Christmas card greetings became a magazine to introduce Japanese women's lives. Her home in Kyoto also functions as the magazine's office with a group of women as volunteer staff.

Women's Messages has 3,000 subscribers in 80 countries, and is read by many people, such as students, working women both inside and outside the home. It can be found in universtities, libraries, government institutions such as embassies, women's centres and international organizations. It is published two to three times a year.

A wide range of topics are covered by *Women's Messages*. The latest issue features a woman who wrote a draft of the Japanese constitution on women's rights, reports from the Beijing Conference, and a woman training mentally ill people. Articles are from the US, Ireland, Russia, Nepal, Guatemala and so on. Some folk tales are also introduced. As the number of overseas readers increases, various opinions and responses to the magazine are sent to us and the magazine is filled with the latest international articles. This mutual exchange of information between writers and readers is peculiar to our magazine.

The atmosphere of the *Women's Messages* office is very much like being at home. The editorial meetings and current topic meetings inviting foreign guests are lively and enjoyable. This is where people discuss international news over a cup of tea. Some articles result directly from these lively meetings. The women's input is the magazine's output.

Women's Messages is the only women's journal in Japan and it is unique because of the variety of topics it covers and it is a direct opinion magazine. Although it is rather difficult to regard our magazine as feminist due to the negative stereotype of 'feminists' common in Japan, the basic attitude of our magazine is clearly feminist because it promotes more equal opportunities for women.

Yukiko Usui,
Women's Messages Irish Office

What is your image of Japan? Cars, technologies? Well, these are the best known aspects of Japan but there are also various lifestyles there. Geisha girls? It is often said that Japanese women are oppressed in many situations but there are a lot of dynamic people who represent different images of Japanese women.

Women's Messages from Japan is a Japanese/English bilingual magazine on women's issues. Noriko Takashima, editor in chief, started to publish this magazine eight years ago. 'Japan is most famous for its financial power, but there are a lot of interesting people around the country who live fascinating lives.' Noriko says. 'I have wanted to introduce such people to my friends overseas.'

Readers subscribe to the *Women's Messages from Japan* with an annual fee of 3,000 yen, (IR £17). As pounds cannot be changed for yen in Japan, 22 postal coupons are equivalent.
For further information, please contact the *Women's Messages* Japanese Office:+81-75-956-1388
Irish Office: (01) 8335544

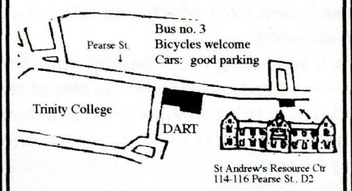
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Disabled Women and Motherhood

Alison John, a woman with cerebral palsy, author and mother of two, was at a local council meeting with her children when a woman said to her, "Isn't it lovely that you and your husband can adopt children?". Alison replied, "Excuse me, actually we bonked for them!", leaving the woman in a state of complete shock at the idea of an obviously disabled woman having sex and getting pregnant. Alison told this story at the 1992 Maternity Conference on Disabled people, Pregnancy and Early Parenthood, at which many women came together for the first time to talk about the difficulties they had faced in becoming parents.

A woman I know with multiple sclerosis was once told by someone visiting to discuss adaptations to her home, 'No one in their right mind would leave you alone with children', not knowing that she was at the time fostering two children.

Women who have been disabled from birth or early childhood are themselves often seen by family and professionals as perpetual children, in need of care from others, rather then as adults who can care for someone else. Girls may therefore grow up with the message that the adult world of boyfriends, marriage and children is one from which they will always be excluded.

Sex is something which healthy, attractive people do and society finds the idea of sex rather disgusting when it involves people who are old or fat or ill, or who in any way fail to meet standards of physical normality. Disabled women are expected to give up the right to ordinary desire for love, physical closeness and sex which others take for granted. If our partners are 'normal' men then people wonder why they are with us, and if our partners are also disabled we inspire deep fears about disabled people breeding more disabled people and destroying the health of the nation. As for those of us whose partners are women, much of society has not got as far as thinking of the possibility of disabled lesbians existing, let alone being parents.

If disabled women do have children they will have a much harder job than other women to prove that they are coping with motherhood. They will be at risk of having their children taken into care if they are thought not to be managing and it may be impossible to get appropriate help when it is needed. Positively Women, the support organisation for HIV positive women, told me of one London borough where women with AIDS can get 24-hour cover so that they can stay at home with their children rather than go to a hospital and their children go into care. There are so many women living with so many different illnesses and conditions who their children would benefit from this sort of help, but mostly it doesn't exist.

So even if women overcome the barrier of others' prejudice and find the confidence to think of having children, there is much for them to fear. Women who have managed as adults to live independently and to free themselves from professional interference have to contemplate a new army of professionals, this time concerned for the welfare of their children and the prospect of losing their children to the state is terrifying. Last but not least women may have fears about the effect on their own health of pregnancy and looking after small children. These fears are sensible and well-founded, but it is hard for us to voice them in case we are dissuaded from having much wanted children or are seen as neurotic or cowardly. Thousands of women with illnesses succeed in having children and staying healthy; many more need information to help them do so.



Women's health, November 1995

Information about pregnancy and child-birth for those of us living with illness is scarce and often contradictory. Professionals seem at times unconcerned and blandly reassuring, but at others terrify us with threats of what will happen to our babies if we get pregnant or fail to follow their instructions when we are pregnant. In a survey published by Positively Women several women mention the negative attitudes of doctors towards them becoming pregnant: 'The doctor said I would die of AIDS and so would the baby.'

Women with conditions such as lupus, sickle cell anaemia, diabetes and many others receive conflicting advice and information about the risks of pregnancy to themselves or to the baby. One friend with thyroid disease and another with diabetes have both had several miscarriages and badly wanted to know if these are connected to their medical condition or if there is any way they can be helped not to miscarry again, but the information they want is not available. In a survey done by Maternity Alliance a woman with rheumatoid arthritis mentions putting off having a family for 11 years because of inaccurate advice about the likelihood of passing on the disease to her child.

Disabled women and women with illnesses are often left out of literature and discussions about pregnancy, childbirth and reproductive rights. Women's Health and other organisations could do much to lesson women's isolation by developing appropriate information.

Veronica Marris

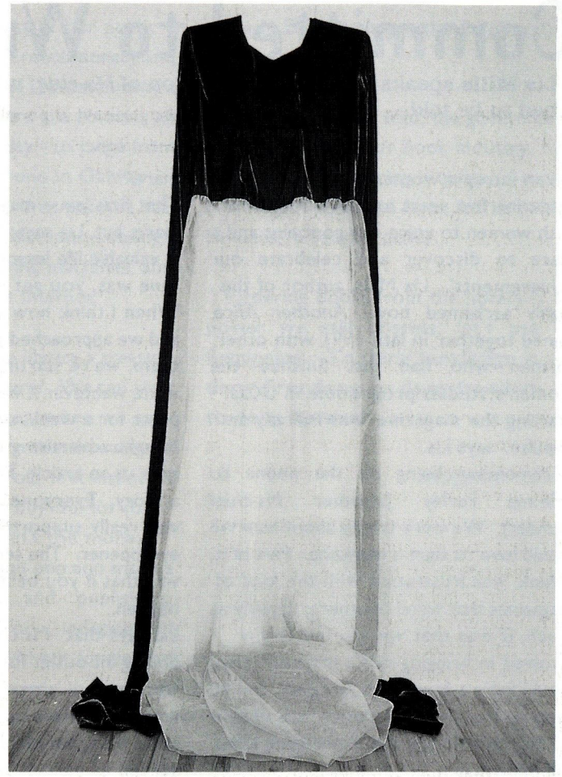
Reprinted with the kind permission of the Women's Health Newsletter 27 and (Women's Global network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)

Very few services exist in Ireland for disabled women who are or want to become mothers. Most maternity hospitals lack basic facilities such as information in braille. The Central Statistics Office maintains no statistics on how many disabled women have given birth.

The Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) and the Well Woman Centre, in conjunction with the Eastern Health Board, have developed a pilot project in Tallaght/Clondalkin and Coolock which will make their centres there fully accessible to women with mobility, hearing and sight disabilities. The project includes awareness training, installation of induction loops, and information leaflets in braille and large type.

Beverly Semmes exhibition at IMMA

Beverly Semmes: New and Recent Sculpture, which is on exhibit at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, comprises 10 of Semme's characteristically large, dramatic clothing pieces. They explore the power of clothing and its ability to influence, and even define the self. The exhibit continues until 16 February 1997.



Beverley Semmes. *Big Blue.* 1993. Photo courtesy IMMA

Louise Bourgeois: Sculpture at the Douglas Hyde Gallery

Louise Bourgeois is now considered to be one of the world's most important contemporary artists. Bourgeois's subject matter draws on her own personal experiences, from disturbing childhood memories to her role as a daughter, wife and parent. She began producing her personalised art in the 1940s, and her strong statements predate the feminist movement by twenty years. The Douglas Hyde exhibition also includes a number of very recent pieces. From 21st November - 19th December at the gallery in Trinity College, Dublin 2.

UCG WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE

REVIEW

VOLUME FOUR

Edited by Alan Hayes, Ann Lyons, Áine Ní Léime, Lorna Shaughnessy

Defining the Political

Women's Networks and politics-Eilís Ward & Orla O'Donovan
Ulster Women's Unionist Council-Diane Urquhart
Feminism and Nationalism in Ireland-Jane Tynan
Obstacles to Peace and Human Security-Caitriona Ruane
Experiences of Beijing-Noírín Clancy
Galway Travellers-Rachel Doyle

New Perspectives on Citizenship

Women and Citizenship-Sylvia Walby
Employment: Norway and Ireland-Mary Quinn
The Prostitution of Sexuality-Kathleen Barry
Violence: The Galway perspective-Claire McDonagh
Rural Women-Anne Byrne & Mary Owens

Expression, Voice and Movement

Feminist Moral Psychology-Stephen Mannix
Women and Dance-Berni Divilly
Kate Wolf-alan Hayes

Book Reviews

November 1996, ISBN 0-9519466-3-3/ISSN1393-3612, IR£8

Random Access International Performance Art Day

A major performance art exhibition takes place at the Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford, on Saturday, 9 November from noon - 11.30pm. Eleven artists will perform, including Annette Smyth, Monica Ross, Leah Hilliard and Carol Kavanagh. For further information, contact the Sculpture Society tel: (01) 8722364 or the Garter Lane Arts Centre.

Coming Up!
Creativity
Ms.chief 14, February 1997

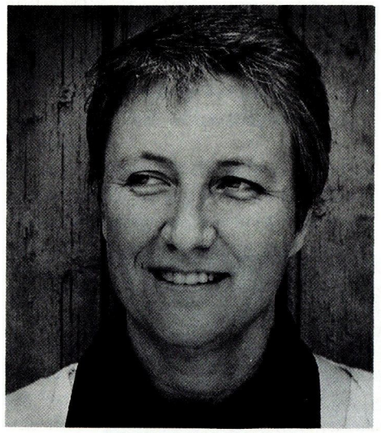
Committed to Writing

Lia Mills speaks about the foundation of *Ms.chief* and a story that had to be told

Seven intrepid women founded *Ms.chief* magazine five years ago as 'a forum for Irish women to voice our concerns and a place to discover and celebrate our achievements'. Lia Mills, author of the highly acclaimed novel *Another Alice*, joined together in late 1991 with other women who had just finished the women's studies programme in UCD. Starting the magazine 'was literally an impulse,' says Lia.

'I remember being on the phone to Fidelma Farley [another *Ms.chief* founder]. We were talking about how we would love to start a magazine. Part of it, I think, was frustration with the kind of magazines that were out there. Equally as much, it was that we wanted to be involved in bringing out a magazine that would have a feminist orientation and to keep up the kind of inclusive idea of generating knowledge and exchanging ideas and information'.

Lia continues, 'When you think about it, it was pretty outrageous. We never stopped to think that none of us had any training, any background; I didn't even know how to use a computer properly.'I remember the week coming up to producing the first one, we borrowed an Apple [mac] and we taught ourselves from scratch how to use the Apple programme. We printed each page and cut and pasted the columns over and over and over again. Then we'd find we were a millimetre out and we'd have to start again. I'll never forget it. It was a night-



Lia Mills. Photo courtesy Poolbeg

mare.'

That first issue may have been a night - mare, but, Lia says, 'there were two really valuable life lessons that I got out of it. One was, you get what you ask for. When I think how we set ourselves up and we approached people and we said to them, we're starting this magazine, we want, wahtever it was: the loan of a computer for a week, support - some people bought advertising space, Ailbhe Smyth gave us an article, Phyl McCarthy gave us a story. Everyone, without exception, was really supportive - that was a huge eye-opener. The second thing, I suppose, was that if you believe in something, it'll happen.

Lia says that *Ms.chief* was never about finding an outlet for her own writing. It was, instead, 'about trying to get as many women involved as possible'. But at the same time, her involvement with *Ms.chief* served as part of what she calls her apprenticeship.

'I'm a person who has always written, even as a very young child. There's this terrible sense of dislocation when I'm not writing,. It's a vital function for me, it's like breathing. I don't mean that in a grandiose way, whether it's letter writing, or it's a diary. However, whenever I tried to do anything that needed more sus - tained attention that's when the kids, family life would get in the way and I found that very difficult. I think that, doing womenn's studies was probably essential in some way to me. I had to learn authority to write with conviction, and I see the same thing a lot in the work of students. I can point out to them, see here where you're almost apologizing for the fact that you're saying this or you're qualifying it out of existence. They see it and they recognize it and they laugh but it's still very hard to correct, to write with that idea that you're entitled to say what you have to say'.

Lia's commitment to making space for women's say is obvious in *Another Alice*. The story was one she felt had to be told. 'In 1992, it seemed as if every single time I opened the newspaper or turned on the radio there was some story about sexual abuse or rape, but the reports I was reading in the paper were all reports of trials or outcomes of trials. You inevitably had some judge or some lawyer explaining or redfining an event. The official institution or the representative of that institution would say no, you might think that happened but that's not really what happened or we're going to call it something else or we're going to decide what the impact that has been on you. This sotry was not being heard because of all the rhetoric that was flying around. That was Alice's story when I began to sit down and listen to it'.

'It was a very difficult novel to write and all along the line I had to really work against myself because there were decisions to make about how to tell the story I found that all along the line I kept running up against this internal censorhsip, all these little voices going, you can't say that, you can't put that in writing'. Commitment kept Lia going, however. 'I owed it to Alice, I think,' she says. All the time I felt she was real to me when I was writing the novel. I could feel her sitting there with her head on one side waiting to see what I was going to do, what I was going to make of it all. I couldn't screw it up.'

Are books such as *Another Alice* simply rivetting and horrifying stories, or can they contribute to change? Lia hopes so. 'I think the difference that a book can make, especially a novel, is in changing the level of awareness people have. Certainly what I hope to achieve with Alice was a kind of recogntion of what was really happening under the gloss. There's a level at which we're all implicated in turning a blind eye and I think that the more informaed we are, the more ready we are to act on behalf of children or on behalf of ourselves, whichever the case may be. That would be something that I wanted to achieve, to induce that recognition, but also I think to demythologize abuse as well because in fact it's an awful lot more prevelant than we were ever led to think by the press or the judiciary. That has been the single most positive thing about having written this book, the response that I have had from women either coming up to me or writing me letters saying you could have been writing about me when you said x,y,z. There just seem to be all these levels at which women recognise themselves in the character and I think there is something very positive in that.'

interview by Elizabeth OShea

Make Your Library Work for You!

Until you do something, you never know how it is done. Theory and practice. Radio Pirate Woman has been forced into publishing its own book, *Galway's PirateWomen - a Global Trawl* (published by Women's Pirate Press). I set out to try and get publishers interested in the idea of a book to stimulate debate about small open-access unlice - nensed uncensored radio-stations, and how transmitters should be available to everyone in public libraries just like books or audio tapes. I was told there was no market for such a subject. So here are a few jottings on how we might break through the orthodoxy of current market values in publishing and communication.

Why are there no women's book - shops? Why are there only two independent non-academic women's magazines - *Ms.chief* and *Women's News*? In Galway, where there are five regular bookshops, *Ms.chief* is sold in only two of them and *Women's News* in none. The reason: it doesn't pay. And what about the rest of the country, where there are now hun - dreds of women's groups? Where do they go for their ideas and direction?

Of course, if you are part (but only if you are part) of the academic/NGO/government-orientated information network, you are on the superhighway; information is a commodity; information is power; control of information is the way to pull all of us into line and deprive us of our own power.

Do we make the best of our public library, one of the most revolutionary and liberating institutes of communication ever thought of ? There are libraries all over the country. Today - to judge from my experience of the one in Galway - they are moving forward to become real social centres, with exhibitions, readings, computers, photocopying machines, and I'm sure very soon, the Internet.

So why not make the library a treasure house of women's culture? We can start at women's conferences, when we see books and magazines for sale that are not generally available, and our first instinct is that we would like to buy the lot (but can't because we haven't the money). Take out a little pad and pen and make a note of the titles and publishers. Particularly look for independent women's publishers without funding or resources for publicity - such as Women's Pirate Press, or *Women's News* or *Ms.chief* - then go to the library and put in an order. Even though you personally might not be all that interested in a title, you can ensure it will be there for another woman.

You can then mention it to your friends that that's what you've done. When *Galway's Pirate Women* came out, I went round the town with fliers, suggesting to people I met that if they hadn't the cash to buy it, why not get it out of the library ? To my delight the library ordered eight copies. A friend of mine in Edinburgh got the Edinburgh library to order it.

(In Norway, I am told, the government helps the indigenous book industry, by automatically ordering a quota of each Norwegian-published book for its public libraries: a brilliant policy.)

Ordering books from the library is a power we still possess; let's use it. Remember : **To deny kowledge is to deny Freedom: to deny freedom is to deny Power !**

Margaretta D'Arcy



'Control of information is the way to pull all of us into line and deprive us of our own power. The independently published Galway's Pirate Women *tells the story of how women speak plainly on Radio Pirate Woman.*

books

***Hazel: A Life of Lady Lavery, 1880 - 1935.* Sinéad McCoole. Lilliput Press. £15 paperback.**

"Hazel, Lady Lavery - Society & Politics", the title of an exhibition currently at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, provides an excellent summing-up of the life documented in this new biography of Hazel Martyn, the American-born wife of the painter Sir John Lavery, whose image survives as the water-mark on Irish banknotes.

The book is largely a chronological account, from the comfort of her childhood in Chicago to her life in Britain as wife of a very successful artist, with friends including Winston Churchill and George Bernard Shaw. Her early life, including her first husband's death and her romance with Lavery are covered, but the greater part of the text is devoted to the years between 1916 and 1935, to Hazel's growing interest in Irish nationalism, her relationships with Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins, and her disillusion with Irish politics in the years after O'Higgins' assassination.

I found the book alternately satisfying and frustrating. By the last page, a fair portrait of Hazel's personality had emerged, showing a woman both fascinating and off-putting, astute and naive, vain, self-obsessed, and yet with an enormous capacity for dedication, and seemingly possessing great ability to attract male admiration. On the other hand, I would have liked more analysis to supplement the narrative, particularly of Hazel's political role and influence, as well as the affairs (if they were) with Collins and O'Higgins.

I finished the book with a vague sense of disappointment, perhaps because I am also left with a number of unanswered questions. However, it is largely a well-written informative book, a reasonable guide to a complex character, which provides a different perspective on some of the "great" names of early twentieth century Irish history.

Deirdre Morrissey

***Word of Mouth.* ed. by Ruth Carr, Gráinne Tobin, Sally Wheeler and Ann Zell. The Blackstaff Press. Stg£6.99.**

When I read a book of poetry I never feel comfortable picking it up and reading it cover to cover. So I began reading this collection with Gráinne Toibin. I found with each of her poems I experienced a new emotion. My favourite of hers was 'The whole story'. It begins 'All the women in our family like to toast their arses at the fire'. I laughed remembering my own granny arriving at our house on a winter's day and going straight to the fire to warm her posterior. Margaret Curran's 'Unmarried Daughter' is a very affective poem. It gives us a look at one very lonely woman's existence. Still at home with her mother, she seems to spend her time taking care of her: 'Yes, Mother. I'll get the tea And fix your bed.' She has become cocooned, experiencing very little else but her mother's company.

In all honesty it took me two or three readings to fully appreciate this collection. I can't find fault with it but it did take time to acknowledge its worthiness. This is the first time there has been a space purely for poetry by women from Northern Ireland. It is a great book and a vibrant read.

Sonya Mulligan

***The Fun Palace.* Agnes Bernelle. The Lilliput Press. £9.99**

Agnes Bernelle's fans will be thrilled to get a hold of *The Fun Palace*, which recounts the cabaret performer's life until 1969. Bernelle's life has been incredibly varied and, I think, incredibly lucky. Her memoir anecdotally details her childhood in Berlin, her family's escape from Nazi Germany, their involvement in Radio Atlantik 'freedom' broadcasts to Germany during the war, her rocky marriage to Desmond Leslie of Glaslough, Monaghan and its end in 1969, as well as her diverse stage work. Bernelle has had a huge number of near misses in her career and life, both lucky and unlucky, as well as some amazing escapades, such as cooking her children's dinner below stage during a performance. The book is aptly titled: it seems that, as soon as Bernelle climbed the crazy moving stairs she got tumbled down a fun palace tunnel.

While *The Fun Palace* will be an enjoyable read for anyone interested in biography and twentieth centry history and culture, I'm very disappointed the book stops in 1969. When Bernelle's marriage ended after living in Glaslough, she found herself penniless and stranded in Ireland with three children. But we don't find out about her successful career in Dublin thereafter. Bernelle was one of the founders of the Project Arts Centre, and her musical career continues very successfully. Agnes Bernelle fans will eagerly await the next installment of her fascinating life.

Elizabeth OShea

***Clearing the Space: A Why of Writing.* Anne Le Marquand Hartigan. Salmon Poetry. £4.99**

Clearing the Space reprints the paper Anne Le Marquand Hartigan presented at the 1995 Kerry International Summer School (KISS). In a wideranging reflection, she explores women's fear of creativity and reasons why the creativity of women - as poet, priest and mother - has been feared in the past. She asserts that we can only confront these fears by being creative and that creativity is always a voyage of discovery. Interspersed with selections of her poetry, *Clearing the Space* could well be food for thought for women writing.

Elizabeth OShea

***Dancing to Different Tunes: Sexuality and Its Misconceptions.* Ethna Viney. The Blackstaff Press. Stg£14.99.**

Anyone who cares about feminism and feminist theory will find *Dancing to Different Tunes* frustrating. This book takes on more than it can cope with. It simplifies the complex topic of sexuality. This, far from being a virtue, makes for a book that is characterized by sweeping, generalized statements and attempts to synopsize the theories of highly complex thinkers like Julia Kristeva in half a page. She dismisses philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan because they represent 'male' thought.

Psychoanalysis, says Viney, set women back a century because it is 'male' - never mind that before psychoanalysis, female sexuality was never given a forum for discussion.

Viney's subtext is, to a large extent, an apologia for heterosexuality. 'Giving birth,' she says, 'is the high point of a woman's sexuality.' There are many women who would argue with this 'I have a womb, therfore I am' philosophy, who might even find it mildly offensive.

Viney maintains that both Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich have been relegated to the fringes of feminism because of their 'essentialism'. This is patently untrue - these are two of the most-discussed writers in women's studies classrooms and both are certainly extremely popular. Viney refers to Daly as 'a Catholic who has challenged the Church on its attitude to women.' This would probably horrify Daly, given that she long ago relinquished institutionalised Christianity in favour of a Goddess-centred view of the universe. To call Daly a Catholic, even one who challenges the Church, is to miss the point of what she is about.

Whoever proofread this book did not take adequate note of grammatical problems and factual errors, such as a reference to 'Gustav Jung' instead of Carl Jung (granted, his middle name is Gustav, but no one ever referred to him that way). This may seem petty and pedantic, but the quality of feminist publications is a matter of deep concern and factual and grammatical mistakes are hard to excuse when the publisher is a reputable one like Blackstaff.

Ultimately, this is a confused, worried book, which gives the impression that feminists of different persuasions are in constant catfights with one another. While devoid of incisive comments, its lack of coherence and its judgemental tone militate against its usefulness.

Deirdre Clancy

errata second sentence, last paragraph *Dancing to Different Tunes* review:
'While devoid of incisive comments, ' should read
'While not devoid of incisive comments'.

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WERRC

Women's Education Research and Resource Centre

Adrienne Rich: A Celebration of Her Work
Dayschool, Saturday 7 December, Arts Building, UCD

Women and Health Seminar Series 1996 - 1997
all lectures begin at 4pm in Room F104, Arts Building, UCD

Friday 8 November
Community Initiatives: Traveller's Women's Health Project
Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group

Friday, 6 December
Women's Health Care in Ireland: Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour
Dr. Miriam Wylie, ESRI

24 January 1997
Lifestyles and Limits: Women, Reproduction and Moral Agency
Dr. Margrit Shildrick, Lees/Liverpool

21 February 1997
Reading Birth and Death
Dr. Jo Murphy-Lawless, Centre for Women's Studies, TCD

Further seminars on 21 March, 18 April and 9 May

The Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) at University College, Dublin offers MA, BA and certificate courses in Women's Studies (full-time and parttime) and PhD thesis direction.
Details from WERRC, UCD, Dublin 4.
tel: +353-1-7068571 fax: +353-1-7061195 e-mail: werrc@ollamh.ucd.ie

La Leche League of Ireland

The La Leche League is a voluntary organisation which provides information and support to women who want to breastfeed their babies.

All La leche League leaders are mothers who have breasfed their own babies and who enjoy helping other mothers to do so. Leaders are available at any time to speak with a mother personally or on the telephong.

The League also provides information and experience for women in speical circumstances (blind mothers, babies with a cleft of the soft palate, premature babies, multiple births and many others.

There are many La Leche League groups around Ireland. Each group hold monthly discussion meetings on various aspects of pregnancy, parenting and breastfeeding. Each gropu has a lending library of books and leaflets on childbirth, breastfeeding and childcare.

To contact the La Leche League, please check the address for the League listed in your local telephone directory.

La Leche League of Ireland Annual Conference
22nd & 23rd March, 1997
Ennis, Co. Clare.
for further information, contact your localLa Leche League

upcoming events

Women's Conservation Action Group
The group organises conservation outings in and around Belfast
Saturday, 16th November
seed collection
information from +(01232) 645169

Women's Aid
Women's Aid has opened two charity shops in Rathmines and Capel St., Dublin. Volunteers are urgently needed. Contact Joan at (01) 8600033 ex. 27 or 34

Ms.chief requires an experienced accountant/bookkeeper for a few hours a month. If you would be interested in volunteering, please contact Elizabeth on (01) 4531103

Women's Aid Support Group
every Tuesday evening 7.15-9.15pm
Central Mission Hall, Abbey Street, Dublin. For more information, ring Linda or Pan at (01) 8600033.

Lesbian Craft Fair
Sunday, 1st December
St. Andrew's Centre,
Pearse Street, Dublin 2.
all welcome

African Voices
Fri & Sat 8 & 9 November
Irish Writers' Centre, Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1.
information tel: (01) 872130

Douglas Hyde Gallery Trinity College, Dublin
21 Nov - 19 Dec Louise Bourgeois: Sculputre.
Jan - Feb 1997 Group Show: location and space. sited around Trinity College

Word of Mouth Book Launch
23 November, 7.30pm
Bewley's Grafton St.
all welcome

Lesbians Organising Together (LOT)
5, Capel Street, Dublin 1.
For events information, contact the LOT events line at
1850 122 345

Belfast Lesbian Line
Open House last Sunday of every month, 2-5pm. Ring +(01232) 238 668 Thursday 7.30-10pm for venue information

Women's Disco, Belfast
First Tuesday of every month
The Parliament, Dunbar Street

Cork Monthly Lesbian Social
Last Sunday of the month,The Other Side Cafe, 8, South Main Street, Cork.

GET WET GO WILD
NEW Venue
ESB Pool, Ringsend
Dublin 2.
£3.50/2.00 conc.
Sundays, 8.30pm
SWIMMIN WIMMIN

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Non Directive Pregnancy Counselling

Irish Family Planning Association
36/37 Lr. Ormond Quay,
Dublin 1.
(01) 8780366

Lesbian Lines

Cork Thurs 8-10pm	(021) 271087
Dublin Thurs 7 - 9pm	(01) 8729911
Belfast Thurs 7.30-10pm	(01232) 238668
Galway Wed 8-10pm	(091) 66134
Limerick Thurs 7.30-9.30pm	(061) 310101
Lesbian Line NW (Derry)Thurs 7.30-10pm	(01504) 263120
Lesbian Line SE Mon 7.30-9.30pm	(051) 79907

Rape Crisis Centres

Dublin	(01) 6614911
	1800 77 88 88
Cork	(021) 968086
Belfast	(01232) 249696
Galway	(091) 64983
Limerick	(061) 311511

Women's Aid Help Line
1 800 341 900
Mon-Fri 10am-10pm, Sat 10am-6pm

Amnesty International Women's Network, Seán MacBride House, Fleet Street, Dublin 2. (01) 6776361.

CAFE - Creative Arts for Everyone, The City Arts Centre, 35 Moss Street, Dublin 2. (01) 6615268.

National Women's Council of Ireland, 32 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, Dublin 2. (01) 6615268.

Irish Countrywoman's Association, 58 Merrion Road, Dublin 4. (01) 6680453.
freephone: 1800 652652

Irish Women's Environmental Network (IWEN), Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7. (01) 8732660

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
c/o 5 Verschoyle House, Verschoyle Court, Mount Street, Dublin 2

noticeboard

Send notices for the events and noticeboard pages to:
Ms.chief, P O Box 3327, Dublin 8.
Ms.chief 14 appears February, 1997.
Copy deadline for notices is 1 February.

Employment Equality Agency
tel: (01) 6624577
fax: (01) 6625139

Midwives Association of Ireland
c/o 49, Marklands Woods,
Maryborough Hill,
Douglas,
Cork.

Home Birth Centre,
25, Larkfield Grove,
Terenure, Dublin 6W
tel: (01) 4922565
or tel: (0405) 57795

Cork Lesbian Advice Support and Self-help (CLASS)
tel: (021) 278470

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by and for women

Every now and then I will read a piece of 'news' in one of the national newspapers or hear one of the chat shows on the radio about a topic which interests me, only to find that the basic facts have been distorted and the subject has been mis - represented. However, it was only when I found myself in this position of having been personally misqouted, when a group I am involved in was misconstrued, that the level to which they will stoop to get their story rang home.

My story began after a heated discussion between a group of lesbians. Each one had an incident to recount, raging from insulting remarks they had heard whilst walking down the street, to physical violence they had suffered at the hands of homophobes in our society. I decided that the lesbian com - munity not only needs a voice but needs a supportive organi - sation, that will not be afraid to retaliate.

So I looked to the organisations out there and talked to some people around and we came to the conclusion that the path of the Lesbian Avengers was the one for us. We each got a copy of their handbook, sat and read it thoroughly and took out material to use for fliers. This was how we decided to build up some interest and check out the community's opinion on the group.

Two fliers, that's all we pro - duced and the media were on our trail. We had decided to remain anonymous until a planned public meeting. The *Examiner* was the first to pick up on it. They rang *GCN* (*Gay Community News*) who in turn suggested they contact LOT (Lesbians Organising Together). Of course, I could almost hear the writer say, 'they both have lesbian in the title, they must be one and the same'. The jour - nalist was told that the Avengers were not a LOT affiliated organisation.

So having found no one in the Avengers to quote, he decided to make use of his talent for creative writing. He decided that our fliers were 'lurid' and that the Avenger group was some sort of aggressive vigilante group who would stop at nothing to achieve their goals. I knew that, if I were Josephine Public reading that article, I would be worried about what the Avengers were up to, whether they were, indeed violent. Being on the inside I knew that this was far from the truth. Yes I decided to organise this group out of frustration, but I chose to take the Avenger approach as they have a dis - tinctly effective and often humourous way of dealing with issues that arrive. I could never be considered violent, in fact I am generally described as being 'soft and cute', words one generally doesn't associate with the type of characters our 'friend' in the *Examiner* wrote about. I am a very sociable woman who sees the Avengers as a forum for a lesbian voice to be heard. I don't intend to take part in any violent actions, in fact I believe that there are many other forms of expression that are much more effective. I'm looking forward to being part of a collective that strongly believes in being heard in a non-aggressive but boisterous way. There's a world to be changed out there, but violence of the physical or the *Examiner*-style printed kind isn't going to do it. It's time to bring on the dyke love, dyke anger, dyke intelli - gence, dyke strategy that will make a difference.

Sonya Mulligan

...bile file...bile file...bile file...bile file...bile file...bile file...

bile file

...bile file...bile file...bile file...bile file...bile file...