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Ireland's Feminist Forum

£1.00 No. 14 1997
ISSN: 0791-6795



we're not writing for the boys....

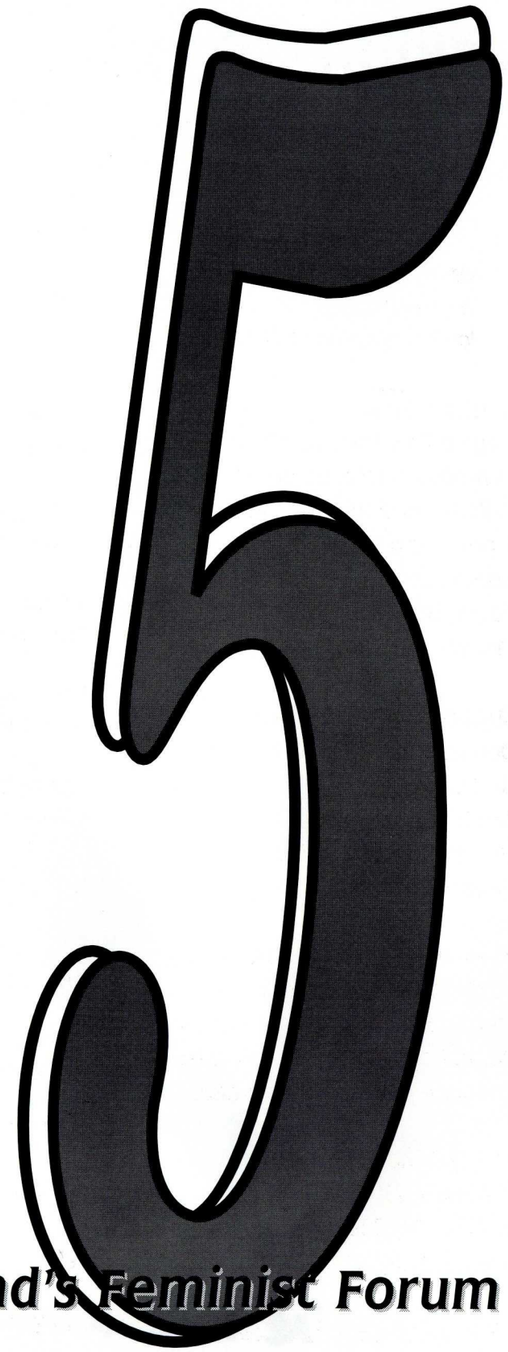
thank you...

Last October *Ms.chief* celebrated five years of feminist publishing. As a volunteer-run publication, *Ms.chief* could never have survived without the support and encouragement of many people.

In particular we'd like to thank the women who gave generously of their time and talents to celebrate with us at our fifth anniversary party:

Lia Mills
Louise Callaghan
Alexis Guilbride
Rosemarie Rowley
Hayley Fox-Roberts
Sonya Mulligan
Agnes Bernelle
Margaretta D'Arcy
Breda Hammond
Phyl McGlynn & the PODs
DJ Sweet
Shakti
Cloddagh Lineham

With your support, *Ms.chief* will provide a feminist forum for Ireland well into the future.



Ms.chief Ireland's Feminist Forum

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Contents

Ms.chief 14 was produced by
Deirdre Clancy
Fiona Martin
Deirdre Morrissey
Sonya Mulligan
Elizabeth OShea
Helen Walmsley
Mary Wogan

Layout: Elizabeth OShea
Sonya Mulligan

Cover Photo: Annette Smyth
Pen by Klee Paper,
89 North Circular Road, Dublin 7.

Contributors:
Hayley Fox-Roberts, Claire Campbell, Susan O'Donnell, Helen Fallon, Mary Suttcliffe, Annette Smyth, Ann Marie O'Dwyer, Celine Brown, Lorraine Donegan, Klee Paper, Books Upstairs, Vivid Images Graphic Design

Supporting Subscribers:
Donna Hoffman
Bríd Connolly
Breda Hammond
UCG Women's Studies
Deirdre O'Byrne

Ms.chief accepts articles, poetry, fiction, letters , artwork, cartoons... Submissions not accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope cannot be returned.

Ms.chief magazine,
PO Box 3327, Dublin 8
tel/fax: (01) 8386946
e-mail: satisfaction@connect.ie

Ms.chief 15 copy deadline: 20 May

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Journey of Adventure

Writers' groups have existed for a long time, and in lots of different forms. Once seen as a decadent preserve of the literary upper classes, over the past few decades they've become a means of not only self-expression but, particularly for women, an empowering circle that increases not only their writing ability but their means of communication and their links with the social and political world overall.

There are as many kinds of groups as there are writers: some take new members only on acceptance of the present membership, others welcome new voices with open arms, but all have their purpose and, ultimately, their goals.

In the late 1970's in Liverpool, an organisation called the Windows Project helped instigate a series of activities around creative writing, the effects of which are still active. As a community based organisation, outreach workers arranged readings, workshops and a 'Dial-a-Poem' phone line for local and established poets. They also published (and still do) *Smoke* poetry magazine, and small collections from local poets. By beginning a network of creative writing, they made space for others to follow. One development from this were the L8 Writers, a group of mostly women from a housing estate known for its lack of facilities and resources.

The women in this group found in meetings they were able to freely discuss the issues that affected them, and the poetry that came out of the group was powerful and angry. For women who had little opportunity to have their voices heard in a deprived and largely ignored area, the L8 Writers provided an outlet and a means of making themselves visible. With the increase in vocal ability came an increase in political awareness: by writing about what was happening to them and their families they were becoming active in a social sense: by publishing their work they were making a small but pointed comment on Thatcherite Britain.

In Ireland in 1993, in an area where women were traditionally less vocal and which at the time had no theatre or literary venue, the Longford Writers' Group was formed by, amongst others, an ex-worker of the Windows Project. Although many of the members were initially self-conscious about their writing and deprecatory of their skills, as meetings progressed, so did their confidence, and within a year the group had produced their first annual journal, containing strong, valid writing from a variety of backgrounds and views.

Writers' groups can start anywhere, but in Longford the County Librarian, Mary Carlton-Reynolds, saw fit to offer use of the library and its facilities. This encouragement led in time to LWG extending its activities, from giving readings in local venues to performances in the Longford Festival of '94, school workshops for International Poetry Day in 1995 and, also in that year, Longford's first Writers Weekend.

For those involved, the meetings, the readings, the new sense of purpose in writing brings a heightened self-respect for their own work, and a meeting point where ideas can be shared, discussed, argued and laughed about. There's an incentive to write which for some hadn't been there since school, and encouragement for others who've become isolated in their work. Certainly there's increased opportunity for reading and listening to that work.

The sense of meeting like-minded souls follows naturally into the network of writers' groups that cover Ireland. The Longford group links frequently with the Granard, Moylurg and Athlone Writers' Groups. Despite the difference in sizes and resources, many are able to host events where different groups can get together. In 1994 the Aughnacashel Writers' Group in Ballinamore held a small but enthusiastic weekend of workshops where writers from the Midlands met writers from the North, and began working friendships that gave increased access to ideas, and also to places and situations not otherwise accessible. Organisations like Co-Operation North that actively fund exchanges between groups of various natures have helped smaller writers' groups come into contact with others. With assistance from The Arts Council and the Writers' Centre in Dublin, groups like the Longford Writers have been able to host readings by Rita Ann Higgins, Evelyn Conlon, Collette McCormack and others.

These groups are not exclusively for women, though many are women-oriented. Some groups, however, feel a more specific focus is necessary. The Bacchantes are a lesbian/bisexual writers group formed after a workshop during the Lesbian Lives Conference at UCD in 1996. These women aim to 'put power back into poetry', a very specific and pagan-based act. Although they only meet sporadically, their intent is very definitely the empowerment of women through their sexuality and experience, and they defined the membership so that experience could be openly discussed and worked on.

To explore is to find something new, and writers' groups are guides on a journey of adventure. Their sharing and building of creative power increases the profile of non-commercial or unrecognised literature, and helps bring women writers back into the public arena of poetry and prose where they rightfully belong.

Hayley Fox-Roberts

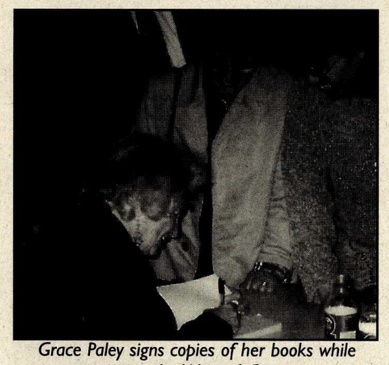


Getting to the centre of things

Many women writers have emerged in the country in the last few years. And the Irish Writers' Centre has seen many of them pass through its doors since they opened in 1991.

The staggering facts are that 65 out of every 100 students on the courses are women and 16 out of 18 Friends of the Centre are women. Among the women students on one creative writing course was Nuala O'Faolain who then wrote her autobiographical work *Are You Somebody?* So, lots of women, famous and otherwise have availed of the facilities in the IWC, becoming part of a growing creative buzz in Ireland.

A feature of the Writers Centre is the courses they run on an ongoing basis in creative writing.



Grace Paley signs copies of her books while visiting the Writers' Centre

Poet and writer Mary O'Donnell has taught creative writing and believes the reason that there are more women attending these courses is obvious.

"It's consistent," she says "with the fact that women go to more cultural events everywhere, such as theatre and art exhibitions. They seem to be more interested."

Apart from the participants on the courses, a very high percentage of Friends of the Writer's Centre are women. This could be because once you've paid the twenty pound subscription fee, you can use the computers that the Centre put into operation for writers last year. It's possible that not as many women writers actually own computers as their male counterparts. Regulars to the Centre on a daily basis to use the computers are women journalists and creative writers.

Foreign women writers have always been well represented at readings, and have included Calix Beyala and Beryl Gilroy.

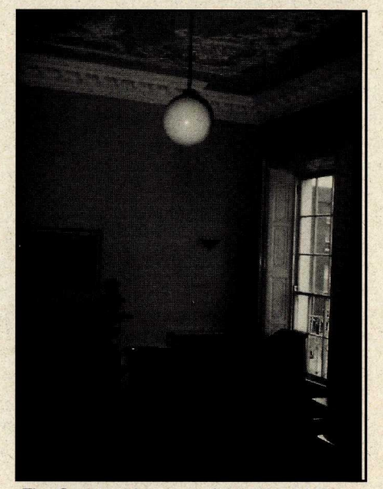
Last October Grace Paley, the American poet and short story writer did a much welcomed reading at the Walton Theatre in TCD, which was organised by the IWC.Of Paley it has been written, "All over the world, in languages you never heard of, she is a master story-teller in the great tradition. People love life more because of her writing".

Local groups from Cork and long established groups like KLEAR from Kilbarrack, as well as newer groups such as DubCit Writer's Workshop have also had women writers represented over the years.

As for teachers, in the last few years poets and writers Katie Donovan, author of *Ireland's Women Writing Past And Present*, Evelyn Conlon and Enda Wyley have taught courses at the IWC. The number of women tutors compared to male tutors falls behind the number of female participants compared to males. Maybe this can be rectified in the future.

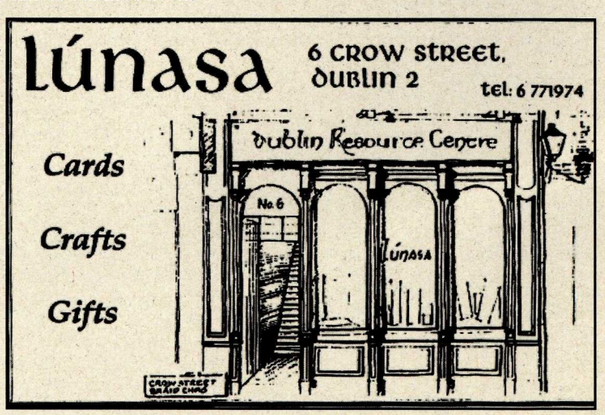
The majority of the staff at the Writers' Centre are women. If it looks like the Centre has been totally taken over by women, think about the reasons why. Administrator Jacinta Douglas, says that the women have an interest in doing the work and it's part-time which suits the working mothers. But they're on FAS schemes and not getting paid much more than they would on social welfare. While the Writers' Centre is well supported by women and is well worth supporting, it's unfortunate that more secure, better paid jobs are not available for the women working there and that more of the tutors are not women.

Mary Wogan



The Georgian character of the Writers' Centre building has been maintained.

Poetry Ireland hosts a reading with Elaine Feinstein on 16 April, 8pm at Bewley's, Grafton Street. Angela Bourke will read from published and new work on Tuesday, 13 May at the Winding Stair, Dublin



Underground

Sitting on the Tube

Just past Embankment

On the Northern Line

Heading for Clapham Common

Thinking how much I'd like to be

Intent upon another tunnel

confined by skin not steel

smothered by wet heat not conditioned air

Not striding up through tiled tunnels

But pushing and coaxing my way

Through flesh and blood and mind and soul

Baiting that grin nobody sees outside

Poem and photo by Margaret O' Flanagan.



Women making links

Lesbian Lives iv

The Lesbian Lives IV : ' Focus on Lesbian Health Issues' Conference was held at University College Dublin by Women's Education and Resource Centre (WERRC) on Saturday March 1.

The conference was opened by Ailbhe Smith of WERRC followed by Grindle Dockery and Janet Price who researched and wrote an important report entitled *Sexual Health Needs of Lesbians, Bisexual Women and Women who have Sex with Women* which was funded by the EU and Liverpool Health Authority and published in 1996.

The various workshops in the morning included 'Health Risks for Lesbians' by Sharon Oye from Dublin Aids Alliance, 'Holistic Health: Empowerment and Healing' by Gay Woods and Ali Welfare and 'Proposals for a Lesbian Health Clinic' by Anne Broekhoven from the Well Woman Centre. The health clinic proposal, which was submitted to the Eastern Health Board, covers leaflets targeted at lesbians, providing an outreach worker to the lesbian community and having specific hours in the week for lesbians at the Well Woman Centre. The importance of targeted lesbian health care was revealed in the afternoon in the workshop run by Ger Moane from the Lesbian Health Group, 'Is homophobia bad for your health ?' They discovered that lesbians frequently avoided seeking healthcare because of the difficulties of coming out to health professionals. Stress, coming out and fears of rejection, homophobia in the health service e.g. having no rapport with doctors/nurses, violence/the fear of violence and fear of prejudice - all of which are caused by prejudice in society, were listed as ways in which homophobia affects our health. Suggested actions to counteract this were education, being political, getting support and coming out to practitioners. People in the workshop realised how much pressure we put on ourselves and that we neglect personal care of ourselves as people.

Psychological Health (Marianne McGiffin), Alcohol and Drug Abuse in the Lesbian Community(Liz Willows), Lesbian Disability Issues: An Irish Perspective-Research and Services (Suzy Byrne, IGLYO/GLEN) and Bisexuality: No Need To Feel Bad About It (Helene Bonnlander, Megan Stewart) were covered in the afternoon.

'The Other Stage Theatre Company', Dublin, addressed issues of homophobia using forum theatre. The group played out a short dramatic piece which was set in a school and involved a lesbian teacher. The piece was repeated and the troupe invited the audience to stop the action, take the part of the characters; and attempt to change the outcome to a more positive one. The audience discussed and played out different strategies to challenge homophobia and had fun doing it. After closing the conference with 'Lesbian Age Rage: Issues of Change and Ossification in the Lesbian Community' by Sasha Roseneil and panellists, women enjoyed networking, wine and chat and the after conference party.

Helen Walmsley

The International Conference on Women, Violence, Abuse & Citizenship

The International Conference on Women, Violence, Abuse & Citizenship (Brighton '96) demonstrated the various ways that violence, abuse and gendered power relations affect women's citizenship and human rights and the ways that women around the world fight and resist our oppressions.

Attended by over 2000 delegates (it was open to men but I didn't see many there), the five days were divided into key areas. Days 1&2- Rape, sexual harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence; day 3- Harmful cultural practices, including female genital mutilation and women and armed conflict; day 4 - Trafficking of women and children and day 5- Children and violence and abuse.

Ireland was well represented by both delegates and speakers, among them were Margaret Kennedy (disability and abuse), Ailbhe Smyth (legal aspects of sexual violence against women in Ireland) and Hilary McCollum (sexual abuse). Monica McWilliams was inspirational talking about how the N.I. Women's Coalition was started, choosing to stay out of mainstream/ 'malestream' politics and how despite the differences in fundamental thinking, there is a "rock solid working class women's movement" in the North.

Some women at the conference felt marginalised and various fringe meetings were held, among these were women of colour, lesbians and women with disabilities. Most of the women at the conference were white and western. The anti-porn - s/m - prostitution bias was criticised and the organisers announced that speakers taking part were chosen because their views represented the organisers' own. I became constantly aware of the women who were not at this conference (or others like it) and who are kept out of the work to end violence against women, "who threaten our credibility as they criticise us as irrelevant to their lives" (Beth Ritchie).

Despite this, great opportunities were provided by this conference for networking, increasing awareness, learning about the different ways women fight oppression, discussion and action planning. Many women leaving the conference, myself included, although exhausted, felt inspired and empowered.

Helen Walmsley

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WOMEN, WORK AND EXPLOITATION

Galway marked International women's Day by hosting a conference titled 'Women, Work and Exploitation on March 7 & 8. It was organised by the Galway One World Centre, NODE (Network Outreach in Development Education), the Women's Studies Centre UCG, the Western women's Link and Banúlacht. The conference opened with speeches by Althea MacQuene from the International Labour Resource & Information Group in South Africa, followed by a rousing speech from Nell Mc Cafferty. The day then continued with workshops and base group meetings. Workshops included: Prostitution in Ireland; Sex tourism; Voluntary work, and base groups were the core working structure of the conference. The workshops were facilitated by leaders from a variety of backgrounds who used a variety of approaches.

The conference took the form of base groups. Each base group decided which of its members took part in the various workshops. Delegates then returned to their base group and used the information from the workshop to discuss the base group area of focus.

Various suggestions were brought back to the base group. One of the base groups, which focused on the media, discussed the difficulties of women's access. They suggested that both women's groups and individuals lobby politicians before elections through press releases and to use boycotting as an instrument for change.

Helen Walmsley

Women's Rights as Human Rights

The ICCL conference 'Women's Rights as Human Rights', in Dublin 20-21 March was a wonderful opportunity for women from all over the island and beyond to meet, network and discuss women's human rights and their lack globally, regionally and nationally.

On Thursday 20 March, the focus was on the global dimension, with speakers Charlotte Bunch (USA), Florence Butegwa (Uganda) and Shireen Huq (Pakistan). Bunch focused largely on the use of human rights theories to claim women's rights, and the interactions of the two, while Butegwa and Huq looked at how the concepts are applied in practice, using examples from Asia and Africa. All three speakers emphasised the importance of the concept and also the necessity and value of networks both locally and internationally.

On 21 March, at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, the main part of the conference was attended by over 300 women. The format moved between plenary and workshop sessions, with lots of opportunities to talk and visit the exhibits. The first plenary was a presentation relating to the themes of the morning workshops with six speakers, while the closing session offered an opportunity for assessment and celebration of the day's work.

I attended the workshops on Political Discrimination and Oppression and the Legal Mechanisms for Women's Human Rights. The Political Discrimination workshop concentrated on the national situation within Ireland, with emphasis laid on the need for education and empowerment, and for politicians to be made accountable for legislative shortcomings, such as the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, which has proved impossible to use. The afternoon workshop, on the various mechanisms available to ensure that states are fulfiling their responsibilities under the various conventions and treaties was extremely informative. Particular stress was laid on the periodic reports that governments are expected to supply to the UN once they have ratified the conventions, and the need for NGOs to monitor their contents, and where necessary, submit alternative reports.

The conference was excellent, highlighting the work yet to be done, with horrific stories of acid attacks in Pakistan, murders in Ireland, domestic violence, and the accumulation of prejudice and discrimination against women. Yet it was also an exhilarating experience, with lots of inspiration, practical suggestions for continued action, and enough reading material to keep me busy till the next time.

Deirdre Morrissey

WERRC

Women's Education Research and Resource Centre

Imaginings

Women, the Arts and Culture

WERRC Annual Conference
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Proposals for papers, workshops, performance, exhibitions and other presentations to WERRC by 2 April 1997

WERRC Applications

Applications for PhD should be made directly to WERRC Postgraduate MA, MLitt and Diploma applications should be submitted to WERRC by 1 May in the year of application. Subject to availability, late applications may be accepted. Forms on request.

The Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) at University College, Dublin
F104b, The Arts Building, University College Dublin, Dublin 4
tel: +353-1-7068571 fax: +353-1-7061195
e-mail: werrc@ollamh.ucd.ie http://www.ucd.ie/~werrc

Genetically Engineered Foods: a Serious Health Risk?

Genetically engineered foods (also known as genetically modified: GE or GM) contain genes derived from animal, fish, insect and bacteria and will soon be appearing in the shops. The sale of these foods will be permitted without proper assessment of the potential risks, and without adequately informing the public. Many scientists say that GE foods could cause serious damage to health and the environment. Nobody can tell what effect changing a single gene in an organism might have in the long term.

A large shipment of US Soya beans arrived in Hamburg and Rotterdam recently. This shipment contained both natural and GM soya. mixed together; it was impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Soya is present in over 7,000 food products, including sausage, chicken nuggets and gravy powder as well as the more direct forms of soya product (milk, desserts etc.). Since the BSE scare many people have switched to soya products as an alternative to meat. However because the EU have decided that GM foods can be imported and sold without label, consumers are not in a position to know whether they are eating genetically modified foods.

The genetically modified soya bean plant was developed by the United States company Monsanto which also manufactures a herbicide called Round Up. Normally Round Up would kill or deform, but the GM soya plant is herbicide resistant. If this plant is able to withstand one of the most powerful weed killers in present use then we must ask ourselves what effect it will have on our bodies. We should now be aware of the dangers of interfering with nature. Potential dangers include new toxins (such as the absorbed herbicides) and allergens in foods.

Plants and animals which are genetically engineered have no natural habitats at all. They are completely new life forms, developed in laboratories and untried and untested in the wider environment. We know from experience that introducing alien species to new habitats can have disastrous consequences.

Ivan Yates TD claims there is no cause for concern, yet the Austrian Government have taken a different approach and are banning imports. How thoroughly have the Irish Government investigated this matter?



Photo: Margaret O'Flanagan

There are other damaging effects to health caused by unnatural foods: increased use of chemicals on crops can directly affect health and diseases can spread across species barriers due to an alteration of habitat or habit. Biotechnology companies claim that their manipulations are similar to natural genetic changes or traditional breeding techniques. However, the cross species transfers being made between such as fish and tomatoes would not happen in nature and may create new toxins and diseases. Now your tomato has a longer life and a much redder skin, making it more attractive, but the right to choose what you eat is lost, particularly in the case of vegetarians and vegans.

There are also dangers to the environment in the use of GE foods. In Canada salmon breeders are using 'anti-freeze' genes so that the salmon can be taken to colder water. This also makes the salmon grow six times faster - making the salmon the predator, upsetting the whole eco-system in which all creatures are part of a food chain. Damaging that chain can cause species to mutate or become extinct as their place is lost. The effects of this are irreversible.

The Irish Association of Health Food Stores (IAHS) does not support the use of GM foods, and will not retail them.

Don't just sit on this one! Harvest Wholefoods (an IAHS member in South William St, Dublin 2) have a petition on the ban of GE foods: drop in and sign it. Write to your TD's and express your concern. One of the many lessons to come from BSE is that scientific opinion is not absolute in the area of food production. Many efforts to improve on nature have left a risk to human health.

Paula Gilmore

singer songwriter
Sharon Murphy

DJ Sweet

Friday 18 April 1997

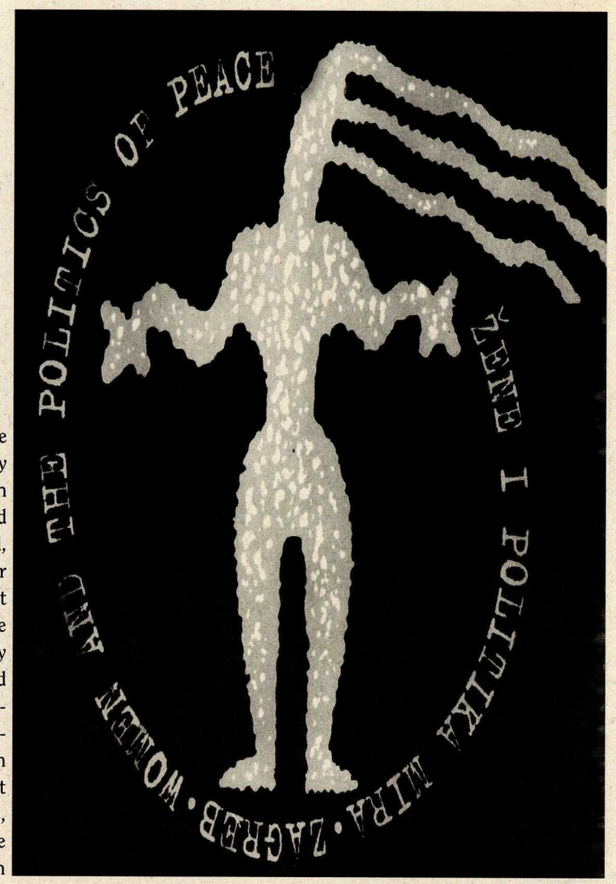
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Women Working for Peace



Issues such as women as champions for peace, ways of transforming conflicts, and women challenging peace were spoken about, cried about and debated at the International Women's Forum: Women and the Politics of Peace, held in Zagreb in October 1996. It was the first time women from the former Yugoslavia - Bosnians, Croats, Kosovans, Macedonians, Serbs - played host to an impressive international gathering of women peace activists from 22 countries, including Northern Ireland.

Refugee women, rape victims and the women activists who organise centres such as the Zagreb Centre for Women War Victims and other support centres throughout the war-torn former Yugoslavia, shared their stories and their experiences with us.

Liz Groves of the Falls Community Council, whose own Belfast house had been fire bombed, said she had never heard such heart rending stories as the stories told by Bosnian refugees and rape victims she listened to in her workshop. In my own workshop, about women's identities, we had a fierce debate as to whether we wish to claim our national identities, the very identities in whose name man-made wars keep claiming lives and wreaking havoc.

Some speakers, such as Margarita Papandreu of Greece, argued that women are more peaceful and more inclined toward conflict resolution than men, an argument hotly refuted by participants who knew that often, women too - and not only the Margaret Thatchers of this world - can be nationalistic and chauvinistic. No orthodoxy remained unturned, no statement went unchallenged, but in the supportive atmosphere our hosts created, hugs and strategies were swapped, and friendships flourished.

Many of the Serbian and Kosovan women had serious difficulties on their way to the newly-created, nationalistic Croatian state. Some conference participants were detained on the Serbia - Croatia border for many hours. Some women, former Bosnian refugees, and now refugees in third countries, such as Canada, went through thick red tape in order to reach the peace conference. But they arrived. However, the Palestinian peace activist Jihad Abu Zneid, of the Israeli and Palestinian women's joint venture for peace 'The Jerusalem Link', despite the clearance she managed to secure for her papers and travel documents at the eleventh hour, was prevented at the last moment by the Israeli authorities at Tel Aviv airport, from travelling to the conference.

Conference participants protested, but this was a salutary reminder that despite the fact that women though not necessarily more peaceful than men can usually find a way of sitting around a table, swapping life stories and talking across national divides, are not part of the negotiation teams of any of the 'peace processes' currently being negotiated in Northern Ireland, in Israel-Palestine, or in the former Yugoslavia. All these 'peace processes,' negotiated by military men, with bodies of men, women and children piled high in the background, desperately need the input of the many women peace activists who congregated for that unforgettable October weekend in Zagreb. War is a gendered process, and until we incorporate a definite feminist agenda in the peace negotiations, 'peace' will also remain gendered, the exclusive domain of the boys and their military games.

Ronit Lentin

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How Neutral is Irish Research?

This March, a small group of women caused a furore at University College Galway when they took direct action to protect Ireland's neutrality.

Women Against Military Research took to the UCG campus to mount an education campaign and protest after they discovered that aerospace research being carried out at the university may have military applications. Students responded positively to the petition and were concerned that military research might be happening at UCG.

The research, which is funded under European Framework Four, a programme which funds non-military research. Entitled APIAN (Advanced Propulsion Integration and Noise), the project deals with the effects of propeller noise on an aircraft. But according to a fact sheet distributed by AfrI, 'there are strong indications that, for some of the partners involved, there is a military interest.' UCG's research is directly applicable to Future Large Aircraft (FLA), a military craft soon to be developed by Airbus Industrie. When asked about their interest in the UCG research, a spokesman for Airbus stated their interest 'could only be for the FLA because there were no other projects that involved propellers'.

The women who formed Women Against Military Research are deeply concerned that this research contradicts 'the philosophical aspiration of Ireland's neutrality'. In their letter to the president of UCG, they also stated 'since the end of World War Two, 23 million people, the majority of them civilians, women and children, have been killed in warfare. At the same time, women and children all over the world are dying from a lack of basic natural resources.

'Women and children are expendable in time of war.

'Military research is expendable at all times. Its sole purpose is to make money without regard for the consequence: the consequence is death'.

AfrI states that 'it would seem that UCG's resources are being used for purposes related to the FLA, without the knowledge of those running the project. At worse, it could be that there is tacit collusion between those heading the research and some of the commercial partners, though there is no evidence of this'. Research director Dr. Johnny Eaton vehemently denied there is a military dimension to his research when he was interviewed by the Galway *City Tribune*. But Women Against Military Research are certain there is a military connection to the research, and they want that information to be made public.

Elizabeth OShea



Women Against Military Research want details made public of any research that may have military applications

FEMINISM COMMUNITY POLITICS

edited by Ailbhe Smyth

brings together the work of twenty eight leading Irish community-based and feminist activists, academics and writers, who explore issues of major importance to women working for social and political change.

Women and Community Activism
Teresa Nyland, Noreen Byrne, Kathleen Maher, Helen Harris, Gráinne Healy

Feminist Politics
Marie Mulholland, Ivana and Milada Bacik, Ruth Riddick, Jean Berry, Ger Moane, Felly Nkweto Simmonds

Women's Studies in the Community
Mary Bridget Kelly, Venetia McEllin, Marie Crawley, Longford and Balbriggan Women's Studies Group, Joanna McMinn

European and International Perspectives
Anne-Marie McGauran, Margaretta D'Arcy, Niamh Reilly

Personal Perspectives
Victoria Chan, Eilis Rooney, Ivy Bannister

Poetry
Catherine Phil McCarthy, Celia de Fréine, Mairíde Woods, Eithne Strong

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e-mail: WERRC@Ollamh.UCD.IE
http://www.ucd.ie/~werrc

WERRC

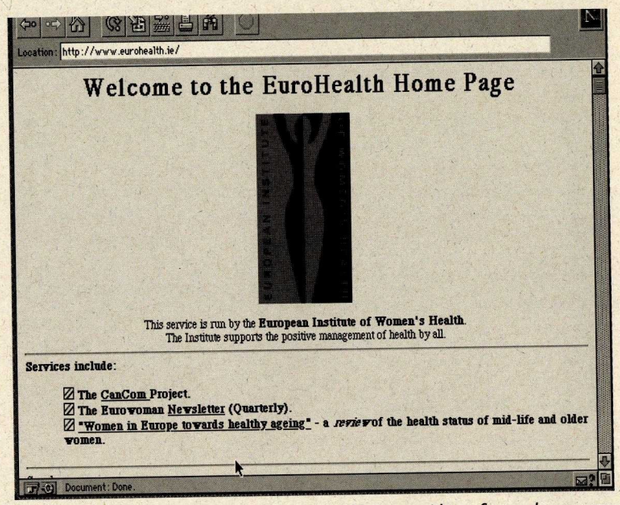
Hot Hype

or is it? Susan O'Donnell demystifies the internet

The communications revolution is based on a technology unlike anything we've seen before. This technology shrinks distances. It brings people together, allowing them to communicate and share information across vast distances, across social and cultural barriers. It has the potential to revolutionise Irish society, by making it more democratic, more participatory. Do you know what this technology is called? The telephone. It was introduced in Ireland more than 100 years ago. The first commercial telephone call was made in Dublin between the Gresham Hotel and an office on the south side of the Liffey, in 1878. Since then, it has changed forever the way information is communicated and shared in Ireland, and in all other industrial nations.

The telephone was a communications revolution. On a scale of one to ten of significant technologies, it's unquestionably a ten for most people in the Western world. The Internet will at most be a three or four on that scale for most of us, ever. The Internet is not an information revolution, nor a communications revolution, no matter how much businesses like Microsoft and other computer companies say it is, or Internet service providers like Ireland Online or Indigo want it to be. Their business is to sell computers, or Internet service. The Internet is just a tool, a communications tool, something that's useful in some situations and useless in others. The most important questions you should be asking about the Internet are: What's it good for? and, can I do the same thing more easily by using the telephone, the fax, the post, or by going to the library? And, of course, how much does it cost to use? Not only the cost of the computer hardware, modem, software or Internet connection, but also the Telecom charge for using the phone line. It may be fun to sit down at your computer and surf the Web for an hour every day, but you're going to pay for it when the phone bill arrives. The Internet can be useful to you and your organisation, but it will never be as useful as the telephone. The telephone - I mean live voice conversations, people talking to each other - will continue to be, for as long as I'm alive, the most important information and communication technology in our place of work and our homes.

The Internet is a computer network. A computer network is what you have when two or more computers can communicate with each other. They do this by speaking the same language, or protocol. Computers have been "talking" to each other for more than 30 years. Most computer networks are private. Today there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of computer networks around the world - networks of computers talking to each other - and most of them are owned by private sector companies. On private networks, the wires, lines and cables through which the digital messages travel are owned or leased by private companies are not accessible to the public. The Internet, in contrast, is a public computer network. It is an international federation of computer networks which use the same communication protocols to talk to each other. On the Internet, the wires, lines and cabling through which the messages travel are generally owned by the public telephone companies. So, in most industrial nations, Internet access is open to anyone who can afford to pay for it. Most people in the world will never use the Internet. I estimate the number of Internet users today as considerably less than one percent of the world's population, and I don't expect that figure to change by the end of this decade, if ever. You have to remember that the Internet uses the public telephone system. Fewer than one-third of the world's households have a telephone, and most people in the world have never made a telephone call. In the global scheme, the Internet is very unimportant to the way people communicate and exchange information. However, it can be useful in some situations for community and voluntary work.



The European Institute of Women's Health website provides a fast and easy way to find up to date health information. Their cancer information is also available on diskette for users without the internet.

The interest of community groups in the internet is significant because the hype about the Internet is that the technology is inherently democratic. This is not true. The Internet is only as democratic as the people using it. The Internet can be used in new ways to challenge dominant social relations and support organised democratic movements, community development, and so on. However, right-wing and military forces are also using the Internet, to work against democratic social movements. All communications technologies have been used in the past and will continue to be used to support both democracy and fascism, and a range of ideologies in-between, and you can't judge a technology without looking at who is using it and how they're using it. While governments in countries as diverse as the United States and China are legally limiting internet communications, community groups are challenging this trend and eagerly searching for the good in technology. As part of the Dublin City University research project entitled The Voluntary Sector in the Information Age, we organised a conference in September 1996 for community and voluntary organisations, harnessing the internet. More than 140 people attended, representing more than 80 community and voluntary organisations. The conference was booked up a week before the event; a few dozen more interested people could not be registered because of space limitations. The conference included presentations by community and voluntary organisations about how they were using the internet.

Use of the internet is lower in women's organisations, due to lack of funding, attitudes towards technology and disinterest and perceived or actual lack of need, but a number of women's groups have been proactive. One of these groups, which also attended the conference, was the European Institute for Women's Health, whose web site is at, www.eurohealth.ie. The institute in Dublin works to establish health issues firmly on the European political agenda and promote women's health awareness. They have been using the internet for about a year, and it has proven to be a very cost-effective way for staff to communicate both within and with contacts outside the Institute. Electronic mail has been particularly useful and far less expensive than sending international faxes. However, staff have found that people they send e-mail to do not always respond to the messages.

The Can Com project on women's cancers developed by the Institute is an excellent example of a woman's organisation using electronic media to the full. The project is available both on a world wide web site and on diskette. While the internet is not the miracle it is hyped up to be, its potential as a means of information and communication in Ireland has as much potential as any woman's imagination can give it. While public access is developing slowly (see 'Access Issues' box,) it's worthwhile for women and their organisations to explore the technology now.

Susan O'Donnell is a lecturer in communications at Dublin City University

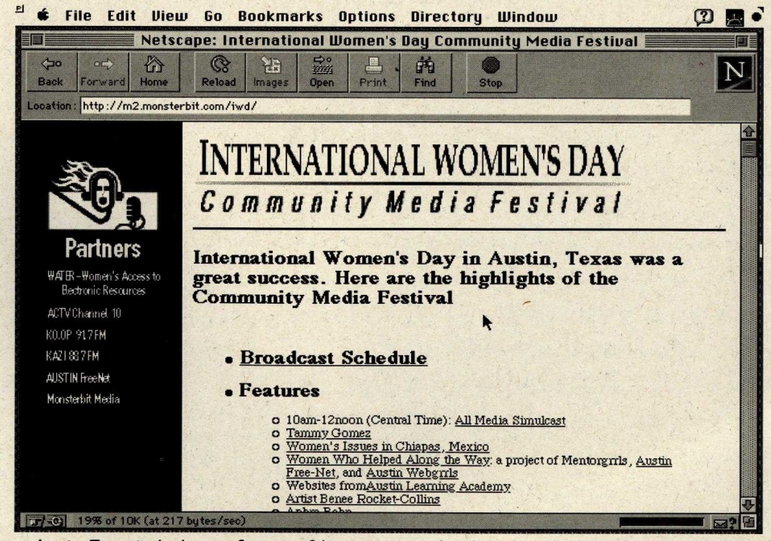
'Women on the Web' is a major European conference on what's happening in cyberspace. It will be held from 6 - July, 1997 at the University of Huddersfield. The conference themes are sharing experience so developing courses and materials; examining the implications of creating new models of communication; and networking at local, European and global levels, and the organisers have issued a call for papers. For more information, visit the 'Women on the Web' web site at http://www.hud.ac.uk/events/events.html or by writing to: Women on the Web Conference, European Office, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield HD1 3DH.

The Access Issue

One of the biggest challenges for women who are not institutionally affiliated to a university or organisation is the issue of access. Dublin Public Libraries currently offer access to the Internet from the ILAC Centre Library in Henry Street. A machine can be booked for two hours in any one week. Ring (01)8734333 on Monday morning between 9.30 and 10.30 to make a booking. As of February 1997, there is a one week waiting period for a booking. Nenagh Public Library now offers free Internet access and training courses. A number of other public libraries currently have access for library staff, but hope to soon extend this to public access, while others hope to have access in the near future. As the situation is changing and developing it is best to ring your local public library to find out about internet access in your area. Microsoft Development Corporation are currently in discussion with local government computer services boards, regarding installing equipment and software and connecting public libraries in disadvantaged areas to the Internet. It is hoped this may happen in Dublin and Limerick initially.

Cybercafés offer paid access to the Internet. The cybercafé at Art House in the Temple Bar area of Dublin offers access for £4 per hour. To maintain an e-mail account costs an additional £20 per year, or £5 per month. A facility for inputting information is not available and of course there are additional costs in that cybercafé patrons are expected to buy food or beverages. Anecdotal evidence would tend to suggest that more males than females use the services of the cybercafé.

Helen Fallon



Austin, Texas is the home of a powerful woman-centred multimedia project. Every year, women's media groups and radio and television stations come together to broadcast on three media: television, radio and internet.

We're not writing for the boys



Since she began writing in 1982, Rita Ann Higgins' poetry has been highly praised and widely read. Eilean Ni Chuilleanain has described her work as 'witty and frightening, exposing hidden anxieties or dismissing them to make anarchic fun.'

Rita Ann thinks things have changed for women writers. 'It's only a small change, but it is positive,' she told *Ms.chief*. 'We're not really writing for the boys,' Rita Ann continued. 'We're writing for ourselves and we are writing for other women. When I started writing I hadn't really read any poetry and I needed to start learning about it and become informed. When I started going into bookshops and looking at anthologies I thought I was the only woman writing because there were no women in them. I really was gobsmacked. I think it 's been very difficult for women because they weren't recognised, they weren't recognised in the Field Day anthology. It's a disgrace but the power of women's voice is coming through again and again.'

Rita Ann feels that it's women themselves who are making the change. 'Women poets are really asserting themselves and it's great to see. Mary Robinson's influence is palpable, she's enthusiastic and supportive, and women like Eavan Boland and Ailbhe Smyth are doing incredible work. They're talking about women's voices and the oxygen women need and we can pick up on that. Then we just need to believe it ourselves. Personally I'm quite forceful, I have no intention of being kept down by anyone. I have something to say and I'll say it.'

Rita Ann Higgins' latest collection includes the poem printed here. *Sunny Side Plucked, New and Selected Poems,* is published by Bloodaxe Books,

Gretta's Hex

For years
Gretta cleaned
the factory
down the road from us.

When she had to have
her dog put down
because he had the mange

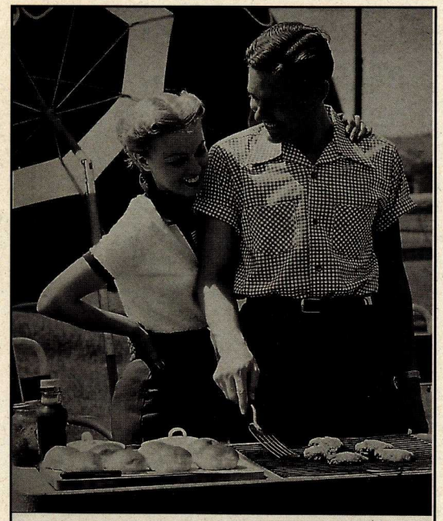
she got the runs
for three days
Babbs Laffey
told the whole street.

Before this
she never missed work
not when her four girls
had the measles,
nor when the Pope came
to Ballybrit.

Now she went to the boss
She asked him for time off
to mourn her dead dog
She had long before the four girls
who recovered well from measles.

The boss said,
'Sorry Ann
I mean Gretta
I can't spare you now
what with Sadie
I mean Annie, on holiday
and the two Marys out sick,

you're the only one here
who can operate that buffer.
Can't you mourn your dead dog here,
take an extra fifteen minutes
at tea break, good girl'.



All these foul noises
from the boss's mouth
upset Gretta
who never missed
a cleaning factory
four girls with measles
Young people of Ireland
Pope filled Ballybrit day
in her life.

From her grief stricken
dead dog hole in the heart
she wished him :

Sightreducingweekendsahead
buffer festering
the company of bats
the company of bats (over tired and
hungry ones)
nouns with genitive singular inflection

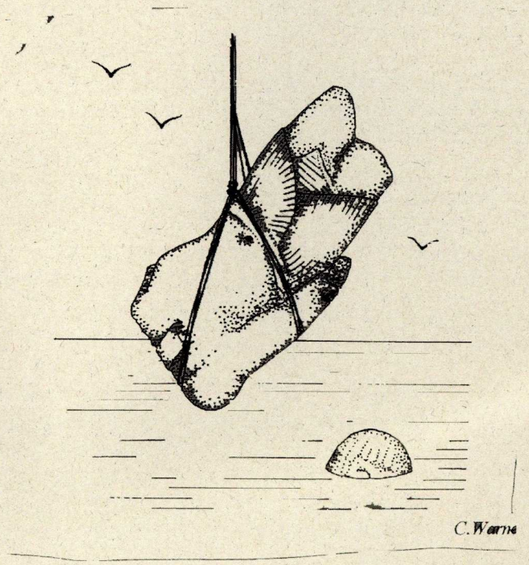
verbs with janitor holding injections
slow dipping in the wallets (by others)
Sadie and the two Marys
and above all
sleepus interruptus with demonos oftenus
plus an extra fifteen minutes in hell.
Amen.

Books

Flight Into Reality
Rosemarie Rowley
Tree of Life Productions
Cassette available from 53 Rosemount Court, Booterstown, Co. Dublin.

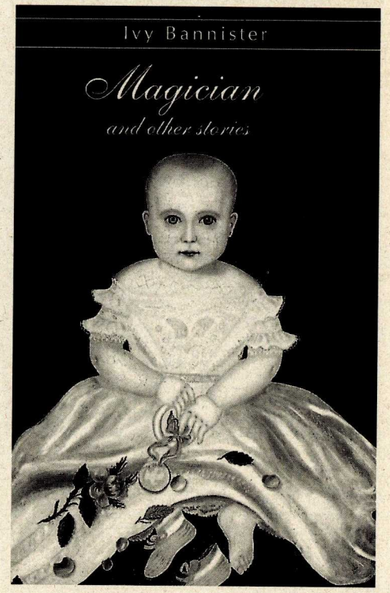
It's an innovative and wise idea to present poetry as an aural experience, and Flight Into Reality is a valiant attempt in a relatively new genre. However, offering new poetry this way requires a great deal of planning and technical ability, and sadly some of that is lacking. Rosemary has been published by Martello and Rowan Tree, and this version of her 1989 text offers 'the myth of Isis and Osiris...the balance, and love between the sexes...an impressive, passionate exploration of failures and renewed hope and faith'. Listening, we ask is this myth truly the poem's base (because it is a fashion at present to hitch onto the skirts of any available god/goddess story; call it pre-millennium spiritual need if you will), but technical faults get in the way. There's no shame in writers not being outstanding readers (Yeats and Eliot never did their live poetry justice) but it should be recognised, and Rosemary's hesitant intonation prevents 'Flight' being heard with any clarity. Brian Lally's production has it's own problems. The 'garage sound' of poetry is born here with untidy editing and partial sound breakdown. This belittles poetry and it's value, and Rosemary's ability cannot be perceived with any clarity. Whilst Rosemary is to be applauded for her striking step in demystifying poetry, and bringing it to a wider audience, technical polish is required. With that, Flight Into Reality could be rewarded with the attention it may well deserve.

Hayley Fox-Roberts



Reviews and Previews

Magician and Other Stories
Ivy Bannister
Poolbeg £5.99



This first collection of short stories by Ivy Bannister, a Dublin-based writer, is a very mixed collection. Some of the stories are most straightforward, others slightly bizarre; even grotesque. Each of the eleven stories in this book is about some type of relationship and the havoc they can cause in peoples lives. However there is a very cold feeling about many of the stories that distances the reader and this makes it difficult to become very involved in the stories, even though I enjoyed the imagination and ideas in them. Two of the stories, 'The Magician' and 'The Family life of Jimmy McManus', are interesting ideas with good humourous twists and strong hints of darkness.but they are written in such a whimsical style that they were spoiled for me. Another pair of stories which were less imaginative but more successful were 'My Mothers Daughter' and 'The Naughty Bits' both of which recalled in a more straightforward manner and conveyed well the sadness, uncertainty on the death in an unhappy mother-daughter relationship. Other stories in this collection are a mixture of these two extremes, and some work better than others. On the whole I found this book both interesting and enjoyable, though not perhaps as good as it could have been.

Fiona Martin

Women in Film and Television **was established to provide a professional forum for the advancement and celebration of women in the Irish film, television and radio industries.** ***WFTV*** **publishes a newsletter, web pages, and a directory; runs workshops; provides a production fund and training bursaries for members. For more information and membership forms contact:**

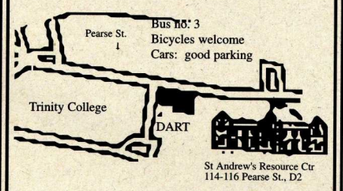
Women in Film and Television,
5, Gilford Court,
Sandymount, Dublin 4.
tel: (01) 7067035

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The 1997 Dublin Pride celebrations happen from 22 - 28 July. The always popular Camp Vamps have been confirmed for the Pride women's disco on 27 July. If you're interested in doing something fun and fabulous and you're willing to commit yourself to at least one specific task, attend the Pride Volunteer Meeting on Saturday, 19 April from 2-4.30pm upstairs in Out on the Liffey, Ormond Quay, Dublin 1. If you want to design and produce floats, organise a roller blade troupe, staple placards but you can't make the meeting, contact Dublin Pride from 11am - 3pm on (01) 8723500 x272.

Women's News *to publish monthly*

For fourteen years, a volunteer collective has produced *Women's News* in Belfast. The magazine has been an important feminist information source, and it is the only feminist magazine in Ireland to survive more than a few years. The group's diligence and commitment have been paid back with their successful applications for European Union and Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust funding. This funding allows the magazine to take on paid workers, begin publishing monthly from October 1997 and reach out to women's groups who haven't been introduced to *Women's News*. Look for *Women's News* in a shop near you!

New Artist Profile:

Annette Smyth

Performance Artist

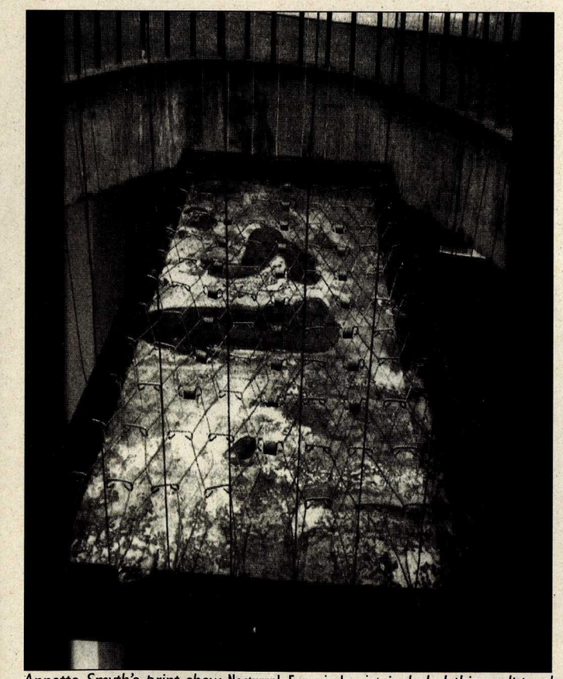
Curriculum Vitae

1996
BA in Fine Art, University Ulster

November 1996
Nocturnal Enuresis
Random Access International
Performance Art Day,
Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford

January/February 1997
Nocturnal Enuresis Imprint
Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin

January 1997
Tolerance and Intolerance
Performance, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin



Annette Smyth's print show Nocturnal Enuresis Imprint *included this sculptural element, hung in the atrium of Temple Bar Galleries, Dublin. Photos by artist.*

Annette Smyth spoke with Elizabeth OShea

Performance art is a natural extension of the way Annette Smyth thinks.. 'When I think of something I think visually and I use my body,' she says. 'I'm a contact person: I like to touch things, so using my body for performances is very important. When I think of something, it always comes out in an immediate reaction where my body is involved, like a gesture, I like gestures. I feel as an artist I'm compelled to deal with the past, to deal with experiences, to deal with things that make me feel and when I feel things powerfully, I need to express them and they come out in visual ways. They sometimes come out in a sound way, like a scream or something, but it's always something that is gesture.

Annette's recent work, *Nocturnal Enuresis,* developed directly out of her own experience and the compulsion to deal with the past. Nocturnal enuresis means 'nighttime bedwetting'. 'Lots of things happen to bedwetters,' Annette explains. 'Still it happens. Children are punished constantly because of something they can't control. In the first performance of *Nocturnal Enuresis* I wet the bed in public, which was a major breakthrough. When the urine stained the metal as rust, my immediate reaction was to write with urine on the metal, to use it as a canvas to write text on it, to write stories, very hurtful things and they developed in to a piece like a photograph, The photograph became very luscious, very beautiful, and it changed from something that was very negative, to something that was very positive, just simply because of the aesthetic value of the photographs.

Dealing with the past and moving on is the philosophy that fuels Annette's work. She explains, 'the important thing, I think, when people deal with their past, with their problems, is to not hold onto them, Drag them up out of the depth or where ever they were, and deal with them but then to move o, to continue life. It's through art, that's how I deal myself, especially in *Nocturnal Enuresis*,. It's very easy to see everything negatively, it's very easy to say, isn't this horrible, look at the state of this place, look at the state of what their doing to Dublin, it's very easy to see everybody and everything in a negative way; to see them in a positive way is much harder. There obviously have to be good points and to see things positively is more important. That's what happened with *Nocturnal Enuresis*,. I took something that was very negative, and it changed into a very positive thing, for me, and it was a healing process,

Her newer work, *Tolerance & Intolerance,* has developed naturally out of *Nocturnal Enuresis,* and Annette feels it broadens her focus. 'It's more general, It makes the issues wider. *Nocturnal Enuresis* is based on tolerance; the healing process. Dealing with how tolerant we are towards ourselves, towards other people, towards children, I think that's important now,' She has performed this piece at Temple Bar Galleries in conjunction with her print exhibit *Nocturnal Enuresis Imprint* and is already moving on. 'I'm trying to work on a sound and video installation and bring it to Germany and hopefully put it on in the Project in September. I want to show it at a rave. I think Berlin is good right now; the whole rave scene, the whole drug scene, what we do to ourselves, what we put ourselves through. We don't hear ourselves and other people don't hear us when we cry out in pain or in suffering.

TOMORROW'S VOICES

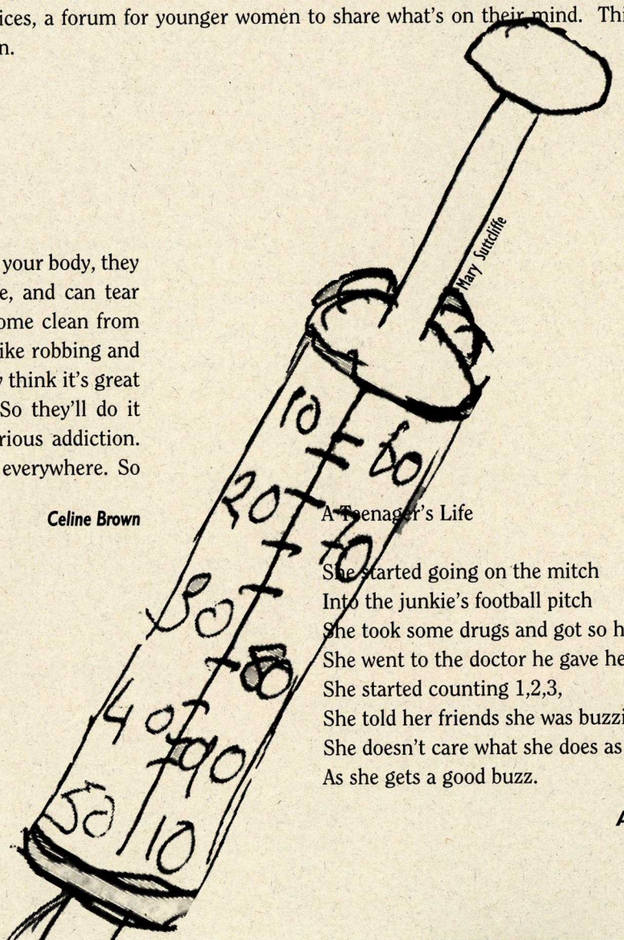
Ms.chief recently facilitated a workshop with young women which developed into this page, TOMORROW'S VOICES. Every issue of Ms.chief will include tomorrow's voices, a forum for younger women to share what's on their mind. This issue's writers and artists all live in south inner city Dublin.

DRUG SPEAK

Drugs

Drugs can do very serious damage to your body, they can even kill you. They ruin your life, and can tear your family apart. It's difficult to become clean from drugs. You start doing illegal things, like robbing and selling the robbed stuff for drugs. They think it's great and that they will get away with it. So they'll do it again and again. Drugs are a very serious addiction. Thousands of people die from drugs everywhere. So stay away from "drugs."

Celine Brown



A Teenager's Life

She started going on the mitch
Into the junkie's football pitch
She took some drugs and got so high
She went to the doctor he gave her phy
She started counting 1,2,3,
She told her friends she was buzzing on E
She doesn't care what she does as long
As she gets a good buzz.

Ann Marie O' Dwyer

Drugs

Only robbin' thugs take drugs, they spend their cash on heroin and hash
they were over her buzzing like a bee, sucking on a sweet called XTC
in the rain and cold nights they're on the streets having a fight.
They're taking drugs to their decease, in the end they'll rest in peace.
It's raining and pouring, drugs are boring.
There's no reflex sniffing Epplex.
You get HIV by doing what you do, but you are stupid, you haven't a clue.
I pity the parents that watch their kids die
if you want the truth I will not lie
It's your opinion on what you wear
use your head and don't smoke gear.

Lorraine Donegan and Ann Marie O'Dwyer



Photo: Annette Smyth

Celine Brown, Mary Suttcliffe and Ann Marie O'Dwyer, who attend the SICCDA Community Training Workshop

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contacts

Send notices for the events and noticeboard pages to:
Ms.chief, P O Box 3327, Dublin 8.
Ms.chief 15 appears June, 1997.
Copy deadline for notices is 1 June.

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

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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Ireland's feminist forum

bile file

Claire Campbell gets mad about a male conspiracy

The recent resignation of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn from political life has stirred up much debate about women who work and also parent children. The stress factor has been highlighted while the issues of personal fulfilment, job satisfaction and intellectual stimulation have been briefly addressed. It was therefore with surprise that I encountered the front page headline in the *Sunday Times* on February 2nd which read 'Children of Working Mothers more likely to fail GCSEs'. The article said that children of middle class families were at a disadvantage if their mothers went out to work (it also said that children from working class backgrounds benefited from day-care). I searched for the statistics which proved that children of fathers who stayed at home performed better in exams but I found no mention of fathers at all! Is this to suggest that women are the sole educators and disciplinarians in the home? This hardly does justice to men.

The article went on to suggest that women were selfish in holding on to their careers to the detriment of their children's upbringing. One woman was quoted as saying that women could return to the workforce when their children were grown up but that children could never make up for the loss and deprivation suffered in childhood. I consider this to be an insult to women. It suggests that a good mother is one who sacrifices everything for her children - including her own self importance. The notion that she can simply pick up her career where she left off before her child rearing days is ludicrous. The middle-aged woman facing a return to work also faces a battle with self confidence, with potential employers and with begrudgers who think that jobs are for young people and fathers. Industry does not stand still. The woman finds that her skills are out-dated and is regularly forced to take up work which is below her competence and which offers low pay. Meanwhile, her male counterpart has progressed through the ranks to managerial level. Even Superwoman couldn't make up for ten/fifteen/twenty years out of the work-force.

So why is it that we see parenting as a job for women only? Is it that men would not sacrifice their careers to bring up their children? Is it convenient for men to perpetuate the myth that women are natural childminders? Do they have too much to lose?

Ms.chief

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