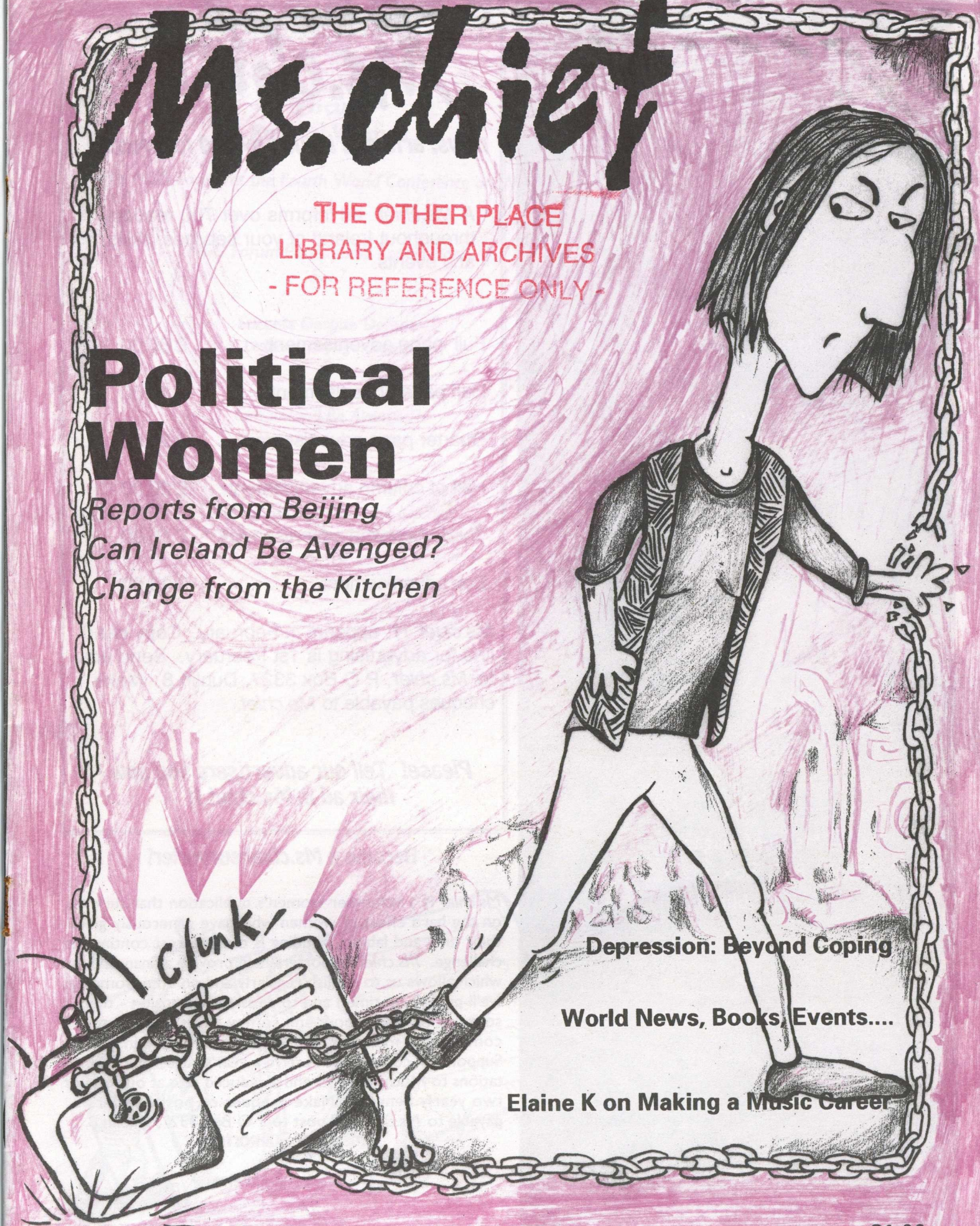
Ms. chief

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Political Women

Reports from Beijing
Can Ireland Be Avenged?
Change from the Kitchen



Depression: Beyond Coping

World News, Books, Events....

Elaine K on Making a Music Career

ISSN: 0791 - 6795 No. 10 1995 £1.00

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Donna Hoffman

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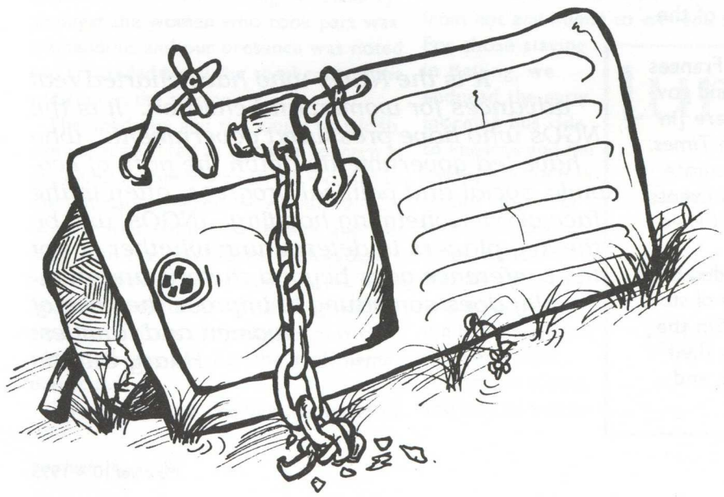
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I've been feeling something like what a drop of rain must feel when she falls into the sea. When she suddenly feels so big, so strong, so powerful, part of a vastness which connects from one continent to another.

-Participant at NGO Forum, as recorded by the Women's International News Gathering Service (WINGS) .

The NGO Forum at the Fourth World Conference on Women

Over 30,000 women attended the Non-Governmental Organisations Forum in Huairou, China, held from 31st August - 9th September. The Forum complemented the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The member states of the United Nations (and permanent observers such as the Vatican, who have voting power at Conferences) met to negotiate and ratify the Platform for Action for women's equality. Attending the form gave NGO workers, activists and individuals a chance to lobby the official conference in Beijing as well as to build and strengthen important links with other organisations from around the world.

Many participants have commented that the NGO Forum was so large you couldn't comprehend it. As well as plenary sessions, protests, social exchanges and journeys back and forth to the United Nations Conference, the NGO Forum included 5,000 work - shops related to the critical areas for action identified during the drafting of the Platform for Action [right.] At a post-Beijing evening sponsored by the Women's Education Research and Resource Centre, Cathleen O'Neill brought home to non-delegates exactly the size of the Forum when she showed us the directory of workshops for the event. It was the thickness of a provincial phonebook. Delegates only got to see and hear a small portion of the diversity on the 42 hectare Forum site.

The media treated the Forum the way they usually treat women's issues. Australian Kath McGinty, Executive Director of the International Women's Development Agency, protested at the Australian media's habit of reporting on film stars attending the conference. In Ireland, there were no daily five minute news reports direct from Beijing, no special sections in the newspapers, which you would expect when a Conference and parallel Forum extensively cover issues of life saving and enriching importance for 52% of the world's population - and their children.

And the NGO Forum *was* that important, as Frances Fitzgerald noted. "Partnership between NGOs and government, as seen in most sophisticated form here [in Beijing], represents the future," she told the *Irish Times*. Hilary Clinton's summation was particulary accurate [right]. The experience after such international events is always the same: Governments talk, but NGOs go home and do the work.

We couldn't contact every woman who attended the NGO Forum in Huairou; featuring that diversity of stories would require three issues of *Ms.chief*. On the following pages some of the participants tell us their impressions of the Forum, what they achieved, and what needs to be done for the future.

Twelve Critical Areas for Action at Beijing

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- Unequal access to and inadequate educational opportunities
- Inequalities in health status and unequal access to and inadequate health care services
- Violence against women
- Effects of armed and other kinds of conflict on women
- Inequality on women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself.
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels.
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Lack of awareness of, and commitment to, international and nationally recognised women's human rights.
- Insufficient mobilisation of mass media to promote women's positive contribution to society
- Lack of adequate recognition and support of women's contribution to managing natural resources and safeguarding the environment
- The rights of the girl child

It is the NGOs who have charted real advances for women and children. It is the NGOs who have pressured governments, who have led governments down the path of economic, social and political progress, often in the face of overwhelming hostility. [NGOs] will be the key players in determining whether or not this conference goes beyond rhetoric and actually does something to improve the lives of women and families.

- Hilary Clinton

Niamh Wilson, Women's Aid



The three weeks that I spent in Beijing at the UN Conference on Women were the most exhausting three weeks I have ever had. I gathered so much information, ideas and impressions that I think it will take me a few more weeks before I can think clearly about the conference and about its relevance for Irish women.

On our first day at the NGO Forum, we picked up the Forum programme which contained information about 3,500 workshops and activities. We were surprised and delighted to see that the first workshop on the first page was the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed workshop facilitated by Maria Hegarty.

The highlight for me of the NGO Forum was the Global Tribunal on Women's Human Rights and Government Accountability which was convened by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in Rutgers University, New Jersey. Mary McGoldrick, who is a volunteer with Women's Aid, testified about her own personal experience of domestic violence. Mary's testimony was straightforward and moving and many of the women who were in the audience of 2,500 came to Mary afterwards to tell her that they felt that she was talking for them.

On Tuesday the 5th of September, Irish women marched to the European Women's Lobby Plenary session where EU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Padraic Flynn was speaking. Carrying quilts made by Irish women's groups, north and south, banners and the Irish flag, the women chanted "Irish women want ... an end to violence against women and children ... full employment ... the right to choose ... the right to divorce ... lesbian rights." The feeling of solidarity amongst the women who took part was tremendous and our presence was noted and applauded by all the speakers and the audience at the session.

The solidarity and the issues that Irish women highlighted as areas of concern at the NGO Forum were carried forward to the Official Conference. About 20 -25 women attended the conference and met daily with the official Irish Delegation. Some of the most contentious issues were sexual and reproductive rights, sexual orientation and the allocation of new or additional resources for the implementation actions.

One of the most positive memories of the conference was the way in which many Irish women at the conference worked together and supported each other in their work. Although we had a limited amount of pre-conference preparation - facilitated by Banúlacht - much of the co-ordination was done when we got to Beijing. We organised on the spot and with one or two exceptions presented a united and informed NGO delegation at both the NGO Forum and the Official Conference. I would hope that we can work together at home to maximise the effect of the UN Conference on Women and ensure that the Platform for Action will be a document that will make a difference.

Niamh Wilson's contribution has appeared previously in the NWCI newsletter, In Focus.

Mamo McDonald, The Older Women's Network

In the wide spectrum of women's issues, the concerns of older women hold a very peripheral place. This was well demonstrated at the recent NGO Forum for Women in Beijing, China, August 30th-September 8th by the absence of any media coverage for "ageing" events, the placing of our tent on the far reaches of the forum campus, the paucity of young participants at the Intergenerational Dialogue and the lack of references to age issues in the statements of governments.

What was even more daunting was the glazed look which came over the faces of other women when, on enquiry, you told them you were representing European Older Women - "ageing" they didn't want to know!

A less determined group might have given up - but older women are made of sterner stuff. We braved the elements from hot and humid to wet and stormy. For those staying in Beijing, we endured the early morning bus ride to Huairou and the twenty minute trek to our tent. For those staying in Huairou, joking seemed the best way to cope with the inadequacies of the very basic apartment blocks and lack of amenities.

The work was intense: long, interesting hours of it. Taking turns acting as hostesses in the tent, we exchanged experiences, held caucus meetings and learned much.

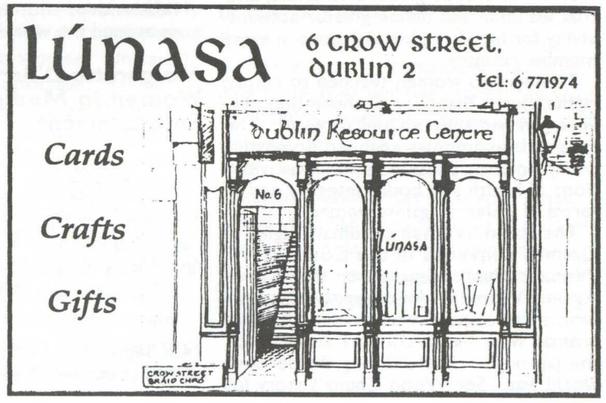
The life stories of Chinese women who spoke were profoundly moving - we heard of the lack of education for girls, especially in country areas, the consequent inability to get work, the cycle of dependency, low self esteem and no expectations ending very often in dementia in old age (women suffer dementia at double the rate of men in China). With the absence of state pensions, fewer young people to support parents (because of the one child to one family policy) and the erosion of traditional respect for old age, many older women end up as slaves in the homes of their children.

Hearing too of the hard lives of old and poor women in Argentina and the story told by the Filipino woman who lives out of a bag on the streets of Manila - it made us realise how lucky we are to be part of the developed world. We may be irked by our own health systems, lack of training and job opportunities and inadequate representation but, looked at on the broader canvas, our lot is a privileged one.

Some of our group concentrated on the main government conference with the Platform for Action and the need to influence the language of the eventual document so that it reflected the concerns of older women. There were caucus meetings and briefing sessions and lobbying of government delegations.

Despite exhaustion, we came home energised and inspired by the need for action, not just at national or European level, but globally.

To our younger sisters we say **"Where you are now, we too have been, where we are now, you too will be, so listen well - we speak for you as much as for ourselves."**



Fiona Tiernan, Education Executive, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

We were honoured and excited to be part of the 4th World Conference. We prepared a leaflet that described the work and services the Rape Crisis Centre provides. Mindful of the absolute international aspect of the conference, we had our literature translated into the six official languages of the conference. This in turn opened many a conversation for us with women with little English but eager to share their own stories.

Our objectives at the NGO forum were to attend relevant workshops and meetings that were directly related to the work we do, to relate our experience as a Rape Crisis Centre evolving and developing since 1979 and to network and connect with like minded organisations. We focused on two main areas of critical concern - violence against women and the effects of armed conflict on women. We also worked on the areas of the girl child, health, education and economic issues. We came to see that all of the areas interlink and affect each other.

While the logistics of getting to and from the conference sites were challenging, we managed to cover many workshops at the NGO forum as well as caucus meetings and Irish, European and American briefings at the official conference.

We attended two days of tribunal testimony from women all over the world who recounted personal experience of the denial of the most basic human rights. The Global Tribunal on Accountability for Women's Human Rights demanded an end to the human rights abuses of women, increased global awareness, and that we build and define greater accountability for human rights violations in every member country.

Twenty two women testified to human rights abuses that they or those they represented had suffered and survived. The range of testimonies spanned domestic family violence, political persecution, violations of health and bodily integrity and all forms of violence against women.

The Asian Women's Human Rights Council convened In the Court of Women: Public Hearings on the Crimes Against Women. Amongst the twenty women who spoke was an older Korean woman who was a 'comfort woman' to the Japanese soldiers during the second world war. See Woon Chung's story full of horror and courage is not over for women in other parts of the so called developed world. While listening to her account we were conscious of the fact that yet in the 1990s, rape camps were being run in the former Yugoslavia, in another war situation. Indira Harci from Bosnia spoke of the devastating effects of this war.

The NGO forum also offered an opportunity to celebrate women of the world. Wonderful visual displays of craft work from all over the world enlivened every meeting tent. Plays, song and dance, sometimes spontaneous, were a colourful backdrop to the earnest and 'serious work' at hand.

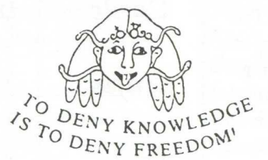
The official conference held in Beijing International Conference Centre struck a more solemn note. Government delegations busied themselves with meetings to try to agree what was left for discussion in the promised Platform for Action. In turn, we met regularly with the Irish government delegation to participate in a two way communication, they letting us know what changes had been agreed on, and we keeping them up to date on what NGOs wanted to see implemented.

Where to now? We have a Platform for Action. To ensure it is not just an aspirational document we must continue to work with government to ensure the ground gained is not lost. On the NGO practical side, we have made valuable contact with similar agencies around the world. We are committed to helping our international colleagues, by way of sharing our written literature on the work of the Rape Crisis Centre, our annual statistics, training material on sexual harassment at work and suggestions on fund raising. The Beijing Conference was just the beginning of relationships with these sister organisations around the world.

The National Women's Council of Ireland commissioned an independent report within the context of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. The report deals with the priority areas that were discussed at the Beijing Conference. It gives evidence of progress towards equality here in Ireland, but it also details actions which must be implemented to eliminate discrimination.

If you're interested in a copy of the report, contact the National Women's Council for more information on (01) 6615268.

Margaretta D'Arcy, Women in Media and Entertainment



The Irish women's voice was heard, listened to, and acted upon, at 2 am on the 14th September 1995, when the officials of 198 countries of the UN unanimously and without reservations agreed that their governments would commit themselves to "measure in quantitative terms unremunerated work that is outside national account... and to accurately reflect its value in satellite or other official accounts."

Minister Mervyn Taylor TD (head of Ireland's delegation) declared that this country would recognise the value of women's unwaged work in the home. But it was not the Irish delegation that broke the impasse caused by the resistance of the EU and the USA, who both wanted the work counted but not valued. The CARICOM bloc (English-speaking Caribbean), with the support of Brazil, the G77 (a group of countries of the "developing" world who are not part of the wealthy industrialised G7 bloc) countries and China, were the successful champions who put the measure through and persuaded the rest of the world to accept it.

I spoke afterwards to Bernard McDonagh (Irish delegation leader after Mervyn Taylor returned home) and to Avril Doyle TD (representing the Taoiseach) and asked them if they were happy with the outcome and were they really going to implement it? They both said they were happy; and Ms. Doyle said that she saw no reason why a start could not be made by measuring and valuing women's unwaged Caring Work.

All in all, I hope that you are pleased with the message I have brought from Beijing, and that the resolutions passed in the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Western Women's Link, together with the hundreds of petitions signed and "receipts" for unwaged work (where women wrote down what they thought their unwaged work was worth) filled in during the Beijing Briefing Campaign throughout the country, were responded to so strongly by the women of what are termed the "poorer nations" of the developing world.

Women in Media and Entertainment, as part of the International *Women Count* Network, came to Beijing with our purposefully-worded mandate to governments, and as our network contained women from Tanzania, CARICOM, Brazil, India and Pakistan, we were able to work together in intensive lobbying and a full commitment that *all* women's unwaged work should be included - not just the work of women from the "South", as first suggested by some of the EU delegations.

At the end of March 1996, there will be a photographic exhibition in Galway of *24 Hours in the Life of a Woman (29 June 1995)*, combined with videos, posters and other material from Beijing; so you will be able to experience at least a hint of what it was like. Any woman who wants photographs of her own unwaged work to be shown should get in touch with me at this address: 10 St. Bridget's Place Lower, Woodquay, Galway.

Cathleen O'Neill Kilbarrick Local Education for Adult Resources (KLEAR)

"Equality, Development and Peace" was the theme of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women which was held recently in Beijing. The motto was "looking at the world through women's eyes" and one of the main aims was "to bring together women and men to challenge, create and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women".

This was the impossible task facing the 32,000 women NGO representatives from all over the world who travelled to Beijing. Women travelled to make connections, to discuss persistent poverty and to examine the manifestations of powerlessness among women. The NGO Forum was an opportunity for grassroots women to become involved in the debate and to work in close collaboration with the UN conference. I was one of the 80 Irish women who travelled there to "make a difference". I hoped to be a voice for working class women living in poverty and also to work on the Platform for Action by influencing the critical areas of concern dealing with poverty, reproductive rights and inequalities in health - care and education.

For the next 15 days I lived in a world of contradictions; it was like being at a Global Fleadh where every creed, colour, class and culture was present, dealing with every inequality under the sun, all the while operating in an arena which was heavily policed and carefully cordoned off from the everyday world of China. Residents of Huairou were restricted from entering the city during the NGO Forum. The only Chinese people I met were those approved by the government, including waiters, drivers and volunteers, and only those with Chinese drivers licenses were allowed to drive - the rest used either designated taxis or buses. After a while the contradictions became part of the norm to be taken in your stride, alongside 12 hour workshops and learning to squat in public while using the toilet (Sleeping on a board in a gulag, living without milk and eating 'hairy' pork are not worth mentioning in comparison).

Each day I attended a number of Pleanry Sessions, including a tribunal on women's human rights where women gave testimony about human rights abuses in their own countries. Two Irish women gave testimony about different aspects of abuse in Ireland. Mary McGoldrick from Women's Aid gave her own experience of being a battered woman where neither relative or police were able to protect her.

Caitriona Ruane from Belfast gave testimony to human rights abuses in Belfast carried out by the British government.

As well as attending workshops and Plenary session, Irish NGO delegates met each day to share information and to devise action strategies for our daily briefing sessions with the official government delegation to the UN Conference. We shared information with the official delegation about the latest brief emerging from the daily caucus meetings at the NGO Forum. The Caucus meetings examined the 12 critical areas of concern and worked to influence the text still remaining in the square brackets (text not formally agreed to by all governments was placed in square brackets in the Conference working document). The Vatican was also interested in the square brackets and we kept a close eye on the boys in black.

I have only one regret about Beijing. I regret that those Euro Women backed off from challenging Padraig Flynn about attending the Forum in Beijing. Some day sisters, when I have recovered from the shame of it, I will tell you about the "definition of a good life for a woman" as told to us by Pee Wee.

Gail Grossman Freyne, LL.B., MA, Family Therapist & Research Associate, Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC)

June Jordan wrote, "My hope is that our lives will declare this meeting open". My hope is that the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women will be a meeting that will declare our lives open. The Platform for Action has been ratified by 180 nations. The three hundred and sixty one paragraphs deal with the twelve areas of major concern to women: Universal Rights, Poverty, Education, Health, Domestic Violence, Armed Conflict, Participation in Public Decision Making, Gender Equality, Media, Structural Mechanisms, Ecology and the Girl Child. The requests themselves form a litany and a testament to what is so horribly lacking.

For the past twenty years women have been engaged in a Women's Movement that has been burgeoning globally but everywhere fragmented. In the summer of '95, this movement coalesced in Beijing. The United Nations provided the forum but is an organisation that cannot mandate the outcome. It is the nations to which we each belong that can implement this document if they wish. They will not wish; we will have to insist. Be very clear, the burden is still ours. We have another twenty years of sweat and struggle and heartache ahead of us. The implementation of this document will only be achieved at great personal cost to each woman who is willing to sacrifice the quiet life of assimilation in exchange for the opposition and vilification that comes with demanding change in the status quo. Power exists, it is never relinquished willingly, it must always be claimed.

Praxis (practice) and theory must always be interconnected, what we do and why we do it. The theoretical message was delivered clearly by Gertrude Mongella as she annunciated her understanding of political philosophy. She made it clear that women's rights are not a separate category of rights to be dealt with in isolation; they are universal human rights which must inform, re-form the whole corpus of human rights by their inclusion. With this political and philosophical understanding of the universal nature of women's rights we are armed to undertake the praxis in the field of national economics. We must be willing to strive for positions of authority where public decisions are made. We know that the Platform can never be implemented unless our governments release the necessary funds. We are, each and every one of us, obliged to find a way to exert the necessary pressure. Maybe legally by entering political life, maybe illegally by withholding a portion of our income tax (if we are lucky enough to have a taxable income) to pay it directly to women centred projects. Women have gone to jail for peace and justice before. We must, however, each find a way.

For what we must now do, to be faithful to what was striven for and achieved in Beijing, no one has said better than Adrienne Rich: "Women are only beginning to uncover our own truths; many of us would be grateful for some rest in that struggle, would be glad just to lie down with the shreds we have painfully unearthed, and be satisfied with those. Often I feel like an exhaustion in my own body. The politics worth having, the relationships worth having, demand that we delve still deeper".

Success Despite Defeat: Lesbian Lobbying in Beijing

When the NGO Forum and UN Conference began, every mention of sexual orientation in the Platform for Action was bracketted, meaning it was not yet agreed as part of the final Platform. Due to the so-called "unholy alliance" between Islamic states, the Vatican and many African countries, all references to sexual orientation were deleted from the final Platform. Reference to orientation had originally been included in the mission statement and sections on legal and employment discrimination and human rights.

Writing in *Gay Community News*, Niamh Wilson explained the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Platform for Action would have been useful for activists in countries with antihomsexual laws and attitudes. She also feels the commitment "could have been used by organisations and activists here to pressurise the Irish government to introduce legislation that would guarantee equal parenting and partnership rights for lesbians *and* gay men." Activists have lost an excellent tool.

While it's initially discouraging that the very active and well organised Lesbian Caucus did not succeed in getting sexuality included in the Platform, on closer observation,the defeat isn't so bad when considered more deeply.

The 1995 NGO Forum hosted the first Lesbian Tent ever at a UN conference. This provided a social and political focus for women from all over the world. By their visual and active presence, lesbian women in Huairou had an opportunity to counteract at a grassroots level the idea that homosexuality is a Western concept that is irrelevant in Arab nations, Asia, South America and Africa.

And how do you explain this notion, that homosexuality is irrelevant, to Palesa Beverly Ditsie? A South African woman, Ditsie became the first (out) lesbian ever to address the United Nations when she spoke at one of the official plenary sessions. This is the first time this issue has been debated at UN level. Sexual orientation has been put on the agenda of governments that didn't know it existed.

Hard work by groups at the conference, as well as general international efforts on behalf of lesbian and gay rights, have made a notable difference with governments. In 1993 at the UN Human Rights Conference, only the Netherlands spoke for sexual orientation as a human right. Things have changed in two years: in Beijing, over thirty countries (including EU nations) supported wordings including sexual orientation. According to the Women's International News Gathering Service, after the UN Conference, some nations went on record as saying that where the document specifies "other status", they would interpret that to mean sexual orientation. This is only of benefit to people in countries which have made the most strides toward lesbian rights, but it is a beginning. Lesbians are on their way to equality!

Elizabeth OShea

Can Ireland Be Avenged? Lesbian Avenger Invisibility

It's the first day of school in working class, Irish, Queens, New York, a district whose right wing school board is successfully opposing the new multicultural school curriculum. This is the first Lesbian Avengers action. There are 300 lavender balloons exhorting children to "Ask About Lesbian Lives". There are 50 women with "I Was a Lesbian Child" t-shirts. There's a kilt-wearing marching band playing "We Are Family". Every child going to school hears the word lesbian in a fun, friendly way. Lesbians are back on the Middle Village curriculum and the local school board can't do anything about it. It's no surprise Lesbian Avengers have caught the lesbian imagination, no wonder we hear repeated around Ireland "we need Lesbian Avengers!".

The Avengers began in 1992 when six activists - including Marie Honan and Ann Maguire of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization - gathered with the specific intention of setting up a direct action group. After their first meeting with fifty women attending and the development of stunning graphics and catchy slogans, the Avengers were destined to be a successful, grass-roots, direct action organization dedicated to confrontation that is also fun and friendly. They've zapped their way to an important place in lesbian history and, according to founding Avenger Sarah Schulman in her book *My American History*, "taken a big step for the lesbian movement, away from symbolic actions or safe, comfortable critiques of other liberal organizations."

Schulman toured Ireland in 1993, showing Avenger videos and leaving behind propaganda. That was enough to spawn Avenger chapters in other cities throughout Europe and the Americas, but in Ireland it seems to have led mainly to "wouldn't it be brilliant" talk. So are we "not ready" for Avenging? Are we too timid? The Avengers are in England, Japan, Germany, Australia Is it too simple to plead cultural differences?

Retired activist Izzy Kamikaze thinks it is cultural differences, in part. In conversation, she has pointed out that Irish dykes have engaged in Avenger-style direct actions individually and in groups, although they have not, so far, set up Avenger-like groups. "It's very difficult to keep up the momentum in that type of organization, as we found in ACT UP. It takes detailed, intense organization and almost military discipline," she said.

Soren Mayes works with Lesbians for Employment Against Poverty (LEAP) in Cork. She told me women in Cork would love to have an Avengers chapter, but many older activists are moving outside of Cork and women who are out only a few years are well stuck in organizing social and support networks. This may be significant. Saying we're "not ready" for Avenging can sound judgmental and isn't quite accurate. There has been an explosion of lesbian organizing, particularly in the last five years. This organizing has increased lesbian visibility, if not lesbian acceptance. That visibility is an important Avenger goal, and Irish lesbians are striving for it without Avenging. These women are also establishing basic networks that already existed in New York when the Avengers began. Homophobic DJs, publishers, school management committees need to be zapped, but surely the first priority is aiding women in crisis because of their sexuality.

Will we ever Avenge ourselves in Ireland? Soren Mayes pointed out that, before a permanent Avenger-style group forms, they should think very carefully "would it work in Ireland? How would it work in Ireland?" Do we have the resources to organize a series of actions such as the Avenger take over of a Spanish speaking radio station? Such actions require a large activist and supporter base and a number of organizers with a lot of time. And the truth is the Irish lesbians interested in activism are already up to their ears with hard work.

But don't go dull; keep your eyes and ears open. Remember the zap on Donna MacAnnellan's employer after they wrongfully dismissed her. Remember that direct action existed and worked before the Lesbian Avengers put it so prominently in our consciousness. Don't dismiss its possibilities as an exciting option for change. And watch your walls. *Women's News* reports a Lavender Menace stalks Belfast. The Menace has spray cans, the Menace will use them. "Lesbians are Everywhere" on the walls of Belfast, and word is the Menace will be back.

Elizabeth OShea

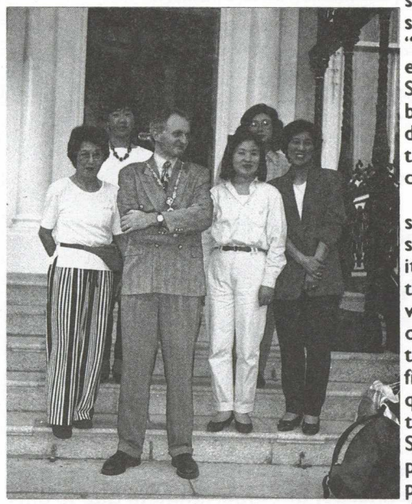
We stand by the belief that housewives can begin to create a society that is harmonious with nature by "taking action from the home." And through our purchases and consumption, we are attempting to change the way that Japanese agriculture and fisheries are operated.

-Seikatsu brochure

Creating Change from the Kitchen: The Seikatsu Consumer Cooperative Clubs

Buying is the basic act of survival in industrialised society. It's how we get our food, clothing and shelter. We can't give up buying and we have minimal control over what we can buy. If we're unhappy with what's on offer, most of us have only two options: to write a letter of complaint and they will write back saying "we are always improving our products" and enclose a sample or a money-off coupon - or we can stop buying that product. Of course, individual acts of not buying don't change anything. We just find another product that might leave us less dissatisfied.

In 1965, a Japanese housewife fed up with increasing prices decided to make a change in her buying. She organized 200 other women to collectively purchase 300 bottles of milk. That clever economy was the founding act of Seikatsu, which is Japanese for "life and living of ordinary people". The group took on official legal status in 1968 with over 1000 members. Those 1000 people have developed into 14 independent cooperative clubs with 218,000 members and a £216 million annual turnover. Seikatsu has remained close to its roots. 98% of members are women. 80% of the 10-20 member Board of Directors are female. The 14 clubs and their cooperative managing business, Seikatsu Consumer Cooperative Union, and their associated independent political organization, Network, are dedicated to a clean environment, women's empowerment and improving workers' conditions, working "from collective buying to all life", as one of their slogans proclaims. Seikatsu has taken industrialised society's passive act of buying and transformed it into something which can rightly claim to be building an alternative economy which empowers "each and every member with a voice and a role in participatory politics".



Seikatsu Club members met the Lord Mayor of Dublin, John Gormley, on a visit to Ireland in July for Eco-op '91, an international cooperative & community exchange gathering.

Those sound grand words, but they do seem to describe the general Seikatsu reality. The history of the natural soap movement demonstrates how an act of purchase, when it is a thinking act done collectively, can be the pebble that sends ripples of change through society.

The soap movement began in 1974 after women noticed their babies had skin irritation and their own hands were cracked and irritated. Meeting in their local *han* groups (the basic purchasing and organizational group of Seikatsu), women discussed the problems caused by synthetic petroleum based soaps and authorised the club to begin purchasing natural soap. In Shounai, the change in detergent was directly related to shirauo fish returning to the local river. The women's simple purchasing change improved their own health, the health of their families and their local environment.

As natural soap has multifold benefits, Seikatsu wanted to convince the 90% of synthetic-detergent-using Japanese to switch to safer soap. They developed the "Campaign to Sell Natural Soap". In general, shops don't carry natural soap, so Seikatsu runs small flatbed trucks and brings natural soap to people - along with demonstrations of the soap and information on why natural soap is a safer, better cleansing product.

In order to ensure a regular supply of soap for their members, Seikatsu used some of the considerable investment capital contributed by members to set up their own natural soap factory as a workers' cooperative. Seikatsu will often set up their own operations when they can't secure a product that satisfies them, something that makes them quite distinctive from other cooperatives. The soap factory expresses the Seikatsu philosophy. It is owned by the people who use and manufacture its product; the roles of consumer, producer and investor are integrated (Unlike other Japanese co-ops, Seikatsu doesn't pay monetary dividends to its members because the co-op doesn't exist to make a financial profit. It exists to provide a secure, safe food supply to consumers and a guaranteed livelihood to producers). The soap factory uses minimal raw materials. Soap is manufactured from recycled cooking oil, which is collected from Seikatsu members. Pollution is minimised as the oil isn't dumped down the drain. Unlike the rest of us, Seikatsu members know exactly what is in their cleaning products and where they come from - they come from their own kitchens. That sort of consumer awareness forms a central tenet of the movement.

After the majority of Seikatsu members switched to natural soap, they began petitioning local governments to legislate against the use of synthetic detergents. Some legislatures responded, but most ignored the campaign, even though it had collected 300,000 signatures. This defeat made campaigners realize that, if they wanted to change mainstream politics and values, they would have to get involved in the mainstream political process. Network began.

Network is exactly that - a network of independent political organizations set up around Japan by women involved in Seikatsu. In 1979, their first delegate was elected, to the Tokyo Nerima Ward. Since then, 75 Seikatsu Club members have been elected to local government. Network members campaign with the slogan "Political Reform from the Kitchen" and elected members provide an important (although minority) voice for housewives' concerns.

It seems that Seikatsu members constantly develop new ideas for improving women's participation in society. Seikatsu benefits men as well; the husbands, fathers, sons that women care for; but remember that 98% of the membership are women. So it is an organization which recognises that women's work is undervalued. When women get paid work, it's most likely part time, unskilled

ETHOS
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and therefore low paid. And as Japanese corporations cut expenses by freezing hiring and making redundancies most common in predominantly female sec - tions, the economic situation for Japanese women disimproves. Seikatsu has begun establishing workers' collec - tives to compensate for women's disad - vantaged position. The majority of the more than 150 collectives harness tradi- tional women's tasks to provide services for urban residents. Collectives recycle, provide Japanese-style boxed lunches, works as home helps, run fresh foods markets all in their local communities.

Seikatsu's economic process is going in the opposite direction to the mainstream one. Our economy dis-integrates every- thing: we eat food and we don't know where it came from or how it was made; we go to work at jobs, sometimes far from home, which have no relation to the rest of our lives and which we may have no interest in. Seikatsu, "life and liv- ing of ordinary people", actively works to reintegrate as many of the activities of daily life as possible. They know where their food comes from, who grows it, how it is processed; they know where there waste goes and recycle as much as possible; they work locally to provide services for their community and incomes for themselves and to develop local initiatives which increase people's participation in society. And all of this began because one housewife wanted cheaper milk.

Elizabeth OShea

DON'T PANIC! BUY ORGANIC!

Dublin Food Co-op

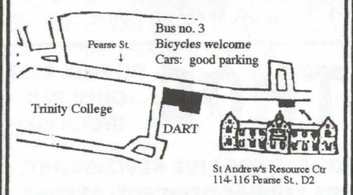
OPEN EVERY SATURDAY

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Wholefoods
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Pearse Street,
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Office: Carmichael House,
North Brunswick Street,
Dublin 7
tel: 8721191 fax: 8735737

Sayoko Makishima is the chairperson of the Centre for Alternative Life, which was built by the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative. Below, she details her experiences working in the Seikatsu Club and the way it changed her thinking.

When I joined the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative 15 years ago, my eldest child was 4 years old and my youngest one was 1 1/2 years old. I joined the Co-op simply because I wanted to have safer food for my children. Having joined the Co-op I met people who had developed the 'natural soap movement'., The prinicple behind this movement was to abolish the synthetic detergents because they pollute the sea , rivers and people. I was surprised by the number of people who were energetically trying to solve this and other issues, and they suggested that I would be able to contribute to society as a woman and a mother. Then I realized the problems of mass production, mass consumption and mass waste through running the collective purchasing system of the Co-op, and I recognized that it was wrong thinking that our society could be ruled by com - mercialized interest and efficiency. Therefore, I tried to organize women who were interested in finding solutions to common issues such as education for children, welfare systems for the aged and environmental problems.

As a result of my own activity, I found the reason why we had such a hopeless society was due to our lack of interest in politics. When I was a child my mother told me of the experiences which she had had during the war. It made me a person who was interested in politics, but when I was a university student I was not able to feel that, in reality, politics could be con- trolled by people in general. However, my work as a leader of the Co-op gave me the clear idea that politics is not in Parliament. it comes from our homes, our kitchens and our communities. If we change our daily life style we might be able to improve our politics and society.

I think now that if you want to solve diverse social problems you should strongly co-operate with people who would try to solve the problems in their communities themselves. For the last 10 years, I have been advocating to women that women should take a positve part in politics, and I put this idea into practice by acting as a County Councillor, a man- ager of citizens' political movements and sometimes a regional chairperson of the Co-op. Around the Capital area, 100 women members of Seikatsu have been elected as City Councillors.

At the moment I am very interested in the 'workers collectives', which are self- supporting, established and run by people from the community, who try to provide goods and services for themselves and people in need in the community. Around the Capital area more than 200 workers' collectives have been estab - lished, and over 7,000 women members are involved in environmentally friendly food production, providing care service to the aged, the natural soap factories, which recycle used cooking oil, and so on. The fundamental principle of workers' collectives is that the collectives should be one of the main structures of a society which is run by the initiative of the citi - zens themselves.

Lastly, I would like to tell all Irish women that I believe women's ideas and practical activities in politics and in work- ing will change our society from a hope - less one into a hopeful future.

Translated by Takashi Sawaguchi. a managing director with Seikatsu Club, Kanagawa Prefecture



Seikatsu members assist at a Japanese orange harvest.. Members often help producers at har- vest time.

We intended to include an article about the Irish Countrywomen's Association in our Political Women *focus, but unfortunately due to our production schedule we were unable to do so. We plan to include it in issue 11, which is scheduled for February 1996 - just in time for International Women's Day!*

Readers' Views

When I hear people complaining about sexism in advertising, the objections are usually based on the use of partially nude bodies or sexist stereotyping. I often agree with such complaints but sometimes I find it difficult to spot the offensiveness that others might see in an advertisement, especially if it does not contain nudity or blatant stereotyping. So I read with inter- est Fidelma Farley's article "Here's Looking At You, Babe!" in issue 9 of *Ms.chief*. The central thesis of her article - advertisements identify the products being sold with women, thus leading con- sumers to think that *both* can be bought and consumed - was well argued and was a complaint about advertising that I had not heard before.

In general, it is rare to find articles any- where which educate their readers in such an effective manner. So when this particular issue of *Ms.chief* also contained Patricia Arias-Paz's excellent and informa- tive *Bile File* article about being a single parent on welfare allowance, I concluded that issue 9 was your best issue yet!

Ciaran McHale,
Clontarf.

Thanks for including an an article about disabled parents in your last issue of *Ms.chief*. We rarely think about disabled people when we talk about parenting rights and responsibilities, when in fact disabled people can be and are parents. It was brilliant to see it in print: "many peo- ple with disabilities do choose to have children." And they should be supported in this decision. We should be making parenting easier and easier by providing better support services, guaranteeing incomes and developing an extensive net- work of state sponsored creches. Doing so would help support parents and their families and help ensure children of any ability have a happy and fulfilling child- hood.

I hope you'll continue covering disability issues for women because "women's lead- ers" on television and in the papers don't give them enough attention.

Siobhán Healy
Rathmines.

Send letters for publication to: Letters, Ms.chief *magazine, P O Box 3327, Dublin 8. Include your name, address and daytime tele- phone number.* Ms.chief *may edit letters for length.*

Ireland will become the fourth country in the world to have a specific health poli- cy for women if government plans go ahead. Since the launch of the discussion doc- ument on women's health in June, the Department of Health has been consulting regionally and locally with women's organizations and other groups interested in women's health. To find out more, be sure to get the February 1996 issue of Ms.chief!

Coming Up!

Ms.chief 11
Focus:
Women's Health

W E R R C

Women's Education Research and Resource Centre
University College Dublin

The Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) at University College, Dublin offers MA, BA and certificate courses in Women's Studies (fulltime and parttime) and PhD thesis direciton. **Deadline for Application: 1 May, 1996.**

Details from **WERRC, UCD, Dublin 4.**

tel: +353-1-7068571 fax: +353-1-7061195. e-mail: WERRC@UCD.IE

WERRC Autumn/Winter Public Lectures
all events are at 7.30pm in Room E114, Arts Building, UCD, unless otherwise stated

Saturday 11 November
Rosy Martin: Home Truths? Phototherapy, Memory and Identity (full day workshop)

Thursday 16th November
Mary Duffy: Telling Tales: with a performance of "stories of a body"

Thursday 7 December
Clodagh Harvey, with **Nuala Hayes** and **Ellen Cranitch**
Perspectives on Irish women's storytelling, past and future

Thursday 14 December
WERRC Christmas Party

Dates confirmed for 1996

25 January
Professor Jennifer Waelti-Walters: The Lesbian in French Literature

1 February
Les Flaneurs des Malls: Two or Three Things I Know about Shopping

7/8 March
Lesbian Lives III (conference)

health

Depression: Beyond Coping

More women suffer from depression than men. This is particularly the type of depression which some psychiatrists regard as psychological rather than biological. According to Anthony Clare, bipolar or manic depression is suffered by an equal ratio of women to men. More subtle manifestations of depressive conditions such as anxiety and panic attacks come under the heading of "mild and moderate" forms of the disease. Many would dispute this distinction, including Kate Millett in *The Loony Bin Trip*, in which she takes a radically anti-psychiatric stance in relation to her own mood swings (Millett had originally been diagnosed as a manic depressive but rejects arguments in favour of a biological origin for the condition as being a form of social control). I find both arguments slightly extreme.

On the one hand, I do not believe that a *purely* biological explanation exists for any mental disturbance. Neither, however, do I believe that the psychiatric profession is in a mass conspiracy to control potentially revolutionary people by suppressing their feelings with antidepressants. Both of these arguments ignore the complexity of depression and the nuances in people's lives which can contribute to it.

I started writing this article with the intention of theorizing about why more women suffer from depression than men. I couldn't follow this intention, because it struck me that if there was even one sufferer reading what I had written through a haze of darkness, I would not reach her with my haze of theory. It's great to read Foucault or Kate Millett when you're well enough to be bolshie again, but when you're in the pits, you most need simple words of encouragement and empathy.

I don't believe that there is one blanket "cure" for depression, yet some words spring to mind which can be valuable for their sustaining power: hope, self esteem, agency. It might seem trite, but these words denote the exact opposite of some of the cultural messages which women internalize and which can often contribute to depression. This is why it is vital that people speak out and do not subscribe to the taboo surrounding anything to do with mental despair: speaking out can save lives. The confrontation of the truth of depression in women can only contribute to a healthier quality of life for the sufferer, who is usually just as frustrated by her helplessness as the people around her.

If you experience bad depression, pat yourself on the back for what you *do* manage to achieve during any given day: it is good to engage in little acts of faith, and making yourself a cup of tea (herbal, preferably) can be a major achievement. Applaud yourself, and take it from there, because building yourself back to activity is a delicate process. Delicate, and ultimately hugely gratifying. Be proud of your own willingness to engage in this process, and keep on raising that feminist consciousness.

The only allusion I will make to my original intention is that more women get depression because many things can conspire to prevent us from honouring and esteeming ourselves in the same way that men in power do under patriarchy. It is also true, however, that men express symptoms of depression in different forms: alcoholism and drug addiction in men are often ways of masking and alleviating chronic depression.

It is important, if you are a sufferer, to *name* the problem and seek help as soon as possible. If you are wary of conventional psychiatric treatment or feel that your depression is psychological in origin, then find a qualified counsellor you can trust, and don't be afraid to be choosy in this regard. A sympathetic General Practitioner is often a good person to alert at first but only if s/he respects your own reservations and preferences regarding the nature of the treatments available.

A balanced diet and proper sleep-pattern are crucial for counteracting depression. Overcoming depression is as much about honouring what your body says as your mind. You can't disrespect one without the other protesting strongly. Which brings me to a point which may be unsavoury for some sedentary creatures (including myself): regular exercise releases feel-good endorphins in the brain and helps to get rid of the dull lethargy which often accompanies depression. Even though exercise is often the last thing a depressed individual wishes to do, it *is* possible to begin to enjoy such activities, especially when you begin to realise that your mood swings are not quite so severe as they were before you began.

I would hesitate to express any strong opinion regarding the merit or otherwise of medication. I have gone through my phases, phases of reading books like Peter Breggin's *Toxic Psychiatry* and vowing never to grace my body with antidepressants, phases of feeling that the quality of life for many sufferers of depression could be negligible without antidepressants: I know people who feel that medication was their salvation. Now I would diplomatically say that antidepressants can serve their purpose if used in a discriminating manner. I would juxtapose them with chemotherapy for cancer patients: it might be toxic, but in some severe cases it can save lives. Nobody should be bullied or coerced into taking medication, however, and this often happens to depressed women. Many will take medication for the simple reason that it legitimises them in the eyes of bewildered family and friends: if the depression is approached as a purely biological illness, then the sufferer runs less risk of being accused of morbid self-indulgence. (Depression *can* appear to occur for no apparent reason: one of the ways in which sufferers often torture themselves is to compare their circumstances with those of more underprivileged or oppressed people and convince themselves that they have no right to be depressed because they are so lucky in comparison. Such patterns of thinking are utterly self perpetuating - and useless for the purposes of recovery).

It is unfortunate that medication is the only standard and accepted way of treating depression. People who favour more holistic methods of healing are often not given access to these methods: their preferences are neither honoured nor respected. This is either because their GPs think holistic medicine is nonsense or because health insurance will generally not cover anything other than standard psychiatric treatments (that is, if you are lucky enough to have health insurance in the first place). If you know your preferences and know that your GP would not be sympathetic, then find one who is. Choose a counsellor carefully as well; I have reservations about the type of counselling which delves into a person's past in a morbid manner without using the language of hope and renewal. Many counsellors, however, will go beyond this. While acknowledging the past, they will also encourage you to mobilize your agency and creativity.

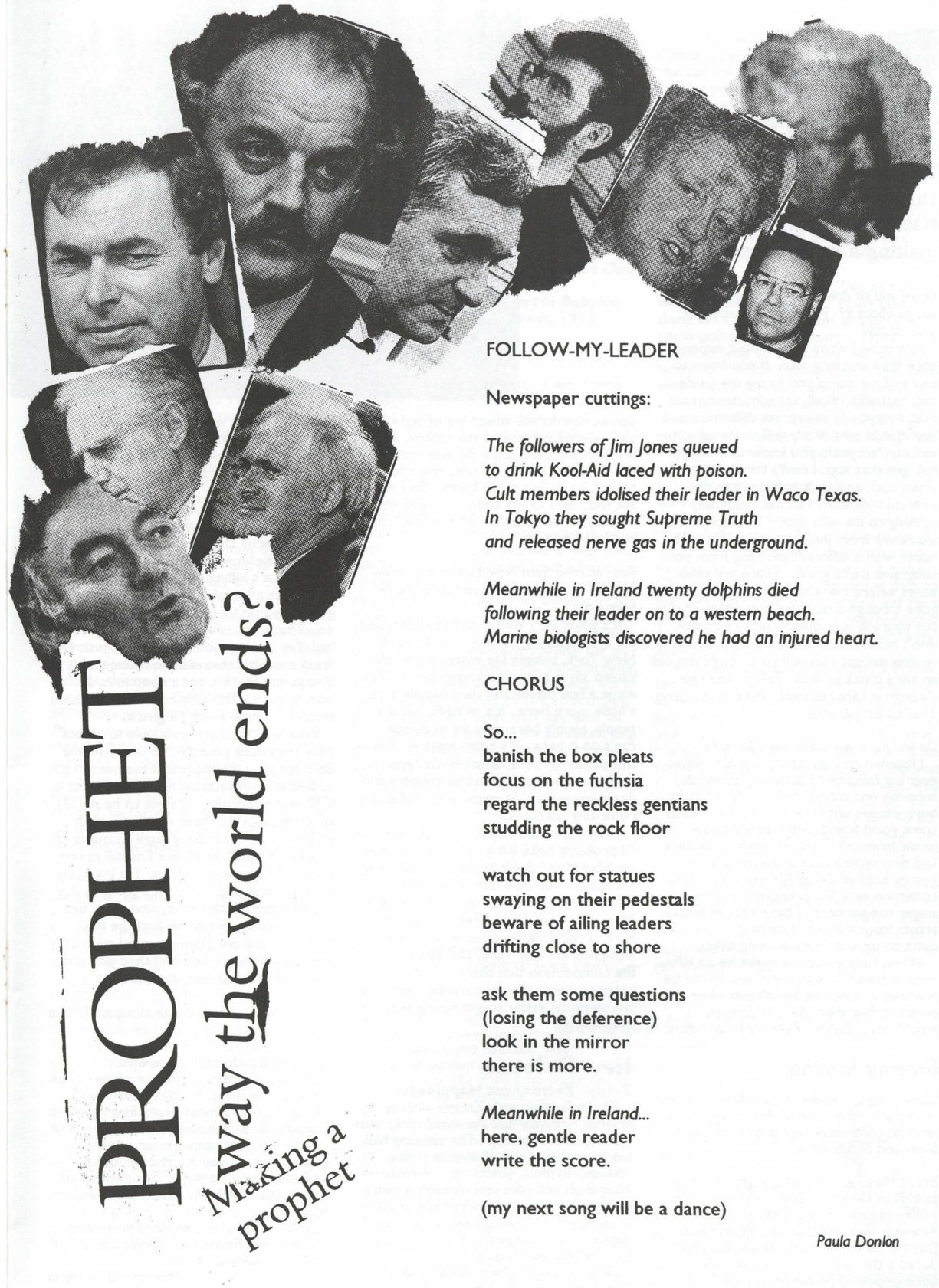
Other helpful strategies in overcoming depression are developing a positive spirituality of hope, self-affirmation and compassion; allowing yourself to express anger, even if it's in a room on your own; joining a support group (particularly a women's group) and committing yourself to an expansion of your horizons to the expression of your own creativity. Depression goes away. It just takes a small activation of your agency as a woman to begin the journey of recovery.

Deirdre Clancy

Mná Mná

Rural lesbian Irish Newsletter

available from The Other Place,
8 South Main Street, Cork. £1.



FOLLOW-MY-LEADER

Newspaper cuttings:

The followers of Jim Jones queued
to drink Kool-Aid laced with poison.
Cult members idolised their leader in Waco Texas.
In Tokyo they sought Supreme Truth
and released nerve gas in the underground.

Meanwhile in Ireland twenty dolphins died
following their leader on to a western beach.
Marine biologists discovered he had an injured heart.

CHORUS

So...
banish the box pleats
focus on the fuchsia
regard the reckless gentians
studding the rock floor

watch out for statues
swaying on their pedestals
beware of ailing leaders
drifting close to shore

ask them some questions
(losing the deference)
look in the mirror
there is more.

Meanwhile in Ireland...
here, gentle reader
write the score.

(my next song will be a dance)

Paula Donlon

Treat It With Respect

up and coming singer-songwriter **elaine k** talks about making a music career



When you sit down to write songs, how do you go about it? What do you want your lyrics to say?

I suppose I write more about experience than anything else. If you listen to some of my songs you know me inside out, basically. Well, actually, having said that, everybody interprets different ways. Sometimes somebody will come up to me and say, 'oh yeah, you know that song you did, gee that was, I really felt like that when such and such happened to me' - hold on a minute, that has absolutely nothing to do with that!. You don't take that away from people, everybody goes home with a different meaning from your song, and that's great. There are other songs where I wouldn't have necessarily gone through a personal experience, you put yourself in someone else's position. I don't have a secret formula. I'm always writing except I do still go through the old writer's block as well. Every time I go through it I always think that's it, it's gone. That's a bit panicky.

Do you have any particular influences?

I listened to everything as a kid, whatever my folks were listening to, which I suppose was mainly radio. I didn't start buying tapes until I was 13 or 14. I have some good friends who would know music from other places apart from here and they would have been good about getting hold of things for me. In my CD collection now it's predominantly female singer songwriters. I have a lot of female artists from a point of respect. I would be quite conscious of supporting them.

When I say someone might be an influence it doesn't mean my music would be like theirs. You can be influenced by characters rather than the actual music. I would never deliberately try to emulate. Someone asks me what kind of style is it and I always manage to mention at least four. In any set I could do one rock 'n' roll, one kind of poppy one, one could be bluesy, so I don't really know. So I would ask members of my audience what would you say it was and they'd be basically as stuck as I was.

You returned from New York in July. How has Dublin been treating you since you've been back?

It's going very well at the moment, people are beginning to take notice. I did New York, people say where'd you play, I played *sin é*, everyone knows *sin é*.. You name a few places and then people sit up a little more here. It's terrible, but it's simply, plainly because a lot of people can't do it here. It's a tiny market. I love this place, I'm here, amn't I? But you could be number one in this country and I don't know if you'd necessarily make your recording costs back.

I haven't closed any doors over there. I'll probably head back out next year but for how long I don't know. There's more enthusiasm for new things there. People are more prepared to take a risk, take a chance on something new than they are here. I chummed around with a lot of musicians in New York, and there's not the competition that there is here between personal relationships. Also it's just so much easier to get paying work over there.

Have you always wanted to be a musician? Would you do anything else?

Always. I did piano lessons as a kid and then I decided I'd take up guitar. Then I wrote some poetry at the embarrassing age of 14 and then I had this brainy idea to put some music and poetry together. It wasn't exactly choice, it was something I did. Sometimes I think, oh no, why did I pick this, it's killing me, but on the other hand I see a lot of my friends my age who genuinely don't know what they want to do. That's not really a problem I ever had. I've had safe jobs. They just, just, just drain me. It's always been music and it always will be. It's not a conscious decision to do it. The only conscious decision involved is how much I'll give it.

Wherever you are, you have to create your own buzz yourself, no one else will do it for you. I treat it as a business; I go to bed at a respectable hour, I get up at 8, 8.30 in the morning. It's got to be my life at some stage so I have to treat it with respect. I'm not making huge amounts of money off music at all, but I'm still paying rent, I'm doing it somehow. I'm investing my time now and I figure it's going to pay off, whether it's this year, next year, five years, it will. I just know that the best buzz I get is from playing a good gig that your audience are into and then you just live off that for as long as possible.

elaine k talked with Elizabeth OShea

Gigging Around

Catch singer-songwriter Breda Hammond working hard around Dublin, playing her unusual combination of pop, rock'n'roll, blues and bossa nova.

Breda Hammond now appears regularly at Mná at Bewley's Grafton Street and will be appearing at benefit gigs for Amnesty International and World Aids Day (to be confirmed). She's also produced a three track demo tape which has been reviewed positively in *Hot Press*.

New Release

Zrazy. Permanent Happiness.

Those familiar with Zrazy's already eclectic mix may find the initial foray into cyberspace unsettling. The opening hallmarks an album full of diverse styles, sounds, rhythms, emotions. *Permanent Happiness* will take you through a range of states from the melodramatic angst of 'u can' through teenage energy and attitude in 'suburban girl' to the pure pleasure of 'heaven blessed'.

The talents of Maria Walsh and Carole Nelson will carry you through a highly charged set of emotions. Covering all steps in and out of love, and a few more things besides, *Permanent Happiness* has almost everything - even a beautiful boy. but the general absence of real instruments deprives an otherwise great album of depth. The ear tickling and soul lifting bodhran, saxophone and tin whistle interludes hint at what we're missing.

This is a great album. The voice and material will haunt you. Don't borrow it or copy it, buy it.

Margaret O'Flanagan

books

A P Clarke. *The Way of the Bees: An Ovarian Yarn.* Basement Press. 1995. £5.95.
ISBN 1-85594-1-805

Mother Nature is the ruthless head of her own international corporation. The island of Ascourt, with its population of bee people, has undergone something of a cultural and political revolution since its queen bee, Charlotte, decided that it was highly degrading to have a bunch of drones racing to see who can get his way with her first to father the next genera - tion of Ascourt's people. Queen Charlotte gives birth to three daughters artificially, who are separated when they are six. Before she dies, she leaves a will outlining "Charlotte's Plan" for Ascourt to be self-sufficient and egalitarian, which can come to pass only when the sisters are reunited again on the island off the west coast of Ireland. Mother Nature is having none of this, for "Charlotte's Plan" violates her way of productivity and predictability: the way of the bees.

Once I got over the initial shock of seeing Mother Nature personified as a post feminist, double dealing honourary man, I became thoroughly fascinated by this book. This is experimental fiction in the extreme, containing elements of the murder mystery, the spy thriller, fantasy, science fiction, and probably any other category of fiction you care to name. It is surreal, and above all hilariously funny.

All of the female bee people are les - bians, and the drones are pretty pathetic creatures whose sole raison d'etre is to fertilize the queen bee. Mother Nature's lover is initially St Gubnet of Balleyvourney, but then Gubnet defects to Ascourt because she is peeved that Mother Nature shows no desire to have her child. Gubnet, however, has invented ovum-to-ovum fertilization, and unbe - knownst to her ex lover is carrying her child. Charlotte's dream for the bee people is also this: that females will be able to reproduce without the aid of male fertil - ization.

Apart from the singularly unique plot of the novel, its observations on the dynamics of women's groups are often extremely funny and bordering on affectionate satire. Very little is overly precious or earnest about this book. I like particularly the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM for short) is seen as an early feminist because she was the first woman to reproduce without the aid of a man. There is much commentary about the strange hodge podge of superstition existing in Irish society, and the New Age ethereality favoured by some feminists mani - fests itself in the Seven Rules of Creation, which include sayings such as "If a belief is in any way limiting, then it is not a true belief about Reality". Rule number six, "Your Point of Power is in the Present", results in the inhabitants of Ascourt being able to fly around the globe with the aid of positive thinking and a powerpoint plug. Totally surreal: if Flann O'Brien had been a 'nineties feminist, he'd have utterly approved.

This is essential reading for any feminist with a sense of humour and a penchant for a very good read. I would love to read more writing by A P Clarke: that fish tank which landed on her head obviously did the trick (see the potted biography at the front of the book). I won't reveal how Ascourt ultimately fares, but will tell you about Mná Mná Ltd., which is set up as an international company specializing in ovum to ovum fertilization - Ireland has revolutionized the world with its progressive reproductive activities. I suppose we can dream!

Deirdre Clancy

Emer Martin. *Breakfast in Babylon.* Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1995. £6.99.
ISBN 0-86327-483-8

"I am not Jesus Christ. I left home younger than he, walked further and stayed out in the wilderness longer."

Thus begins the tale of Isolt's wander - ings across Europe, an ugly, drug-induced haze of a journey which defines its meaning in the meaningless. A young Irishwoman who left home at 16, Isolt gains entrance into the almost exclusively male society of the vagrant subculture, at first because her self-described near invisibility renders her benign to the bondings of men and then because of her strength of character and ability to survive in the cruel world she has chosen over the comfort of conformity. She and her mendi - cants condemn western society for its materialism, consumerism, superficiality, intolerance, self-deceit, et cetera; each human being "a facet of the apocalypse," destroying the planet that sustains us. Isolt becomes a parasite on parasites, begging from them the money for alcohol, acid, hash, heroin, and the occasional meal, obstinately giving nothing in return.

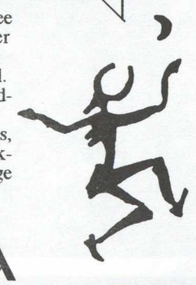
Amidst this morass of hopelessness, Isolt encounters Christopher, the self-proclaimed modern Jesus, determined to make disciples of all he allows into his inner circle and administering the disen - franchised rabble with the illusory, fleeting 'salvation' of drugs. Isolt finds herself strangely compelled toward Christopher, though his misogyny is legendary. Later, she claims to have been blind to his evil, but this rings extremely (I hope intentionally) hollow. Isolt sees Christopher for what he is, but she cannot resist the temptation - of his power (which lasts in the community only as long as his ability to provide anaesthetic), of his mysteriousness (which lasts only as long as she doesn't know him), of his uncompromising hardness, I'm still not sure. But perhaps this is part of Emer Martin's point - why people choose the people they do frequently confounds everyone else, and the participants themselves often cannot explain.

Martin writes cleverly, but at times without skill or subtlety. Many conversations fall flat as awkward excuses for socio-political commentary. Through the development of the character of Isolt, however, Martin most successfully deals with crucial issues. Neither Martin nor her character looks away from the ugli - ness of which life often consists; she unflinchingly reports it in disturbing detail with gritty realism. The reader watches Isolt grow from a seemingly inconsequential individual with vague feminist under - tones to one who earns the quiet respect of those who respect no one. At all times, Isolt remains believable, as do the other characters, with one important exception. Martin attempts to make Christopher a complex character through the diversity of his experiences, yet he is utterly one-dimensional, a stereotypical misogynist, a character disappointingly easy to create.

Although I found Christopher's character hollow and his relationship with Isolt as something the author needed to hap - pen without developing it smoothly, it is precisely through this relationship that Martin's insights are most effective. From the beginning of the book, Isolt responds to gender relations with penetrating, valid criticism, yet, when it comes to Christopher, it takes months for her to defend herself in the most basic way. She becomes almost wholly passive, watching and waiting, fading into the background, the strength that so many admire serving no greater purpose than to withstand his mind games and physical torment. This is no literary invention; this is reality for many women. Too often, vibrant women get involved in a relationship which

This time of year, it seems like everybody's trying to sell you "unusual" gifts: musical reindeer lovingly crafted in plastic, flashing Christmas-tree earrings, acrylic holly print socks, "really useful" things to gather dust in your kitchen drawer. Bet you think we want to sell you something "unusual" too. Wrong! Our gifts *aren't* unusual. They're completely unique. Each piece is a once off artwork, handcrafted in Ireland from natural materials. Talismanic jewellery handcarved in hardwoods, masks, mobiles and musical instruments, bog oak windsculptures - every piece unique. By now you're thinking you probably can't afford any of it. Wrong again! Prices range from £3 to £300. Come and check it out.

UNUSUAL OR WHAT?



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devours their vibrancy and inner strength, even though the relationship may not be as transparently detrimental as that depicted here. But, ultimately, this is the tale of a survivor.

I enjoyed *Breakfast in Babylon* and I look forward to Martin's future work. She has an ability to recount honest experience whilst creating a story that holds the reader's interest and engages her or him in a dialogue concerning issues which are ignored only at our own peril.

Maeve Callan

Cathie Dunsford. *Cowrie*. Spinifex Press. 1994. £6.95.
ISBN 1-875559-28-0

Cowrie is the story of one woman's journey from the home of her birth in New Zealand to her ancestral home in Hawai'i. The journey works on many levels. Cowrie has explosive, life-giving forces and feelings at work inside her. Cowrie is a dreamer, a lover, a lesbian, a family woman, a writer. The story is of her journey through her fears of nightmare destruction towards the summoning of personal strength to speak out, to express herself, to write. In a letter at the end of the story, Cowrie describes her feeling of freedom to a friend: "the journey is urging me to get beyond feeling silenced. I'm beginning to think I might have a few things to say."

Questions of personal and cultural identity are couched in the luxuriant narrative which centres on vivid descriptions of the Big Island of Hawai'i. The book, written in the present tense, is deliciously descriptive, generously concerned with the juice and taste of food and the warm and sensual flesh and muscle of people's bodies and lives. It is gorgeous to read.

Cowrie's desire for her friend Koana is the creative kernel of the story and it is around this that the author writes of the dissipation of desire, from the body out into the world. The landscape sings with erotic energy: "Recent lava trails cut a black river through the valleys amongst which small trees and new growth battle to replace the flow of Pele's fiery anger. From Pepe'ekeo, it is an exhilarating drive on roads cut into the vertical cliffs that reveal surprises at each bend. The cream and yellow insides of the wild ginger flowers ooze their sap onto the grass below, while fiery orange bird-of-paradise spikes thrust out inviting purple tongues. Startling yellow stamens erupt from the sticky interiors of stark white lilies that lap up the bright sun. Water bursts out over the edges of bulging cliffs sending spray twenty feet out from the rocky ledges and thundering into pools below. The sweet smell of frangipani hangs in the wind as they sail past and the landscape explodes with erotic energy." Through the dignified control of erotic desire, Cowrie harnesses herself and learns to release her anger and pain to reach uncharted depths of love and understanding.

As a tourist reader, I found *Cowrie* a challenging read. I ask to what extent the reader is always an observer and whether a genuine constructive participation is possible. Can literature, language and the telling of stories transcend the boundaries of place and cultural determinism? I think Cathie Dunsford answers these questions. The book ends on a note of hope. Cowrie returns to New Zealand/Aotearoa, "the land of awakening dawn". She has work to do. Like Cowrie, the reader is taken through the journey and brought back home again. I am left after reading with the feeling that I have visited a place that has been silent inside me. It is the beginning and there is work to be done.

Sara Fuller-Sessions

Dale Spender. Nattering on the Net: women, Power and Cyberspace. Spinifex Press. 1995.
ISBN 1-875559-09-4.

You can skip the first four chapters of *Nattering on the Net*. They tell you the responses and scepticism about computer based information technologies are the same as those put forward by monks and scholars during the transition from manuscript to print culture. The impulse to condemn the transition to multimedia is the same. The changes aren't good or bad; rather, it's a different way of thinking and knowing. In about ten pages, Dale Spender could have written this less repetitively than she has. Perhaps if she had done so she would have produced a less glaringly Eurocentric history of print and its effects. The Internet is a Eurocentric technology, but talking about other cultures and subcultures, their erasure and non-European print revolutions would have given these chapters more depth and less of a Sunday supplement feel. I expected better of Dale Spender, who has a considerable reputation as a feminist scholar.

Nattering on the Net improves considerably in chapters 5-7 when Spender discusses the future of education and libraries as well as 'women, power and cyberspace'. The issues around education caught my attention in particular. Spender describes a successful transition to computer based learning, how it changes the physical and time structure of a classroom and how the students construct their own education. Teachers respond overwhelmingly negatively when confronted with their consequent role changes and therefore refuse new technologies despite their possibilities. We need to know the issues in chapter 7, where she introduces power in relation to computers and women describing the physical and societal intimidation used to keep women away from computers now that computers are sites of power. I will use these chapters as points of reference when I discuss the computerised future with people. We need to know these issues; we need to lay bare this new (but very old!) aggression.

Nattering on the Net provides a chatty, cheerful gloss on the importance and (some) issues of the Internet. Spender works hard to convince us that we should embrace the new technology that is coming whether we like it or not. But 278 pages is too long for an introduction, which is essentially what the book is. I have some computer knowledge: perhaps the book would seem less repetitive and simple to someone who hasn't computer experience. The blurb on the back of the book says "this my be the last book you ever read". Perhaps it would improve if it were read on the Internet.

Elizabeth OShea

Other Book Releases

• *UCG Women's Studies Centre Review.* The third in the UCG Women's Studies review series includes articles on medieval Irish women, gender and engineering, pornography and human rights, to list a few. Available from Publications, Women's Studies Centre, University College, Galway for £9.50 plus £2 post and packing. Limited copies of the first two issues are also available.

• Bright Sparks is Attic Press' imprint for teenagers. For the past four years, Bright Sparks has published books written by women for teenagers. Their next release is *Saving the Dark Planet*, written by Mary Arrigan, who wrote another Bright Sparks title, *Searching for the Green*, a post apocalyptic novel set in the ruins of Dublin. You can also get your daughter or son the *Bright Sparks School Diary 1995/1996*. Find Bright Sparks in a bookshop near you, or contact Attic Press at 29 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2.

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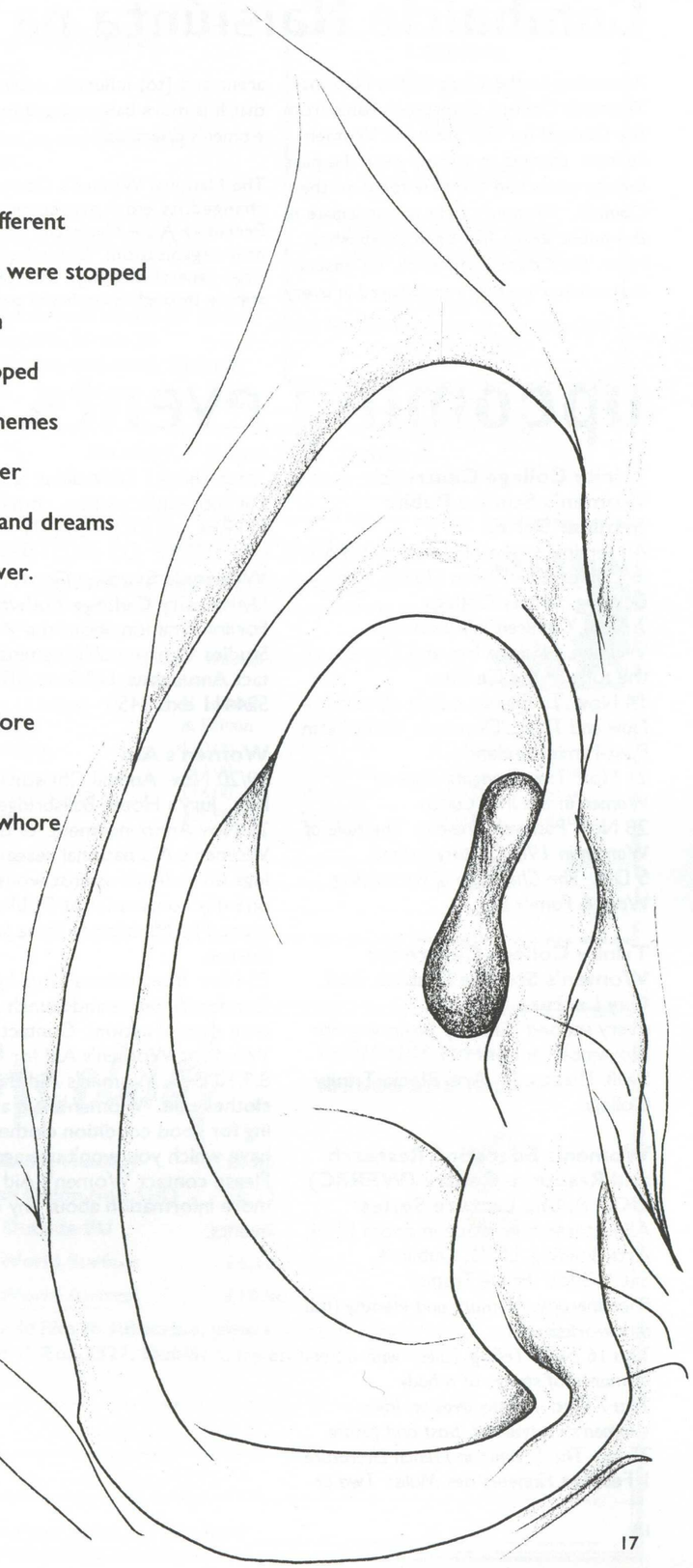
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The Pearl

He taught her to listen to herself. He was indifferent
To the schooled hearts of sealed wonder, who were stopped
In the anchor of discovery. So, seeing affection
Bold in her face, he trifled with her sex and lopped
Her head off. Language was unused to these themes
So she rested with the memory of her true lover
As she knelt on the shore of broken promises and dreams
Naked in the sand, where she could find no cover.

Experience me. Love is real. I am destruction
The annihilation of your soul in proof-positive lore
A capitalist rip-off, a counterfeit seduction,
That having used you profitably, now calls you whore
And in that pain, you buy essential conscience,
Keep this treasure, the pearl of your silence.

Rosemary Rowley has published three collections of poetry. "The Pearl" has appeared in her collection The Sea of Affliction, *published in 1987 by Rowan Tree Press.*



2017.21.091.2.3

National Women's Council
Comhairle Naisiúnta na mBan in Éirinn

According to the Chair of the National Women's Council, changing its name from the Council for the Status of Women reflects changes in society over the past twenty years and the new focus of the Council. Women's right to participate in the public arena has been established. Now, the Council will work "to ensure that women are fully represented in every arena and [to] influence public policy so that it is more balanced and responsive to women's priorities."

The National Women's Council has also changed its work structure. Chief Executive Anne Marie Gill describes the new organisation: "Instead of frequent large general meetings, affiliates will contribute through issue based panels dealing with work, education, social affairs and health. They will develop policy proposals, initiate campaigns or activities and monitor legislation, both at national and European levels. This structure will ensure that the expertise of our 124 affiliates is drawn into the work of the organisation more effectively. When we do meet in full session twice yearly we will be debating issues in more depth and with the benefit of a great deal more research."

upcoming events

Trinity College Centre for Women's Studies Public Seminar Series
All seminars take place 1pm -2.30pm in Conference Room (2026), Arts Building, Trinity College
7 Nov *'Cathleen Writes Back'*: Women, Nationalism and Theatre at the turn of the Century
14 Nov *'To Bounce a Boot off Her Now and Then...'*Domestic Violence in Post-Famine Ireland
21 Nov *The Changing Place of Women in the Irish Canon*
28 Nov *Positively Present: The Role of Women in 19th Century Ireland*
5 Dec *The Challenge of Reconciling Work & Family Life*

Trinity College Centre for Women's Studies Lesbian and Gay Lecture Series
every second Tuesday beginning 9th November at 8pm
Swift Theatre B, Arts Block, Trinity College

Women's Education Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) UCD Public Lecture Series
All lectures take place in room E114, Arts Building, UCD, Dublin 4
Sat 11 Nov *Home Truths? Phototherapy, Memory and Identity* (full day workshop)
Thu 16 Nov *Telling Tales: with a performance of stories of a body*
Thu 7 Dec *Perspectives on Irish Women's storytelling, past and future*
25 Jan *The Lesbian in French Literature*
1 Feb *Les Flaneurs des Malls: Two or Three Things I Know about Shopping*
For more information, contact WERRC on (01) 7068571

Women's Studies Centre University College Galway
For information about the Women's Studies Centre public seminars, contact Ann Lyons, UCG on (091) 524411 ext. 3450

Women's Aid
19/20 Nov Annual Christmas Gift Fair. Jury's Hotel, Ballsbridge.
20 Nov Announcement of the Women's Aid national research findings on violence against women at a one day conference at Dublin Castle hosted by Minister of State Joan Burton.
25 Nov International Day Against Gender Violence and launch of sixteen days of action. Contact Niamh Wilson at Women's Aid for details.
8,9,10 Dec Women's Aid third clothes sale. Women's Aid are looking for good condition clothes you have which you won't use again. Please contact Women's Aid for more information about any of these events.

Cork Women's 2nd Fantasy Ball
Fri 24 Nov Blackrock Castle
for further Information, contact Lesbian Lines around the country

Lesbians Organising Together (LOT)
22 Dec Christmas Disco
29 Dec Post Christmas Disco
For information on all LOT events, contact the 24hr 1550 12 2345

Lesbian Craft Fair
Sun 26 Nov noon - 7pm
St Andrews Resource Centre, Dublin 1.
All welcome.

Ms.chief
winter celebration!
Fri 8 Dec 8pm
upstairs, Doyle's Pub, College St., Dublin 2.
All *Ms.chief* supporters welcome!
admission free

GET WET GO WILD
SWIMMIN WIMMIN
Fridays, 8.30pm Markievicz Pool, Townsend Street, Dublin 2.
£2.50/£2 conc.

Non Directive Pregnancy Counselling

Women's Information Network
Dublin (01) 6794700
Tue & Thur 6.30 - 8.30
Saturday 3.00-5.00

WIN Galway (091) 61079

Irish Family Planning Association
36/37 Lr. Ormond quay,
Dublin 1.
(01) 8725033

Lesbian Lines

Dublin Thurs 7 - 9pm	6613777
Belfast Thurs 7.30-10pm	238668
Galway Wed 8-10pm	66134
LimerickThurs 7.30-9.30pm	310101
Lesbian Line NW (Derry)Thurs 7.30-10pm	(0504) 263120
Lesbian Line SE Mon 7.30-9.30pm	(051) 79907

Rape Crisis Centres

Dublin	(01) 6614911
	1800 77 88 88
Cork	(21) 968086
Belfast	(0232) 249696
Galway	(091) 64983
Limerick	(061) 311511

Women's Aid Help Line
1 800 341 900

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

Banúlacht - Irish Women for Development, Rita McNulty, DESC, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. (01) 371525.

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 Environemental Network (IWEN), Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7. (01) 8732660

noticeboard

Lesbians Organising Together,
5 Capel Street,
Dublin 1.
admin tel: (01) 8727770
24 hr information and events line:
1550 12 2345

Parents Alone Resource Centre,
Bunratty Drive, Coolock, Dublin 17.
(01) 8481872

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) c/o 20 Kenilworth Square, Rathmines, Dublin 6.

Lesbians Organising Together

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for further information, contact LOT at (01) 8727770

Send notices for the events and noticeboard pages to *Ms.chief*, P O Box 3327, Dublin 8.
Ms.chief 11 appears mid February, 1996.

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World News

Save Money, Lose a Life?

In the only industrial nation without a national health care system, nursing associations have begun to document injuries and deaths resulting from hospital negligence. Hospitals and other health organizations in the United States have been cutting back on highly trained registered nurses (RNs), 96% of whom are women. Who does nursing tasks in place of RNs? In some hospitals, they're being replaced with 'unlicensed assistive personnel', who have 4-6 weeks training. There have been reports that, in some hospitals, housekeeping staff are expected to take over some duties in place of nurses' aides.

In a 1993 American Nurses' Association poll, nurses listed the quality of patient care as their top concern, and 84% listed adequate staffing as an important worry. But nurses have begun to fight back against cutbacks and deteriorating care. One nurses' association in California joined a class action suit about deteriorating care. Other nurses have gone on hunger strikes, started talk shows and journals such as *Revolution: The Journal of Nurse Empowerment* and organized marches. Thirty five thousand nurses marched in Washington DC last spring, and march organizer Laura Gasparis Vonfrolio is organizing for next year. 'We have been quiet for too long,' she says.

Women Healing Oceans

"Women's basic values are very very similar cross-culturally in terms of survival of the species," says Sharon Taylor of the Women's Economic Network of New Foundland and Labrador, Canada. Her organisation hopes to build on these similar values in order to fight depletion of ocean fish stocks. Seventy six percent of ocean fish are now extinct, says Taylor, and ocean fish are one of the basic food stocks we need to survive.

Governments agree fishing quotas and then refuse to abide by them, as demonstrated by the fisheries dispute begun earlier this year by Spain with Canada - and Ireland. Spanish ships were landing fish no thicker than a pencil. "These fish have not been able to grow long enough to reproduce itself before it's caught." Canadian hatcheries are almost depleted of stock, yet fishing is still allowed there.

The Women's Economic Network think moratoriums need to be enforced. Taylor adds that the UN should get involved. They should go into countries where there are environmental disasters, she says, just as they do in countries at war. The ships of the world under the auspices of the UN should enforce fishing moratoria.

Taylor also expresses disapproval of media coverage of fisheries issues and WEN's activism. She feels media coverage of issues and activism has been aggressive, seeking to escalate tensions. But, says Taylor, "there's probably women in Spain and Portugal who feel the way we do".

No home for lesbian couple in human rights organisaton

Balay means "home", or "place" and names a non-governmental human rights organisation in the Phillipines which services victims of human rights abuses. Beth Lim and Vangie Castronuevo had worked successfully at Balay Rehabilitation Centre until a co-worker learned that the two were having a relationship. Although the executive committee never stated that their job performance had been damaged, they decided to get rid of the women. They were dismissed for reasons "grossly damaging to Balay", which were Vangie's affair (she was separated from her husband), their "flaunting the affair" at work, and their lobbying co-workers for support. Half of the office supported the women, and since their dismissal, their supporters have also been dismissed.

The women have filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Commission demanding reinstatement of their jobs, a public apology and payment of damages. A support network has been established to help the women fight their case, which is the first in Filipino legal history.

Bina Agarwal's research amongst

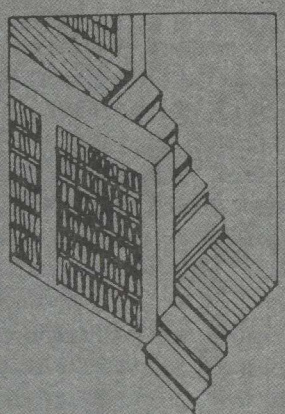
South Asian Women Want Land

Indian women leads her to conclude that lack of property rights is what most slows the progress of South Asian women. Women Agarwal talked to for her research wanted land before anything else, including education and employment. Land provides the women with social status and political power, along with economic security. It is a much better security than that of employment because a woman with land has control of her own subsistence. Land owning households are at a lower risk of poverty.

Land ownership increases the value of women both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. In 1940s China, women who began registering land in their own names reported that it was the first time they had a sense of self. After the 1970s Bodhgaya land movement in Bihar, gender relations worsened in villages where women didn't get land. These women were more likely to be abused than women who had obtained land.

Agarwal says land rights should be put first. "Other issues, like education, are complementary. But land ownership could make a critical difference in the lives of millions of rural women."

News Sources: Women's International News Gathering Services (WINGS), Ms., Lola Press.



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