

A REVIEW OF ONE'S OWN

NEWSLETTER OF THE CORK WOMEN'S LIBRARY
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20p

This is the second newsletter from the Cork Women's Library Collective. We had a really good response to the last edition. As a result we are now introducing new subscription rates and hope individuals and groups will give their support and their money. The next review will also include a letters page, so any issues, comments or criticisms are welcome. If any groups have any events coming up let us know.

We are dependent on advertising to cover costs of printing etc., and on publishers to donate books to the library for review and on this note a special thanks goes to Lyn Edmonds (Daily Telegraph), Sheeba, Metheun, Women's Community Press and Co-op Typesetting for their support and encouragement.

WOMEN: A World Report published by Methuen

This is a book from the New Internationalist Co-op, a group who produce a monthly magazine called "New Internationalist" which deals with social issues and world development. The United Nations Department of Public Information has for the first time compiled extensive documentation on the position of women in different countries throughout the world. It is primarily information from this research that informs the first part of this book with additional information provided by Oxford University's Centre for Cross-Cultural Research on Women. The statistics compiled by the U.N. are translated into a more concrete analysis of women's position in the world today. Debbie Taylor, the author of part 1 constantly clarifies the data and occasionally provides local information on the relevant statistics which often usurp the official data. She also outlines the parallels that exist in the lives of women in very different countries. In her discussion of the World Survey on Women in Agriculture she says that the invisibility of women's contribution to agriculture in Africa and Asia, is not unsimilar to the experience of the traditional European 'farmer's wife'. Where the work of feeding hens and gardening is looked upon as domestic work, thereby making a woman farmer disappear. This invisibility exists because 'people gazing at the world's agriculture, do so, through the distorting prisms of men's and women's sex roles. Man, the bread winner, is assumed, and expected, to be working in the fields. Woman, the wife and mother has a veil of invisibility drawn around her when she does the same'.

This invisibility has two affects: (1) women are excluded from the agriccultural training and (2) because women traditionally grow the basic food, the livelihood of the community, especially children is put in jeopardy. Increasingly land in the developing countries is being taken over by multi-national countries who buy up the local land and employ men to work the machinery which produces food for export. Women and children are left alone to tend the "patch" and what they produce cannot compete with the multi-nationals. They reduce the amount of time spent on the patch and produce inferior crops, with which to feed their children, as time must be spent looking for work in the towns. The Food and Agricultural Organisation has said that until women in the developing countries are allowed to acquire and hold onto land independently of men then the attempts to fight famine will not succeed. Latin American women in agriculture meet with a similar situation as that which European women experienced during the world wars, for they are only employed when they are needed during the harvest and left go when men can do the job on their own.

In the section on Work-industrialisation Debbie Taylor points out that women are more likely to be hit by unemployment than men during recession and that even though official statistics bare this out no recognition is given to the fact that not all women who are looking for work or who are not employed are registered. Given this fact the statistics relating to the number of women unemployed grossly underestimate the number in real terms.

The needs of women in the developing countries are far different from the needs of women in the developed countries yet as we can see from the evidence in this book the causes attributed to these needs have a similar source. As is pointed out in the Political section it is because men control the power and women possess all the responsibility that these gross injustices still exist between men and women. And the laudable principle of 'equal pay for equal work' has no meaning in a world where men and women are forced to different kinds of work.

A statement of particular relevance to women in Ireland appears in the section on Sex. Here we are informed that in the Kinsey Report on Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female carried out in 1953 religious beliefs had little or no effect on a man's sexual pleasure, but could slice as powerfully as the circumcision knife into a woman's enjoyment, undermining with guilt and shame any pleasure she might otherwise experience. It is frightening to imagine the possible number of Irish women who have never experienced the joy of masturbating and suffer the attendant problems of sexual expression because they do not even know how to please themselves. It would be interesting to find out what Irish women think and feel about sexual pleasure and having said that, I must say that yet again the dearth of information about women in Ireland becomes patently obvious

in a book of this kind. We must yet again allow ourselves to be identified as women who have the same experience as their sisters in the U.K. and the U.S.A.

In the second part of the book ten women writers give their impressions of the position of women in countries different from their own. Five from the 'rich' world, and five from the 'poor' world – have each visited a country and give their report of that country's experience for women. It is the part of the book which is easiest to read, but if you do begin at this section don't forget to sift through the first, otherwise you will lose out on a lot of important information which will provide you with a wide knowledge of women's experience throughout the world. Unfortunately I was unable to read all of this section but reading the report by Anita Desai on life for women in Norway I was reminded of something which a friend of mine once said. Describing Elisabeth as 'Ibsen's Nora giving back her wedding ring to her husband and walking out into the night because she had to do 'my duty to myself' and as Cora Sandel's Alberta who had also left her family to go away alone – no arms around her' I remembered that faced with a similar experience a friend found that she enjoyed not having her husband's arm around her anymore, and the luxury of a double bed on her own and the freedom to think a thought through without interruption. It is the personal camaraderie between these women from different cultures which informs this part of the book and it is a necessary and complementary part. As outlined in the beginning the editorial design has succeeded in its aim to avoid 'international voyeurism' as so often happens when the rich world views the poorer, here in the best efforts of the One World approach, ideas and insights are exchanged. This is an informative and stimulating book to read.

Claire O'Mahony

THE NEEDLE ON FULL. Lesbian Feminist Science Fiction by Caroline Forbes – Onlywomen Press.

This collection of short stories is entertaining and thought-provoking. If you want a break from Virago Classics or demanding works on feminist theory or philosophy this book will help you change gear. I would quibble with the choice of *The Needle On Full* as the title story. The Comet's Tail seems a much more ambitious treatment of a similar theme: two women forced to circumstance to spend a period of time together in close proximity and the intimate relationship they develop. I particularly like the humour in Snake and The Visitors. In fact, the wicked note of humour running right through the book is its most enjoyable feature. You can almost hear the author cackle as she steers her characters into a universe which thrives on unexpected twists and curves of fate.

The one disturbing feature which is apparent in a number of stories is a projection of a post-Armageddon wastleland where men have either destoryed themselves and planet Earth or have had to be killed off by disease gun-wielding women. Science fiction has become scientific fact all too often for me not to take these fantasies seriously.

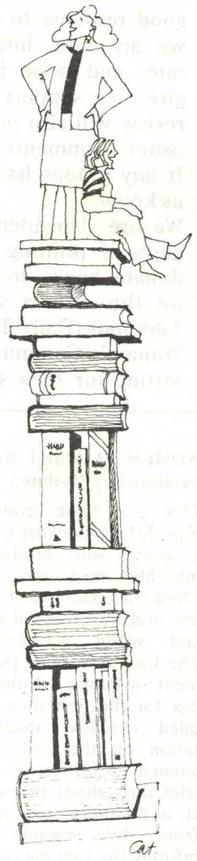
Surely lesbian feminist imaginations can come up with a more hopeful and more original future? Holocausts and genocidal massacres abound in male-authored fiction and in the factual world of white male systems of government.

There are fundamentalist christian sects in the U.S. who interpret the Book of Revelation to mean that a nuclear holocaust has been decreed by The Almighty but God's chosen believers will of course survive. One of these self-styled prophets lectured in Cork and Dublin recently. She was vested in a robe which was a cross between a sari and a Catholic priest's chasuble and selling oodles of promotional literature with a logo which pledged belief in a futuristic psychedelic Christ! The antics of these sects might be highly amusing were it not for the reality of Reagan's Star Wars programme which is frighteningly possible.

I would love to see what Caroline Forbes would produce if she thrusted her imagination more into the realms of feminist futures as invisioned in *Herland* or *Woman On The Edge of Time* for instance, but that's just a personal preference. In *The Needle On Full* her brand of Lesbian Feminist Science Fiction jolts you into an awareness of scientific fact and Lesbian Feminist experience and as such it is well worth reading.

Joni Crone

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"IN NIGHT'S CITY" by Dorothy Nelson. Wolfhound Press.

This book is about violence that begets more violence and more violence. It is also about incest – or how an incest victim views the world and the other violences that are as bad if not worse because they are repeated so often. It is about battering. Battering – husband of wife, father of children, mother of daughter. It is a terrible book because it is so true, yet in some strange way it is also a beautiful book because it is about children acting out their daily lives pretending that reality is not fact. The title would have conjured up for me before reading, stars, wondrous things, and perhaps eerie things that got righted in the morning. Now it draws to mind the supremacy of darkness and evil. Dorothy Nelson has managed to place the ultimate description of domestic violence before us in this book. When you read it you are not going to like it. You are never going to smile and think "didn't she put that well". When you know that she has got it right you are going to shiver.

"In Night's City" is a poetic portrayal of horror and I couldn't help believing at times that if the author had used more 'normal' language she would have had to resolve the tensions within the book to a greater degree. Because I find it hard to believe that these women who had to suffer so much could all hate each other so fervently. Although on the other hand it is possible that they cannot afford to even sympathise with each other because in order to do so they would have to know too much about each other and themselves. Yet the mother says "Repeat after me. Men are bastards" as if she wants to believe that her daughter will triumph. Yet she wants her married in the domino manner of woman victim or girl potential victim. All the while this daughter thinks in terms of colour – White, Red, and Dark Black.

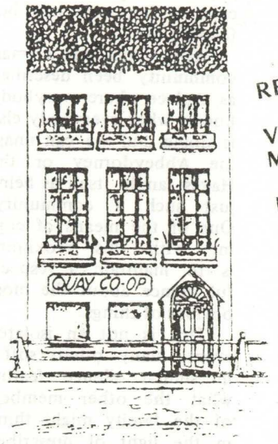
The mothers story of the start of her marriage is as chilling, exact, and sparse as I can imagine written anywhere. "I found out that what I thought was happening wasn't happening at all and all I had to do was to let him do what he wanted with me and he'd never know". Again "Then I had Sara. And then two more. And I thought how the same motherhood cut through me like a knife as I lay in the dark waiting for them to exalt me while I listened for his footsteps on the stairs knowing how he'd beat me if I refused him. The people who preached the word didn't know the meaning of it...." "So I married him to lay me down in the dark nights and hate where no one need ever know with the earth lying over me in the curse of the long relentless hours." Later her daughter says "Don't cry Mammy,... Don't cry. But she wasn't. She was shrunk down to where you can't. It began to drizzle rain".

This book is a real book about Ireland and your feelings are never spared. It is specifically Irish in its Roman Catholic reaction to the family, although it is the universal story of battered women. The priest asks "Well, apart from your father beating you, what is going on?". He later suggests to her that "Your parents seem very nice to me". You want to read about the family that the priest thought was normal! It reminded me of my early cynicism of the priest on a Christmas morning talking about people loving each other even though he know that half the congregation of men had been stocious at midnight mass and no doubt had piercing hangovers just at this moment. There is indeed a comment on many of the viciousness of violent Irish family life – a comment that you will not enjoy but one that we need.

Another major part, voice of this book is the relentless search for love on the childs part somewhat similar to the daughter in *"Piece of the Night"* by Michele Roberts. Indeed the daughters search is probably similar to the mothers own because her mother in turn had never loved nor forgiven her.

I have no doubt that we should read this unhappy, poetic, brutal book even though we may want to say all the way through it that surely it could have been different, surely women didn't have to be such victims all the time, surely Dorothy Nelson has got the flavour wrong because I believe that she has in fact got it right. Which is why there was a revolution is it not?

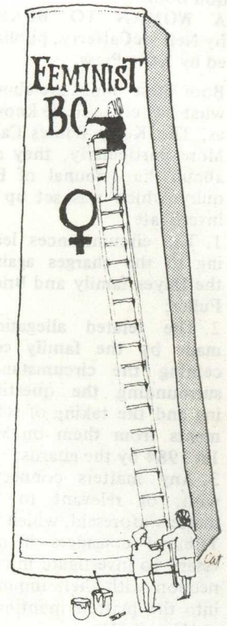
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MY STORY by Joanne Hayes, published by Brandon Books.
A WOMAN TO BLAME by Nell McCafferty, published by Attic Press.

Both these books are about, what has come to be known as, The Kerry Babies Case. More particularly, they are about the Tribunal of Enquiry which was set up to investigate:

1. The circumstances leading to the charges against the Hayes family and Bridie Fuller;
2. The related allegations made by the family concerning the circumstances surrounding the questioning and the taking of statements from them on May 1st 1984 by the guards;
3. Any matters connected with, or relevant to the matters aforesaid, which the Tribunal considers it necessary to investigate in connection with their inquiries into the matters mentioned at (1) and (2).

Subsequently we were all to realise that emphasis would be given to the third term of reference, "any relevant matters", allowed the tribunal to conduct, in effect, the trial that was never meant to be and the police lawyers took the opportunity that had originally been denied them to present what the director of public prosecutions had called 'this amazing case'. While *A Woman To Blame* offers a perspective of, and insight into, the legal niceities of the Tribunal, *My Story* gives an enlightening view of the predicament in which Joanne Hayes found herself, not only at the Tribunal but also during her pregnancy.

In *My Story* we realise that from Joanne's point of view the Tribunal was as much a media production as it was an enquiry. In the reports about the case Joanne's sister Kathleen was applauded by the press for having been "an impressive and convincing witness", while her brother Ned, despite his amatuer theatrics, was woefully described in terms of stage fright. Similarly when describing how she could take no more of the inquisition herself the Tribunal called upon Kathleen to take the stand, "for with legal costs at £4000 per day, the show must go on." Such was the extent of media interest in this show that Joanne's former lover, Jeremiah Locke secured a court injunction against some personnel of the Thames Television programme TV Eye, claiming that he had been harrassed by them at work. Comic relief was brought to the production by the spectre of Tom Flynn, a character linked to Joanne because his name was discovered written on her mattress. The Gardai hoped that he would provide the missing link to establish their theory of "super fecundation". In order to secure their theory the Gardai had to prove that Joanne had sexual intercourse with a man with blood type A within forty eight hours of having made love with Jeremiah Locke and that despite its rareity had been made pregnant by both. Tralee people entered into the spirit of this farce by wearing T-shirts which said **"I am Tom Flynn"** later it was discovered that Tom Flynn had been a sales clerk who liked to sign the mattresses he sold. These and other wild goose chases were allowed by the judge in his attempt to find out what happened at Tralee Garda Station at the time the Hayes' were questioned and made their statements.

My Story throws light on some of the more misleadingly bald facts of the case, such as the lateness of the allegations against the Gardai. Apparently the allegations were first mentioned on May 5th 1984 but were kept quiet by Patrick Mann, the Hayes' family's solictor, in order to be used later to better advantage, in defence. Of her silence about her pregnancy we learn that such silence was a usual occurence in her own and her family's life.

Many times has a small community been described as a place where everybody knows what everybody else is doing and we can imagine Abbeydorney or the Hayes family itself as being just such a community. One of the means of coping with this proximity is to maintain a respectful silence about the most obvious of things.

This is not an isolated event, many others suffer in similar silence fearing what the other members of the family might think in the light of prescribed morality. Furthermore it is not an event confined to Tralee and its environs but rather is one which occurs, everywhere social morality refuses to accept what it defines as deviance.

Despite the great extent of media coverage and the extreme latitude given to the Tribunal in its investigation, questions still remain unanswered and largely because, as The Irish Times put it, the wrong questions were asked. The harrowing and often ruthless way in which Joanne Hayes and her family were questioned has ended with the Judge's final report offering that she and her family were "barefaced liars". The Gardai were excused by Judge Lynch, for their testimonies merely "gilded the lily" an action excusable on their part because "there is a danger that the oath may become for them largely a matter of form". In the final chapter of *A Woman To Blame* Nell poses the unthinkable horror of the case "that if the Cahirciveen baby had been, perchance, blood group O, such wishful thinking and gilding of the lily might have resulted in imprisonment, upon conviction of murder, of Joanne Hayes and her family". Furthermore she cites that more thorny of issues the credibility of the legal system, when she says, "The report has in fact laid grounds for fear of the law itself, and the courts, and the police because all that stands between the innocent and the opinion that that the police are 'unlikely to tell completely groundless lies' is chance. Should chance dictate otherwise, people could end up in jail".

Judge Lynch makes the further speculation that 'Joanne got into a panic (the night she gave birth to her baby) and as the baby cried she put her hands around its neck and stopped it crying by choking'. To 'the legally untutored' as Nell describes us, this reads as willful murder on the part of Joanne Hayes, whereas the Judge is saying that it was a case of misadventure, but as Nell points out such careful choice of words gives most people the impression that she murdered her baby while carefully absolving the Judge of such blatent misrepresentation.

Nell McCafferty reminds us that according to the Catholic morality within this report a distinction should be made between one kind of female and another. Women are saved and elevated to the status of ladies (a term that always reminds me of the loo) if they become mothers within marriage. Joanne was not a wronged lady according to Judge Lynch, says Nell, she was described by him as "a sexually evil Eve, mesmerising a helpless Adam in the Vale of Tralee". To understand the implications of Judge Lynch's colourful report and the repercussions of his interpretation of the case, it is important to read *My Story* and *A Woman To Blame.*

Claire O'Mahony

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