

CARTON 317

WILD TREES PRESS

PRESS COVERAGE

1984-1985

2017/193
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MAKING CHANGE

Ms. GAZETTE®

Best-Sellers from Crone's Own, Light Cleaning, Down There, and Dozens of Other

FEMINIST PRESSES

In the beginning—in the late sixties—was the word. Women meeting in consciousness-raising groups wrote down the ideas they had generated and ran off copies. The ideas grew into pamphlets and articles that were circulated among friends, handed out at demonstrations, and sold at conferences. When the pamphlets and articles were bound into books, a feminist book publishing industry began.

Carol Seajay, editor of "Feminist Bookstore News," described this early activity for the First International Feminist Book Fair in London: "On the East Coast, women of Diana Press printed collections of articles from 'The Furies.' They also started publishing the poetry of Rita Mae Brown. On the West Coast, the Women's Press Collective compiled work by women, printing and publishing collections entitled 'Women to Women' and 'Lesbians Speak Out.' Later, the collective published volumes of poetry by Judy Grahn, Pat Parker, and Willyce Kim, working-class and Third World women whose work had not been published anywhere else. And Shameless Hussy—Alta—started publishing her own work and the work of Susan Griffin, Ntozake Shange, and others."

At the same time, feminist bookstores began to appear around the country, providing a needed marketing outlet for the presses. (See "What Makes a Feminist Bookstore Special?" "Ms.," September, 1983.) These have evolved into a network of 88 stores, while other progressive and general bookstores have increased interest in small press feminist books. Seajay's "Feminist Bookstore News" (P.O. Box 882554, San Francisco, California 94188; \$35 per year) is the trade publication of the women's bookstore movement.



Although this spring's release from The Naiad Press, "Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence," threatens to be a best-seller (see excerpt on page 48), the feminist press commitment remains to ground-breakers—work at the cutting edge of feminist thinking that will expand the imagination and create new consciousness. Most presses try hard to keep titles in print and, increasingly, to provide reprints of significant works that have disappeared from the market. While royalty

figures are generally close to the industry norm, advances are rare, and promotion is generally limited to personal appearances and conscientious networking. Many authors are subsequently picked up and published by "major" houses after a small press success.

Over and over the women with whom I talked explained that they became publishers because certain books needed to exist. Many presses survive by being highly specialized, focusing on a very specific audience, be it spiritual healers or progressive vegetarians. The most sobering comment on the financial perils of feminist publishing is the disappearance of "established" presses, such as Persephone and Diana. The most heartening is the list of more than 75 women-owned or co-owned presses in the 1985 Index/Directory of Feminist Media (available for \$8 from Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Place, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008).

In the following listing, I have reluctantly omitted presses that publish the work of only one author, and gay men's and university presses, several of which are seriously committed to women's issues. All the presses listed rely on a loyal audience and the active cooperation of feminists and other progressive bookstores. Write for their catalogs. Buy their books.

BY ANDREA FLECK CLARDY

ACACIA BOOKS (P.O. Box 3630, Berkeley, Calif. 94703). Marjorie Larney and Paula Moseley started Acacia in 1983 with personal expertise in computer technologies. In addition to a series of pamphlets on feminist theory and *Stage V: A Journal Through Illness*, by Sonny Wainwright (documenting one woman's heroic struggle for remission from cancer), they plan to publish micro-computer software for women, and within five years, to produce books printed on demand.

ACADEMY CHICAGO PUBLISHERS (425 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. 60611). Literary excellence has been the priority for Anita and Jordan Miller since they started publishing in 1975. Aware of the volume of excellent work that was unavailable, they emphasized reprints and new translations from the start and now publish more than 50 a year. Their current list includes the first English translation of George Sand's *Lucrezia Floriani*, and five paperback volumes of feminist Han Suyin's autobiography and history of China.

ALICE JAMES BOOKS (138 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138). Seven poets decided in 1973 to create a writers' cooperative, named their venture for Henry and William's gifted sister, and solicited manuscripts from the New England states. Poets selected would make a two-year commitment to running the press, participating in every aspect of book production from design to distribution. It was a profoundly fair and sensible conception, most remarkable for the fact that it has worked. Under the continuing leadership of Marjorie Fletcher, "Alice" has published 50 books that have received an impressive array of awards.

AUNT LUTE BOOK COMPANY (P.O. Box 2568, Iowa City, Iowa 52244). Aunt Lute was established in 1983 by two members of the Iowa City Women's Press collective to

take over publication of *Against the Grain: A Carpentry Manual for Women* and *The Greasy Thumb: Automechanics Manual for Women*. It has since published two novels by Dodici Azpadu and *Shadow on a Tightrope*, a feminist collection on fat oppression.

BEACON PRESS (25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. 02108). Owned by the Unitarian-Universalist Association, Beacon is unique among church-affiliated presses for its editorial bravado. It has an outstanding list on feminist theology, ranging from Starhawk's *Dreaming the Dark* to the work of eminent theorists Rosemary Radford Ruether and Nelle Morton. Beacon has also published the philosophical-linguistical work of Mary Daly, and *Another Mother Tongue*, by Judy Grahn, a personal synthesis of gay cultural tradition.

BIBLIO PRESS (P.O. Box 22, Fresh Meadows, N.Y. 11365). Doris Gold started Biblio six years ago from her home in order to "bring light to the subject of Jewish women." Biblio first published bibliographies of Jewish women's studies and has since expanded its scope to include *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers*, by Sondra Henry and Emily Taitz, and the forthcoming *Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*, by Penina V. Adelman.

BLACK OYSTER PRESS (P.O. Box 8550, Chicago, Ill. 60680). *Memory in Bone*, poetry and prose by Susan Dambroff, a Jewish woman living in Lebanon, is the most recent Black Oyster publication. These beautiful books are hand-set and printed on letterpress.

BOOKLEGGERS PRESS (555 29th Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94131). Celeste West is a journalist, librarian, and publishing consultant who founded Booklegger Press in 1972. Launched by a very successful book with an unlikely name, *Revolting Librarians*, Bookleg-

ger specializes in books on feminist media, including *Words in Our Pockets: The Feminist Writers Guild Handbook on How To Gain Power, Get Published, and Get Paid*. West continues to advise individuals and groups on how to publish their own work.

CLEIS PRESS (P.O. Box 8933, Pittsburg, Pa. 15221). Cleis Press is a three-woman partnership that began in Minneapolis in 1980 and now has offices on the West Coast staffed by Frederique Delacoste and Mary Winfrey Trautmann, and on the East Coast by Felice Newman. Newman explains: "Our focus is grass-roots, very basic women's issues. I like to say that we 'instigate' books as much as publish them. So much of our time goes into developing ideas for books, and they are often a long time in the making." Their first title, *Fight Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence*, began as an idea for a self-defense manual and grew into an anthology of resources, theory, poems, photographs, and articles, more than 400 oversize pages in length. The newest Cleis title is *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology*, edited by Nanci Stern, Debra Connors, and Susan Browne.

COALITION ON WOMEN AND RELIGION (4759 15th Avenue N.E., Seattle, Wash. 98105). Founded in 1973, the coalition has reprinted *The Woman's Bible*, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, first published in 1895, as well as *Study Guide to the Woman's Bible*, and *The Word for Us*, by Jo Haugerud. To strengthen the network of "women with varying religious experience," the coalition also publishes "The Flame," a quarterly newsletter.

COMMON GROUND PRESS (P.O. Box 50064, Washington, D.C. 20004). Common Ground publishes writers of color who have an established audience in their areas of expertise, including Michelle Parkerson, Joanne Jimason, and Har-

ryette Mullen. Common Ground does not accept solicited manuscripts.

CRONE'S OWN PRESS (Driver Street, Durham, N.C. 27703). Elizabeth Freer saw a need for the publication of older feminist women's writings and set up a one-woman operation that relies on the active involvement of authors. "Crone, a pejorative used against older women, was chosen for its original meaning, a wise old one who knows the secrets of the universe."

THE CROSSING PRESS (P.O. Box 640, Trumansburg, N.Y. 14886). Elaine Goldman and John Gill started publishing poetry chapbooks years ago, collating the pages by walking around the dining room table. More than 100 books later, Crossing has established its reputation as a broad-based alternative press with a commitment to health cookbooks, gay literature books about childbirth, and antinuke books. One of the strongest components of the press is the Feminist Series with 24 titles in print, including *Sister Outsider: Essays on Speeches*, by Audre Lorde, *Abeng*, by Michelle Cliff, and *Mother Wit: A Feminist Guide to Psychic Development*, by Diane Mariechild.

DOWN THERE PRESS (P.O. Box 2086, Burlingame, Calif. 94010). Joani Blank founded Down There in 1975, the publishing house devoted exclusively to sex education and sexual enhancement books: "Women grow up receiving only negative information about sex: how not to get pregnant, how not to get V. Everybody assumes the rest comes naturally, but you have to learn about pleasure, too."

THE FEMINIST PRESS (P.O. Box 334, Old Westbury, N.Y. 11568). Now in its fifth year, The Feminist Press is a nonprofit educational organization committed to bringing the heritage of women's lives into the classroom. The lo-

history of American women writers has been restored with the publication of books by Rebecca Harding Davis, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Zora Neale Hurston, among others. Study guides are available for many of their books. Florence Howe, founder and publisher, sees the future focus of the press as "deepening our commitment to international work." This will involve publishing in English or bilingual editions work from other countries, and cross-cultural studies.

FIREBRAND BOOKS (141 *The Commons, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850*). Brand new and thriving, Firebrand will publish six titles in its first year. Now available are *Jonestown & Other Madness*, poetry by Pat Parker; *Mohawk Trail*, by Indian writer Beth Brant; and *Moll Cutpurse*, a novel by Ellen Galford. Firebrand's running start is attributable to Nancy K. Bereano who previously edited the Feminist Series at The Crossing Press. She is a firm believer in independent feminist and lesbian publishing: "Especially in the face of increasingly virulent and sophisticated attacks from the right, we must be able to define who we are and talk to one another directly." Forthcoming are books by Michelle Cliff, Pawnee/Otoe writer Anna Lee Walters, and Southern activist Mab Segrest.

FROG IN THE WELL (430 *Oakdale Road, East Palo Alto, Calif. 94303*). Begun as a pamphlet-publishing collective linked to the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence, Frog in the Well was reorganized as a book publisher by Susan Hester. Titles include *The New Woman's Broken Heart*, by Andrea Dworkin, and *Against Sodomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*. Frog in the Well also publishes *The Feminist Publishers' News*, which provides a forum for news of the industry. Subscriptions are \$15 a year for five issues.

HECUBA'S DAUGHTERS (P.O. Box 488, *Bearsville, N.Y. 12409*). A mail-order specialty house, Hecuba's Daughters publishes and distributes books "devoted to inspiring and promoting the healing works of wimmin." Now in their tenth year of business, Billie Potts and River Lightwomoon have more than 65 active bookstore accounts and sell directly to the public at women's festivals, and through the mail.

KITCHEN TABLE: WOMEN OF COLOR PRESS (P.O. Box 2753, *New York, N.Y. 10185*). Kitchen Table is the first publisher in North America committed to producing and distributing the work of Third World women of all racial/cultural heritages, sexualities, and classes. Professionally savvy as well as socially vibrant, Kitchen Table issues two books a year, which it markets aggressively, and distributes relevant titles published by other small presses. With one professional administrator, Betty Powell, Kitchen Table actively seeks the involvement of women with different ethnicities and experiences. The backlist includes *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa; *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith; and *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*, edited by Alma Gómez, Cherrie Moraga, and Mariana Romo-Carmona.

LIGHT CLEANING PRESS (Box 14, *Guttenberg, N.J. 07093*). Formerly called Karmic Revenge Laundry Shop Press, Light Cleaning has been producing low-budget feminist poetry books and essays since 1973. Says editor Rita Karman, "Our physical format remains clearly shoestring, although we have gotten excellent reviews of the content."

LOLLIPOP POWER, INC. (P.O. Box 1171, *Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514*). Lollipop Power, a

feminist collective, has published 19 paperback books for preschool and elementary age children in an attempt to help counteract the sex and race stereotyping present in most commercial "kid lit." Engagingly illustrated, the Lollipop books are mostly targeted for specific age groups, with a few designated "for all ages," such as the bilingual *Grown-ups Cry Too/Los Adultos Tambien Lloran*, by Nancy Hazen.

METIS PRESS, INC. (P.O. Box 25187, *Chicago, Ill. 60625*). Metis operates its own printing presses and refers to them with respect and affection. Book work is done on a small multilith press at a volunteer, cottage industry pace, often with the help of authors. With six titles in print, Metis is committed to the presentation of talented new writers and to hands-on teaching of book production skills. Its most popular teaching tool is Pearl, an 1885 Golding letterpress, almost certainly the oldest feminist letterpress in service. Nancy Poore, Pearl's principal operator, has 25 years of printing experience.

MOTHER COURAGE PRESS (1533 *Illinois Street, Racine, Wis. 53405*). Mother Courage was a bookstore when its owners were asked to illustrate and publish a children's book for victims of sexual abuse. The result was *Something Happened to Me*, by Phyllis Sweet, followed by *Why Me? Help for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse*, by Lynn Daugherty, and a commitment to publish future books "on difficult topics."

THE NAIAD PRESS (P.O. Box 10543, *Tallahassee, Fla. 32302*). Barbara Grier, co-founder and editorial director of Naiad, chuckles at her reputation as the guru of lesbian-feminist publishing. With 60 books in print and 11 years of experience, Naiad has never lost money on a title: "We understand our audience. There are 20 million or so gay and

lesbian readers out there, a huge and literate audience eager for accurate, positive images of itself. The people who buy our books, like the public at large, enjoy gothic novels and romances and nonfiction books with new information." Naiad's minimum press run is now 10,000, and nine titles have sold more than 25,000 copies. Grier expects that the publication of *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* "will simply put us in a new category in the world."

NEW SEED PRESS (P.O. Box 9488, *Berkeley, Calif. 94709*). When *Frances Ann Speaks Out: My Father Raped Me* was published in 1977, distributors refused to handle it, and magazines would not review it. The publisher, a multiracial women's collective, understood that the book was "a forerunner, as most of our stuff has been," kept it in print, and watched it become one of its best-selling titles. The other best-seller, also a first of its kind, is the Spanish/English story of a child with a parent in prison, *My Mother and I Are Growing Strong*. New Seed publishes children's books "that encourage thinking about how the world could be different... and how to go about changing it."

NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS, (4722 *Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. 19143*). New Society publishes books that promote social change through nonviolence. Recent books that exemplify the feminist component of this commitment are: *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, edited by Jane Meyerding, and *Re-weaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence*, edited by Pam McAllister.

NEW VICTORIA PUBLISHERS, INC. (7 *Bank Street, Lebanon, N.H. 03766*). New Victoria takes its name from a press owned by Emily Faithful in England in the 1860s that employed only women and printed magazines advocating their rights.

Beth Dingman and Claudia Lamperti define New Victoria as "a feminist work collective dedicated to producing fine quality offset printing, silk screening, and graphic design." The double identity, as printer and publishers, has allowed them to print their own six titles and to supplement book publishing with the production and sale of T-shirts and posters.

NORTHWEST MATRIX (385 East 11 Street, Eugene, Oreg. 97401). A *Consumer's Guide to Sex, Race and Career Role Bias in Public School Textbooks*, published in 1977, with periodic updates is available from Charlotte Mills's Northwest Matrix. She has also issued a number of other titles from feminist publishers no longer in business: such as *Angel dance*, a feminist thriller by M.F. Beal, published first by Daughters Inc.

PANDORA PRESS, ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL (9 Park Street, Boston, Mass. 02108). RKP has been a distinguished publisher of academic books more or less forever, having been founded in London in 1834. In 1972 an American branch was opened, and in 1983 Pandora Press was initiated as an imprint for feminist books with a general audience. Philippa Brewster took the idea for the imprint she now edits to "Auntie Routledge," who supported it "in a slightly bemused way." With a commitment to producing 20 books a year that are accessible in language and in price, Pandora has offered a wide range of titles, from *This Place*, a compelling novel by Andrea Freud Loewenstein, to *Test Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?* an anthology on reproductive technologies.

PRESS GANG (603 Powell Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6A 1H2). A "left-leaning printing group" before it was a publishing collective, Press Gang is one of Canada's pioneer feminist presses and has been issuing one or two books a year, along with occasional posters, for 12 years. Best known is *Daughters of*

Copper Woman, by Anne Cameron, a controversial collection of West Coast Indian legends, consistent with Press Gang's commitment "to uncover the symbols that shape women's lives."

SANGUINARIA PUBLISHING (85 Ferris Street, Bridgeport, Conn. 06605). Sanguinaria is operated by the same three-member collective that owns Bloodroot, a successful feminist vegetarian restaurant and bookstore. The *Political Palate* and *The Second Seasonal Political Palate* combine recipes with philosophy.

SEAL PRESS (312 South Washington, Seattle, Wash. 98104). Begun by Barbara Wilson and Rachel da Silva to encourage the work of women writing in the Northwest, Seal has expanded its focus to a national audience. The New Leaf Series on feminist approaches to domestic violence includes *Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships*, by Ginny NiCarthy, which now has 32,000 copies in print, as well as handbooks directed specifically to black and Latina women. Women in Translation, Seal's newest imprint, will include two to four books a year. The final fledgling series is feminist mysteries, launched with Barbara Wilson's own excellent *Murder in the Collective*.

SHAMELESS HUSSY PRESS (Box 3092, Berkeley, Calif. 94703). Alta was one of the first: she began by publishing a small anthology and then books of poetry. She has published 60 books since then, about 20 of which remain in print. Gradually Alta has expanded the scope of the press to include feminist prose, the writing of gay men, and children's stories: "I periodically think about quitting, but I don't know what else I could do that would feel as important."

SOUTH END PRESS (302 Columbus Avenue, Boston, Mass. 02116). In a little less than eight years, South End has grown from a radical whim to an 11-member publishing collective with 100 books in print

and gross sales of more than \$1 million yearly. "When we began, we decided that we would publish books focusing on class, race, and gender dynamics in the United States in hopes that our books would contribute to consciousness-raising and would assist activists by providing guidance and resources." South End is very serious about promotion and distribution and attributes to its promotional efforts the average lifetime sale of its books, which, at 6,500, is more than twice the industry average. Its most recent feminist titles are *Feminist Theory*, by Bell Hooks, and *A Creative Tension*, a collection of essays by socialist feminists of the Dutch Women's Movement.

SPINSTERS INK (803 DeHaro Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94107). Spinsters passed from its founders, Judith McDaniel and Maureen Brady, to its current owner, Sherry Thomas, moving from the East Coast to the West Coast in the process. Among its authors are Minnie Bruce Pratt and Paula Gunn Allen. In addition to seven books in 1985, a new line of note cards and blank journals with color art by feminist artists is planned. "Our commitment," says Thomas, "is to works that are beyond the scope of mainstream commercial publishers, publishing between the cracks of what can be imagined and what will be accepted."

TIMELY BOOKS (P.O. Box 267, New Milford, Conn. 06776). Twenty years ago, lesbian novels with lurid covers were something of a fad. Reclaiming these books for feminist readers has been a function of Timely Books. Reprints include six novels by Paula Christian.

VOLCANO PRESS, INC. (330 Ellis Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94102). Ruth Gottstein helped initiate a publishing program for the Glide Church in 1969, catalyzing awareness with titles such as *Battered Wives*, *Conspiracy of Silence* (about incest), and *Learning To Live Without Violence*. When she

left the church in 1981, Gottstein took the New Glide backlist with her as the foundation for Volcano. Her most recent title is *Menopause, Naturally*, by Sadjia Greenwood, M.D.

WILD TREES PRESS (P.O. Box 378, Navarro, Calif. 95486). With some of her earnings from the instant classic *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker launched a new small press in collaboration with her friend Robert Allen, former editor of *The Black Scholar*. Her explicit intention is for the press to remain small, publishing a few books a year, all of which are "manuscripts we love and can't bear to not have available." The first, published in December, 1984, was *A Piece of Mine*, by J. California Cooper, a collection of stories that read as if spoken to a friend. This fall, Wild Trees will publish JoAnne Brasil's first novel, *Escape from Billy's Barbecue*, which chronicles the coming of age of a white teenager in Boston, and the company introduced a note card series featuring photographs and quotes of Alice Walker.

THE WOMEN'S PRESS (229 College Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R4). Fourteen years and 56 books after its inception, The Women's Press maintains its commitment, as a nonprofit socialist/feminist collective, to bringing material from the Women's Movement to the reading public. With many books that are specifically Canadian in orientation, The Women's Press is best known in the United States for *Everywoman's Almanac*, an annual thematic datebook which focuses on reproductive choice in its 1986 edition.

WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS, INC. (P.O. Box 8475, Minneapolis, Minn. 55408). For five years Marj Schneider has guided a collective effort to make feminist literature available to women who cannot read in print. More than 150 books are available on tape and Braille, as well as a quarterly newsletter.

Andrea Fleck Clardy is a freelance writer with experience in small-press promotion.

CROSS CURRENTS

Citing a possible conflict of interest, Alice Turner, fiction editor of *Playboy*, has resigned from the panel judging First Work of Fiction for the 1985 American Book Awards. Turner said she asked to be replaced when she learned that collections of short fiction were eligible for consideration. She will be replaced by author and book reviewer Doris Grumbach, who was head of last year's First Work panel and who has already read many of the 40 titles submitted for this year's competition.

Viking sales reps will shortly be wearing T-shirts bearing the legend *Lake Wobegon Days* and the international *verboden* symbol (a circle with a slash through it) over the word "Texas." Conceived during a euphoric moment at the August sales conference, the flippant challenge to James Michener's upcoming novel has taken on new seriousness now that Garrison Keillor's book has hit #1 on bestseller lists.

Wild Trees Press, founded last year by Alice Walker and Robert Allen "to publish only what we love," reports that it has received almost 1000 advance orders for its second publication, *Escape from Billy's Bar-B-Que*. The publishers describe this first novel as "wryly humorous about the coming of age in the late '60s of a working-class southern white woman." In her 38 years, author Joanne Brasil has lived in more than 20 places and held more than 25 jobs. "The only thing that's permanent is psychological trauma," she says, "and I'm working on that, too."

Successful people read more books (an average of 19 a year) than the common run of people, and began the habit before the age of 10. That's one of the findings of a survey of 1500 high achievers included in *The Great American Success Story: Factors That Affect Achievement* by George Gallup Jr. and Alec Gallup with William Proctor, to be published later this month by Dow Jones-Irwin.

It's not often that an author loses his job while on a book tour and learns about it on the front pages of newspapers. Tim Sebastian, BBC's Moscow TV correspondent, was touring the U.S. for *Nice Promises* (Merrimack Publishers' Circle), his personal account of the Solidarity crisis in Poland, when he learned that he was the BBC's former Moscow correspondent. Following the defection of the KGB head in Britain and Britain's expulsion of 25 Soviet citizens, the Russians expelled 25 British citizens and Sebastian was one of them.

A four-day conference devoted to genre fiction—mystery, science fiction/fantasy, romance and western—is being planned for August 18–21, 1986, by a consortium of libraries in the Phoenix area. Publishers and authors who would like to participate should contact Sandra Nelson, Phoenix Public Library, 12 E. McDowell Rd., Phoenix, Ariz. 85004; (602) 262-6392.

The longest-lived men's action series by the same writer—the Death Merchant series by Joseph Rosenberger—has moved from defunct Pinnacle to Dell, which will publish #65 next spring. The series began 14 years ago and has 14 million copies in print worldwide.

Ethnic Diversity Will Highlight N.Y. Book Fair

This year's New York Book Fair will host the most diverse gathering of writers and publishers in its history. More than 350 independent publishers, some from as far away as India, will exhibit October 11–13 at the Exposition Rotunda of Madison Square Garden. This year's theme, "Smashing the Mask: A Celebration of Asian American Writers," will be explored by a group of Asian-American writers from across the country in panel discussions and readings.

The Asian-American programs are coordinated by the New York Chinatown History Project and the Basement Workshop—a nonprofit arts organization founded in 1971 to support the work of emerging and professional artists in the literary, visual, performance, media and folk arts. Panels range from "Writers in Exile" and "The Bilingual Mind" to "The Business of Being a Writer: Survival Skills" and "Chan to Chin to Cimino: Images of Asia, America."

Panelists and readers include Frank Chin and Lawson Inada, coeditors of *Aiiieeeee* (Howard University Press),

an anthology of Asian writing; Momoko Iko, a play about American experience; War II telecast on I-dorn, a Philippine-A-ist/performance; Greg-rector of the New on the Arts Litera John Kuo-Wei Tch Chinatown History of a 1985 Before Co-merican Book Aw

After an opening 11 A.M.–3 P.M. for the fair will be free a lic. Saturday hours and Sunday, 11 A.M.

The exhibit space this year, according Suzanne Zavrian, does not take place weekend as it has in year, there are several—the Literary Proda, for one—display materials from a nu For the first time what's being publis provided by the Na tion of Librarians a sionals. It will incl children's books an science and agraria

A special feature book drop for Span glish books intende program in Nicarag the American Libr cial Responsibility the book fair, do money will be for use by libraries to mail in their co books at library rat Brooklyn College N.Y. 11210. Cash supplies will also book fair staff.

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Black women writers blossom



Alice Walker.



Toni Cade Bambara.



Ntozake Shange.

By ELAYNE RAPPING

With the impact of such recent novels as Alice Walker's "The Color Purple," Toni Morrison's "Tar Baby" and Gloria Naylor's "The Women of Brewster Place," to name only the most obvious examples, it is no longer possible to ignore an astonishing fact: Black women are now in the forefront of U.S. literary achievement.

Until recently, U.S. literary standards have been set by white, middle-class suburban males like John Cheever and John Updike, with their tales of cynicism and sterility. But the new Black women writers are giving voice to new themes, new styles, new visions, which reverberate with passion and social challenge. The sheer number of Black women writing impassioned, innovative works is astounding.

If that word seems extreme it is only because the white male-dominated worlds of publishing, criticism and academia have refused to recognize or admit the obvious. "American Literature" and even Women's Studies, as taught in U.S. colleges, virtually ignores Black women writers, for deeply political reasons. In form, language and attitude Black women have rejected the standards of "high art" that establishment cultural institutions push. They have also rejected the male-defined models of "heroism" that have allowed an occasional Black male like Richard Wright or Ralph Ellison into the inner circles of acceptability.

FEMINISM, RACE AND CLASS

Black women, as a group, write from a perspective that combines certain elements of what is thought of as "feminist" writing with a strong sense of race and class consciousness and political engagement—what Toni Cade Bambara describes as "a call to unite our wrath, our vision, our power."

It is hard to know what to include in a necessarily brief survey of Black women's literary achievement. As far back as 1859 Harriet Wilson, a domestic servant, wrote the first Black novel, the semi-autobiographical "Our Nig." In the following decades an occasional slave narrative was "discovered." But it wasn't until the Harlem Renaissance of the 1930s that writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset created a truly Black style and vision.

In the next three decades the long list of important Black women writers grew. Margaret Walker, Ann Petry, Gwen Brooks, Dorothy West, Alice Childress, Paule Marshall and Lorraine Hansberry—many still active today—were only some of the women writing from within the experience of the Black family and community in powerful and proud ways.

But since the 1960s—with the growth of the civil rights and women's liberation movements—the genius of Black women writers came into full flower. Black women today write with a racial and sexual pride that shakes the foundations of white society, with its hypocritical talk of "equality" and "melting pots."

The quality and tone of contemporary Black women's writing, and its great diversity, is hard to summarize. Anger, tenderness, cultural and racial pride, the boundless will to survive against all odds, and the solidarity of the Black community, amidst intense conflicts between sexes, generations, and ideologies,

are among the common themes of this growing tradition.

It would be pointless to try to name all the important writers. We are fortunate to have several recent anthologies, with good critical introductions. Mary Helen Washington has edited two fine collections of short stories for Anchor/Doubleday. "Black Eyed Susans," published in 1975, is organized by themes such as "The Black Mother-Daughter Conflict," "The Myth of the White Woman" and "The Intimidation of Color." In 1980, Washington edited another collection, "Midnight Birds: Stories of Contemporary Black Women Writers." These stories deal more with the growing sense of sexual conflict between younger Black women and men. It is both more feminist in tone and more stylistically unconventional than the earlier work. "We was girls together," "A thinking woman sleeps with monsters" and "In honor of free women" are among the new themes.

Last year Amiri Baraka and his wife, poet

Amina Baraka, edited a collection, published by Quill Press, called "Confirmation: An Anthology of African American Women." It includes 50 writers, some well known, some previously unpublished. Amiri Baraka, a well known writer and activist, provides a lengthy political/historical introduction. It is remarkable primarily for its efforts to grapple with feminist issues from a Black Marxist-Leninist perspective. Baraka is at pains to disassociate his writers from "feminism" which, to him, "is an expression of petty bourgeois and mainly white women's resistance to the oppression of women." He rightly points out that "the division between the struggles of Black women" and the white women's rights movements is "a class division... based on... white chauvinism." He admits, however, that the same chauvinism plagues "the U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement" and causes splits within "so-called Marxist causes."

And so, while the book is not, he says, "feminist per se," he admits that it is no longer possible to deny the importance of the particularly female experience and vision presented by Black women writers. The writers in this volume, he says, "step out of the 'traditional' role of women in capitalist society to redefine [themselves] in [their] terms." They stress women's oppression as well as Black oppression through capitalism and imperialism.

THE 'MAJORS'

Guardian readers are already aware of the important work being done by Kitchen Table, "a woman of color press." But it is worth mentioning, again, their re-release of an important volume called "This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color" which treats sexual themes such as lesbianism, and presents works by a variety of third world women from many communities.

When we come to the "major," or best known, Black women writers, we are struck by the surprising fact that even a handful of such women have achieved critical acclaim, given the racism, sexism and class bias of our

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Why are the banks in such a mess?

"IN BANKS WE TRUST"

By Penny Lernoux
Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984
310 pp. \$16.95

"THE MONEY BAZAARS"

By Martin Mayer
E.P. Dutton, 1984
394 pp. \$22.50

By CHERYL PAYER

The failure of Continental Illinois, the nation's eighth largest bank, has dramatically illustrated the shakiness of the U.S. banking system. Those who have trusted in the widespread belief that "the government won't let a big bank fail" may be chastened to learn how much it will cost the government to rescue the depositors, the bank itself having in fact failed in all but name.

Two new books shed some light on the subject of the dangers the banking system poses for all of us. Curiously, each of them seems to be two books in one, the halves knitted together only loosely.

Penny Lernoux's book is most aptly described by its wordy subtitle: "Bankers and Their Close Associates: The CIA, the Mafia, Drug Traders, Dictators, Politicians, and the Vatican." She might well have added Nazis, fascists, Castro's Cuba and Poland's Solidarity movement to the list, for they all come in for (sometimes very circumstantial) mention. And one of the problems of the book is that there is much more mentioning than explaining.

The main chapters of the book deal with a CIA bank in Australia which financed the drug trade in Southeast Asia, the drug world of Miami, Florida, and its various Latin American connections (particularly in Colombia, where Lernoux lives), and the Vatican banking scandals, including Michele Sindona's failed Franklin National Bank and Roberto Calvi's failed Banco Ambrosiano.

SLEAZY CAST

It has a sleazy cast of characters indeed, and most of them seem to be involved with each of the other groups in some way (the Vatican with the Mafia and fascists, and all of them

plus the CIA with the drug trade). It resembles the fictional world of Robert Ludlum and is, to me at least, as unsatisfying.

As Lernoux admits in her introduction, "while malevolent, the criminal element poses less of a threat to the average American than the wheeler-dealers, who, as happened in 1929, could bring the economy crashing down." In Parts 1 and 3 she rehearses some scandalous practices perpetrated by the respectable bankers at Chase Manhattan, Citibank, and their peers at other institutions such as the now sunk Continental. Her points about the risk-taking by bankers and the complacency of regulators are certainly valid, but she substitutes indignation for analysis and the story is told much better by Mayer.

In 1975 Martin Mayer published "The Bankers" which became that rarity, a best-selling book that deserved to be one. If everyone who bought that book had read its 600 pages and pondered its message, the author might have had less reason to publish this sequel.

Mayer gives every appearance of being a member of good standing of the Establishment—wearing a tie in his jacket photo, speaking to lawyers' conventions, welcomed to the private lunchrooms of New York's largest banks. But the questions he asks and the insights he shares are profoundly subversive, simply because they are based on decency and common sense in a world that disdains both. In "The Bankers" Mayer warned, contemplating deregulation, that "the very last thing we need is a banking system like the one we have, but more efficient." In his new book he examines the way that implicit prophecy has been fulfilled.

Mayer's book, like Lernoux's, contains two main subjects. The first half of his book is devoted to the revolution in banking brought about by the computer and the technology that permits near-instantaneous transfer of funds. This is closely related to the big movement toward banking deregulation, because banks in the past survived thanks to their monopoly of information resources needed for deposit-taking and lending, and now "anyone with a large enough computer" can handle those functions. Sears, Merrill Lynch, and an army of other potential competitors are beating the

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BOOKS

'Our wrath, our power' sets the literary pace

(Continued from page 24)

literary power brokers. It is a tribute to their enormous talent that Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, and several others have established reputations without compromising their voices or values. They all write in a style which is highly poetic, even magical in tone. And they present images of family, community and sexual relations which are often so visionary they could not be expressed in the conventions of realistic fiction.

Alice Walker has produced a powerful body of work which is both political and stylistically inventive. In her recent, award-winning, "The Color Purple," the heroine, a rural southern woman, presents her amazing story through a series of simple letters to God. They trace her development from an "ugly," brutalized, near illiterate housewife, to a boldly unconventional woman of pride and accomplishment. Her sexual relationship with her husband's mistress, a blues singer and "bad woman" in the eyes of the community, is the catalyst for her transformation. There is also an extensive subplot involving her sister's travels in colonial Africa. The book ends with a fantasy of extended family life in which parenting, sexuality and sex roles themselves are radically transformed. It is among the most sexually radical books I have read. And its final vision of family—unrealistic as it is—is significant for its suggestiveness about what human relationships might be, without sexism, racism and economic oppression.

Toni Morrison has also written numerous stories and novels and achieved wide respect. Like Walker, she redefines family and sex relations in a way which repudiates repressive



LUSIOUS HIGHTOWER, SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

white cultural norms. Among her best works is "Sula," which treats the relationship between two women friends, one conventional, one wild and rebellious. The heroine, Sula, has been condemned as "evil" even by Blacks. But, as writer Audre Lorde has said, "Sula is really the ultimate Black female of our time,

trapped in her power and her pain."

The most recent Black writer to win wide acclaim is Gloria Naylor, whose "Women of Brewster Place" won last year's American Book Award. It is a series of connected stories about Black women of different generations, backgrounds and lifestyles who end up living in the same northern urban housing project. "the bastard child of several clandestine meetings between the alderman of the 6th district and Unico Realty Company." Single mothers on welfare, college-educated organizers, lesbians, "loose women," prissy churchgoers, all come together as a community of sisters sharing their Blackness and their economic sexual and political oppression.

That there are strong political undertones in all these books may not be apparent from these brief summaries. But one of the great beauties and strengths of Black women's writing is its integration of personal insight, stylistic innovation and political engagement. To read any of the works from both the more well known authors to the newer crop of writers starting to be published is to be aware of a political sophistication that distinguishes Black women writers from most of their white counterparts.

SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

For a deep sense of that aspect of Black women's writing one can do no better than to read a wonderful new book published by Continuum Press, edited by Claudia Tate, called "Black Women Writers at Work." It consists of interviews with 14 writers ranging in age from the 79-year-old Margaret Walker to the much younger Gayl Jones and Alexis De-veaux.

In Tate's words, from her introduction: "By virtue of their race and gender, Black women writers find themselves at two points of intersection: one where Western culture cuts across vestiges of African heritage, and one where male-female attitudes are either harmoniously parallel, subtly divergent, or in violent collision. . . . Their angle of vision allows them to see what white people, especially males, seldom see. . . . they cut through layers of institutionalized racism and sexism and uncover a core of social contradictions and intimate dilemmas. . . . Through their art they share a vision of possible resolution with those who cannot see."

Because Tate focuses on a few key themes, the reader gets a dramatic sense of both continuity and radical change in Black women's writing over the years, particularly around issues of style, male-female relations, Black-white relations and political responsibility. Margaret Walker, Gwen Brooks and Maya Angelou, for example, tend to place less emphasis on "the Black man" and more on the community as a whole. Angelou, interestingly, points out that "Black women have never been told" to stay out of social and political life. On the contrary, they have been at the center of such life. She blames certain macho attitudes picked up from whites in the 1960's for much of the more blatant current Black sexism.

Young women, however, often express rage at Black male sexism against both women and gays. Alexis Deveaux tells of difficulties in getting her works published in Black journals because of her concern with such themes. Audre Lorde finds it disturbing to hear Blacks say "I can't afford to be seen with you" because she is a lesbian. Sonia Sanchez has scars to show for her struggles, within the patriarchal Muslim Nation, to raise feminist issues.

Almost all the women see political engagement as a key responsibility and many are as

sophisticated politically as literarily. Deveaux sees herself as a "guerrilla fighting the oppression of all people of color as well as. . . women by men." Walker says she is "drawn to working class characters" because "I have a basic antagonism to capitalism" and "am only interested in changing it."

With this political anger comes a sense of how art works to address these issues in special ways. Most of the women are aware of differences between the writings of Black men and women. They see themselves writing from the perspective of Black women within the family and community rather than the more typical male emphasis on individual quests and public events.

On the relationship between politics and literary style, many are particularly thought provoking. Alice Walker sees capitalism and socialism symbolized, respectively, by "a patchwork quilt." "A crazy quilt story," she says, "can work on many levels and include myth. It is more evocative of symbol and metaphor."

Toni Morrison also describes her symbolic style politically. "If you can see this person experiencing the thing, you don't need a lot of rhetoric," she says. "You see a person who is a symbol, a metaphor." Her language, too, she says, "has to have holes and spaces so the reader can feel something visceral. . . . which may not be understood until much later."

Finally, the sense of mutual respect and support and community among these women is often moving. Most refer to the works of others in the volume as inspirational and instructive in their own work. Many also refer to the Harlem Renaissance work of Zora Neale Hurston, with its sense of magic and symbol, as crucial to their works today.

*They 'uncover
a core of social
contradictions and
intimate dilemmas....
Through their art
they share a
vision of possible
resolution with those
who cannot see.'*

A similar sense of debt is often paid Black popular musicians like Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. "To me," says Shange, typically, "James Brown, Earth Wind and Fire. . . are all high art."

Amiri Baraka sums all of this up in his introduction to "Confirmation": "Tell us Bird, tell us Sassy, tell us Trane, tell us Lady Day, what it was all about. At the very bottom of U.S. society, beneath all mystification, are the slaves, and at the bottom of the slaves' society is the Black working woman—it is here that the ultimate description is given, that region of life and feeling in which there is truly nothing to lose but chains."

(All the books mentioned above are available in paperback editions.)

Bank books

(Continued from page 24)

bankers (fat and lazy because their traditional monopoly has left them unprepared to give the customers what they want) at their own game.

Banks are now trying to fight back through deregulation, which means among many other things repealing the Glass-Steagall Act, passed in the depression years, which prohibited banks from operating related businesses such as stock brokering. Mayer remarks cuttingly: "It might be noted in passing that the international financial crisis of 1982-83 took the form it did, with the banks at risk, only because the public was protected by Glass-Steagall. The National City Bank of New York had been the worst villain in the bond scams of the late 1920s; its successor, one suspects, would have "placed" quite a lot of Brazilian paper with investors in 1980-81, if the law had not prevented it."

FAST COMPUTERS

Besides blurring the traditional distinction between banking and other business, the electronic funds transfer system has vastly accelerated speed with which money changes hands producing a totality of financial transactions that are ludicrously out [of] scale to those in the real economy. By far the most important commodity in international trade is oil, which accounts for almost 15% of all international payments. For all of 1982, that meant about \$250 billion—which was about as much as CHIPS [the New York Clearing House Interbank Payments System] moved each day.

By remarks like this one, the first part of the book, which is mostly concerned with the revolution in consumer banking services, is linked with the larger issues of the second half. There Mayer transcends technical mat-

ters and goes into the larger question of bank safety. He first defines, then devotes a chapter each to the three different kinds of risk in banking: the funding risk (the danger of withdrawal of credit by lenders, like the "run" which brought Continental to crisis), the credit risk, and the interest-rate risk; his analysis makes it plain that there is big trouble on all three fronts.

He devotes a mere 20 pages, in the chapter "Picking the Borrowers, at Home and Abroad," to the third world debt crisis, but it is insightful. I might quibble with his assumption that the trouble began only with the burst of lending accompanying the second oil shock of 1979, and certainly with the judgment that as late as early 1983, the situation was salvageable, but on the whole I vastly enjoyed his elegant and cutting prose here as throughout the book.

Mayer concludes with a chapter on the politics of banking, in which he skewers the regulatory agencies, and a final chapter on "The Future of Banking." This is full of portentous rumblings about the genie that is out of the bottle and the Twilight of the Gods, but his recommendations for a better future are sadly inadequate to deal with the disasters he has been signaling throughout the book. Nor does he ever come out openly with an evaluation of the catastrophic predictions which are now freely and frequently aired in the Wall Street Journal and elsewhere.

'HOPED-FOR BEST-SELLER'

Perhaps to say what he really thinks would threaten his hoped-for best-seller status, or his access to those private lunchrooms (though I doubt it). Certainly the jacket copy for this book tries to trivialize and deny his sombre insights. ("The Money Bazaars shows the reader how his, and his company's money is now being processed and made profitable for all concerned because, despite the risks, there are benefits in the rapid changes taking place," it babbles. What Mayer actually says is "It is by no means clear that the gains in efficiency—the income-producing use of every available bit of money and credit every day—are worth the increased fragility of the system.")

But after all, he had a best-seller once, and the people that mattered didn't pay much attention to that, so maybe he doesn't think his advice could make a difference now. Anyway, a reviewer should stick to the book that was written, not the one she thinks might have been written. And I am thankful that he has written this one, even though it will only help us to understand the coming earthquakes, and not to prevent them.

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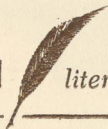
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