

Lesbian literary history—at last

SEX VARIANT WOMEN IN LITERATURE

By Jeannette Foster
Diana Press, Baltimore, 1976

In 1956 this massive, scholarly work was *almost* published. But its university press sponsor died unexpectedly and his successor refused to undertake the unorthodox project.

Jeannette Foster, a University of Chicago PhD who had researched her material for more than two decades, put up the money herself for a small private printing that soon went out of print and the few hardback copies disappeared in the back shelves of public or personal libraries.

Now, 20 years later, when the women's and gay liberation movements have provided a more congenial atmosphere for such a work, as well as a women's press to do it, *Sex Variant Women in Literature* has been published for real.

As a scholarly work, Foster's book will never be a best seller, but it is an important resource for the growing number of women interested in literary history as a way to uncover the veiled past.

Foster's subject is the lesbian in literature. In 1956 she chose the term "sex variant" because "it is not as yet rigidly defined nor charged with controversial overtones."

But this is no lesbian diatribe. It is a carefully researched work that has a tone of relentless objectivity, which results from decades of perseverance by a solitary woman working with a

complete lack of any cultural approval.

The book historically traces every reference to the lesbian in Western literature. Foster begins with Ruth, whose passionate entreaties to Naomi in the Bible are interpreted with a twist that may raise some eyebrows, and Sappho, whose passions three centuries later are better known.

From there she uncovers references in the entire span of literature written by men, from the Roman classics through the dark ages, the Renaissance, and into the 18th century.

Foster roots her scholarship firmly in history. She discusses the general condition of women and ties to it the treatment of lesbian literary figures. While male homosexuality in literature has had its ups as well as its downs, lesbianism has been defined by male writers in a male-dominated culture, and completely subjected to male distaste.

Even more fascinating is her discussion of the history of lesbian novels written by women (the first was by feminist Mary Wollstonecraft in 1788). Foster deals at length with the increase of such books in the 19th century and their peak in the early 20th century with the works of Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Colette and others.

The most interesting section of the book is entitled "Conjectural Retrospect." Here Foster departs from her close reading of original sources and dips into biographical material, speculating that many women writers—greater and lesser—have been lesbians.

This idea has been battled around by the current gay women's movement out of a "political" urge to make connection with a dim past by identifying with some of its more visible figures. But Foster's style and method are so thorough and dignified that she proves what some claim to intuit: that the cultural contradiction between femininity and achievement has produced a great many women achievers who are lesbians.

Her purpose, as a lesbian writing in an anti-lesbian era, was to make sense of lives that were often mystified and misunderstood by the men who edited, published, criticized and even married them. She includes in her gallery of lesbians Emily Bronte, Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson.

Some of her speculation may be wrong; some has been confirmed since 1956; much of it will no doubt be disputed. But all of it illuminates the relationship between private identity and social role that is at the center of feminist thinking.

Today Jeannette Foster is in her eighties and resides in a nursing home in Arkansas. No longer actively able to contribute to the growing body of feminist and lesbian literature, she still provides the women's movement with a powerful role model in her own story of perseverance, as well as with a solid intellectual foundation in her important book—whose time has finally come.

—Torie Osborn

Toward Eurocapitalism

RIO: RESHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Jan Tinbergen, Coordinator
E.P. Dutton, New York, 1976, 325 pp.
\$10 (c), \$4.95 (p)

This is the third report to the Club of Rome, following *Limits of Growth* (1972) and *Mankind at the Turning Point* (1974).

The club is a high-powered think-tank on world problems, started by a group of Italian industrialists in 1968. It is a highly sophisticated group, the most thoughtful representatives of European capitalism.

Their studies and reports are made by *ad hoc* teams of academicians and business people. The second report, for example, was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and supervised by Prof. Mesarovic, director of the Systems Research Center at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, and Prof. Pestel of Hanover University, Germany, who is also vice president of the German equivalent of the U.S. National Science Foundation.

The present report, *RIO*, was financed by the Dutch government and supervised by Jan Tinbergen, a Nobel laureate in economics and professor emeritus at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

These reports are based on computerized models of the world economic structure. The first was rather crude and was severely criticized, particularly on its conclusions as to the future of mankind, which seemed unduly pessimistic.

The second and third reports are more firmly based both in technique and in politics. The experts have been drawn not only from the First (capitalist) World, but from the Third World as well, and, in the third report, individuals from the Second (socialist) World have been drawn into the work.

The reports are increasingly objective in terms of politics. The makers have researched and clarified areas critical to mankind's survival, have presented possible solutions and

suggested strategies—both political and economic—for achieving those solutions. They present hard-headed studies on specific subjects: energy scarcity, environmental degradation, "the brain drain" in the Third World and the like. It is impossible to summarize them in a brief review, but the trend of the studies is extremely significant.

The second study subsumed specific problems to the overall problem of the growing gap between rich and poor nations—a gap that cuts across political systems and ended by proposing the kind of changes necessary for man's survival. One of those changes was the need for a practical international framework based on national interests but in no way envisaging a world government.

The third report focuses on such a framework, describing it and suggesting strategies for reshaping the international order.

Recalling that the club is a capitalist think tank, it is of more than passing interest that the third report states:

"Society as a whole must accept the responsibility for guaranteeing a minimum level of welfare for all its citizens and aim at equality in human relations. The creation of an *equitable social order*—internationally and nationally—can thus be viewed as a precondition for the real pursuit of the fundamental aim [a peaceful and just world]."

"Many in the RIO group believe that this equitable social order could be best described as *humanistic socialism*..." (P. 63)

This is quite a perspective. It is perhaps symbolic that the country whose communists are pioneering new roads to socialism has thrown up a group of capitalists who are pioneering new roads to preserve conservative values. It is barely possible that Eurocommunism may be matched by a Eurocapitalism.

Carl Marzani, journalist, author and publisher, says of himself, "I have only two claims to fame: that I was the first political prisoner of the cold war and that I wrote the first revisionist history of it."

Missing most of Ma Bell's muck

THE PHONE BOOK

By J. Edward Hyde
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1976

AT&T, the Bell Telephone system, is the bureaucratic monster of the American corporate machine.

With \$75 billion in assets it is four times the size of General Motors, its nearest competition in bigness. Last year Ma Bell raked in \$3.15 billion in after-tax profits—or more than IT&T, U.S. Steel, General Electric, Ford, Chrysler, Xerox, Boeing, General Mills, Allied Chemical, RCA, Firestone and Coca Cola combined.

To do battle with AT&T, a muckraking author should at least have the proper equipment. A tank-mounted laser might do the trick. But J. Edward Hyde, the author of *The Phone Book*, has gone to the trenches armed only with a flashlight.

For a few scattered pages he manages to hold a blowtorch to some specific shenanigans. In a short section of deposits, for instance, Hyde shows that phone users in redlined "undesirable neighborhoods" have a "7-in-10 chance that the company will force them to pay a deposit, while suburban users only have a 3-in-10 chance." College students, single women, servicemen and divorced people get no sympathy from Ma Bell on their deposits or anything else.

The Phone Book is good on the nitty gritty: deposits, billing, WATS line bilks, the long-cord racket and color phone over-

charges. It provides the juiciest account of the T.O. Gravitt scandal that I've seen.

Gravitt was Texas operations chief for Southwestern Bell. When he tried to clamp down on the bribery, illegal rate-fixing and political slush-funding common for decades in the wide-open, unregulated Texas system, the company put 150 investigators on Gravitt's case, trying to establish that he had illicit sex with subordinates in company planes high over the sagebrush.

Bell's smear campaign drove Gravitt to suicide in 1974, but backfired when his last will was made public. The suicide note documented Bell's illegal wire-tapping, as well as downhome corruption. It acutely embarrassed former Texas Bell executives who had been promoted to New York on the basis of their Texas record.

Unfortunately, Hyde's book does not have the comprehensiveness its nifty title suggests.

Hyde does not bother to attack the new campaign by Bell to break off essential services like Information (directory assistance) in order to charge for them separately. He does nothing to disturb the rate-base concept—that profits are set as a percentage of investment, with Bell itself defining terms. Yet the rate base is the mossy myth that protects Bell's profits.

In love with Bell's glittering technology, Hyde never cuts through the screen of public utility "regulation" that AT&T embraces to avoid anti-trust charges

and competition from independents.

At the end Hyde throws up his hands. It would be nuts, he says, to turn the phone company over to the government that gave us "the Russian wheat deal, Amtrack and the Postal Service." He is too cynical (or timid) to explore the cheap and efficient, municipalized phone services that have worked for years in Canada, let alone the worker-consumer experiments of the socialist countries.

The Phone Book is a lightweight lampoon by a middle-level insider. Still, the ultimate book on AT&T is hard to find. *Telephone*, an ambitious attempt made last year by *New Yorker* contributor John Brooks, covered Bell's technology and history nicely, but was a political puff piece. (Bell had struck a deal with *Telephone's* publisher to buy more than 5,000 hardcover copies and 110,000 special paperback editions—an automatic windfall of \$227,850 for the publisher and Brooks.)

Except for the hoary 1939 classic *AT&T: The Story of Industrial Conquest* by N.R. Danielian, the only decent book about the Bell System is *Monopoly* by Joseph Goulden. *Monopoly* is a comprehensive and venomous attack on Ma Bell. If you hate the phone company, or are so naive, God forbid, that you still like it, *Monopoly* is the phone book for you.

—Steve Chapple

ALBUM

Photo by Pam Chamberlain

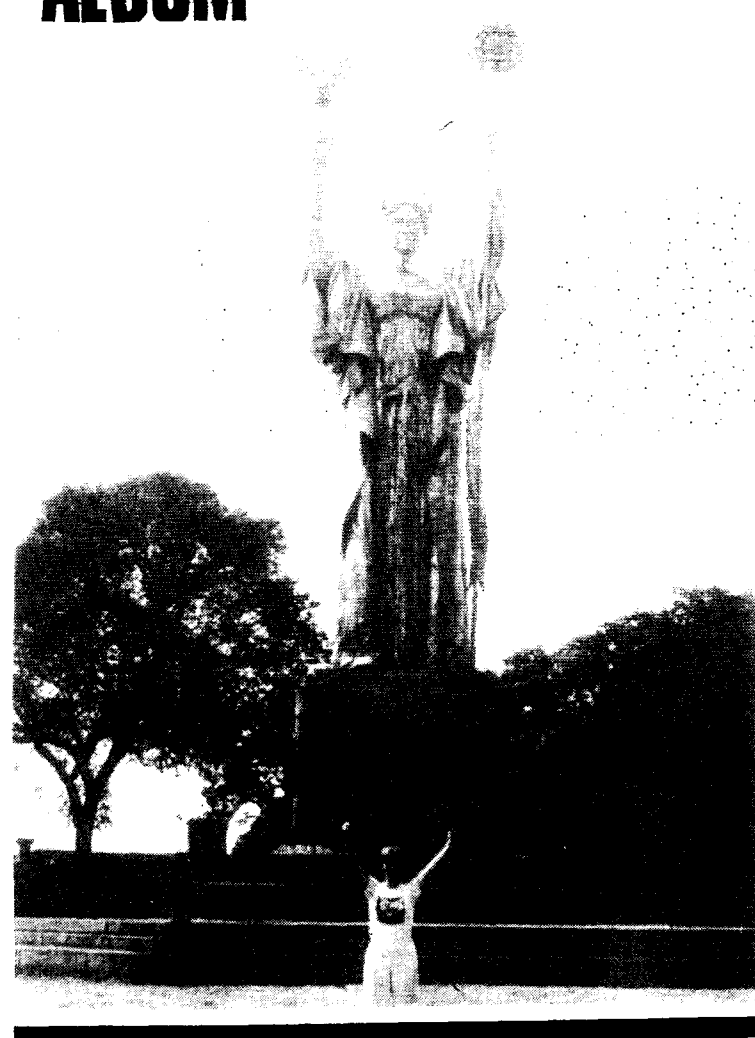




Photo by Edward Stevenson

How to roll your own

BAKE BREAD

By Hannah Solomon
J.B. Lippincott, Philadelphia/N.Y., 1976
(\$6.95)

"How can a nation be great if its bread tastes like Kleenex?"

—Julia Child

In search of national greatness or simply some non-poisonous nutrition, many Americans are returning to the ancient art of bread-baking, only to find that it is not as easy as it ought to be.

There are an impressive number of works available on how to (and why to) bake your own. Some of the best are published by the children's departments of trade publishers who do not usually dabble in domesticity.

One that does very well from a number of view-points is *Bake Bread*, recently published by Lippincott, and presumably addressed to pre-teenagers. It is not exclusively for children. The chapter on the chemistry of bread

is written in deceptively short and familiar words, but it is difficult.

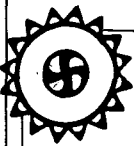
If you read it and understand it, you will know why you must do certain things to make and bake bread successfully. If you don't read it or don't understand it, you can get just as good results by following the step-by-step instructions, checking each move with the photographs, which are tactfully placed at the points where you need them most.

It is all perfectly clear—if you can manage to keep the book open while you are working, without using your doughy fingers to do it. (The cover, incidentally, is hard and washable for efficient kitchen use.)

There are chapters on such variants as corn bread, cheese bread, oatmeal bread, egg bread, braided loaves, and bread sticks. But the best thing about *Bake Bread* is that it is "basic."

—Amanda Bright

Cherokee hidden history— 'Just beyond our view'



TO SPOIL THE SUN

By Joyce Rockwood
Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1976
(\$6.95)

"In 1521, two Spanish ships landed on the Carolina coast. The Indians received the Spaniards as guests. The Spaniards in return enticed a large number of their hosts onto their ship and sailed away with them to Hispaniola where the Indians were to be sold as slaves...."

"In 1526 (Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon landed on the Carolina coast with 500 colonists, 89 horses, a number of black slaves and three Dominican friars.... The colony lasted barely half a year. Two thirds of the colonists died of disease and starvation.... In midwinter, after bloody strife between factions in the colony, the Spaniards abandoned their effort...."

"Twelve years later, Hernando de Soto landed on the coast of Florida... In time, his army reached the country just upriver from the aborted Ayllon colony. There they saw abandoned Indian towns, empty and overgrown with weeds. Through interpreters they asked the Indians

the reason for it. The Indians explained that there had recently been a plague in the land. Before the plague...the country was very populous."

This is the chronology of the events that form the plot of *To Spoil the Sun* as they might appear in one of our histories of the conquest and early settlement of North America. As author Joyce Rockwood notes, "the Indians, so momentarily affected by these 'minor' events, are never glimpsed by us at all."

Her book, she says in the Afterword, "is about a people who lived and died on the other side of history, just beyond our view." That people is the Cherokee, who lived 100 or so miles inland from the coast, directly in the path of the Spanish invaders.

Joyce Rockwood tells the story of the people of Mulberry Town in the first quarter of the 16th century through the character of Rain Dove, a girl who grows to womanhood during a critical period in the life of her tribe. Rockwood is a fine scholar as well as a fine writer, and she has soaked herself in the factual material—archaeological as well as anthropological; purified herself like a Cherokee shaman undertaking an important magic. The magic in this case is the re-incarnating of a lost way of life, and it is entirely successful.

The story is an exciting one. Young readers will probably zip through it to quench the suspense-thirst created by Rain Dove's ordeals. Older readers will have to take time to absorb all the implications of this picture of a culture radically different from our own.

There is much to ponder in these differences: differences in the status of young and old, of male and female; different forms and different feelings about marriage and divorce; different ways of loving, of governing, of meting out justice between individuals, clans, tribes, and peoples. Some are more, some less effective than those with which we are familiar.

It is enormously valuable to live for a time in someone else's skin, to experience another value system and know that it worked and worked well over a long, fruitful period of human history. Being culture-bound in the last quarter of the 20th century is a dangerous, possibly a fatal handicap.

To Spoil the Sun is as enjoyable as it is valuable. It is simply and lucidly written, compact and complete in less than 200 pages, one of those rare books that is good to read aloud, even in a group that contains listeners of different generations.

—Janet Stevenson

Merry Christmas



"Here is a news flash—the turkey has been hijacked by the dog, one little terrorist has shot up your Christmas drinks supply, and some carol singers are here collecting for the IRA."



"...I gather it's some difference of opinion over what key they'll sing 'Peace on Earth' in..."

—Norris - Vancouver Sun, Canada

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