

pointblank times

a lesbian/feminist publication Vol.1 No.1

Plain Brown Wrapper: The Lesbian in Modern Novels

by Amanda

Lesbians have traditionally played such insignificant and obscure parts in literature that any discussion of lesbianism in novels centers around only a small armload of books. A somewhat larger selection of books includes or features male homosexuals (works by Proust, Gide, Genet, Forster, *et al.*), but currently only transsexuals and transvestites have less fictional representation than do lesbians. Until recently, the few and only sources of lesbiana were mediocre-to trashy tales written by men for the erotic satisfaction of other men; examples of this sort of purple prose can be found in publications such as "True Confessions" and "Modern Romance". With only a few exceptions, the lesbian characterization was at best caricature and at worst grossly overdone fantasy, as shown by the prevalence of the macho-butch and fluffy-femme in the lesbian role repertoire.

Women authors, themselves a rare breed in the literary field, seldom discussed their own erotic feelings toward or their experiences with other women, nor did they present lesbians in any other than minor and stereotypical roles. Lately, however, an increasing number of women have begun introducing us to lesbians, not from the actual or assumed vantage point of heterosexuality, but from their own background and perceptions. What these perceptions are and what type of fiction they create are the subjects of this discussion, but first, a flashback...

Prior to the twentieth century, most writers dealing with homosexuality presented only sex and/or love between men. Just as straight women and their sexuality were not taken seriously by men, so too were lesbians dismissed as nature's little jokes. From Greek and Roman writers through the Bloomsbury group (Virginia Woolf and friends) until the present, male writers glorified the beauty of the masculine physique and the erotic and aesthetic nature of love between men. Women writers, because of their double oppression as women and artists, seldom had the time, money, or the means to write and be published. Social pressure, which progressed from extreme to mildly restrictive with the passage of time, dictated simplistic plot, stock characters, an uplifting tone, and a moral that loudly and clearly proclaimed that the good women were those who married and raised a family and the bad (*i.e.* those who strayed from this path) were doomed to miserable existences. Few authors, male or female, dared break these literary conventions and risk social censure by dealing with homoeroticism in a positive manner.

Conditions changed in the early decades of the twentieth century. The 1920's and 30's, in particular, were to the expatriate artists living in Europe what the 1960's were claimed to be for Americans: a time of social and political upheaval and of literary and artistic experimentation. And, to the extent that authors were not only admitting but also displaying that they were sexual beings, the 20's and 30's proved to be a golden age for literary lesbians.

Gertrude Stein, whose relationship with Alice B. Toklas could be (and was) misunderstood only by the most adamant of heterosexists, was openly recording her insights into same-sex relationships in *Fernhurst* and *Q.E.D.: Things As They Are*. Natalie Barney and Renee Vivien were lesbian poets whose exciting and explicit love poetry intrigued their contemporaries almost as much as did their personal lives (see Colette's *The Pure and the Impure* and Anais Nin's *Diaries*). Paris-born Violette LeDuc was experiencing the event which would become *Ravages* and *La Batarde*, while in Britain Radclyffe Hall was combatting pornography charges and the critics' outrage because of her autobiographical novel, *The Well of Loneliness*.

By contemporary standards, *Well* is very mild, relying as it does on psycho-analytic theories of homosexuality (which the heroine, Stephen, both believes in and exemplifies) and portraying, very discreetly, a "respectable" butch/femme relationship. Despite its reliance on stereotypical characters and its unconvincing ending, *The Well of Loneliness* is a remarkable novel because it is one of the few serious and length treatments of lesbianism as a lifestyle and one of the first novels to treat lesbians as an oppressed class. Stephen's passionate plea for society to accept lesbians and to accord them their rights is dishearteningly familiar even today; we are hearing echoes of it in the new lesbian novels.

In the last decade, several books about lesbians have crept quietly out of the closets and onto bookstore shelves. Emboldened by the Women's Movement, Gay Activists, and miscellaneous feelings of freedom and openness, women are writing candidly about their emotional and sexual feelings in a variety of genres: in autobiography (LeDuc's *La Batarde*), in reportage (Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation*), in biography (Isabel Miller's *Patience and Sarah*), and in novels such as *The City Within*, *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *Riverfinger Women*.

Among the first of the new novels about lesbians, Elisabeth Newbold's *The City Within* contains many features characteristic of modern lesbian fiction. The informal tone, detailed description of setting, convincing story line, and sense of familiarity with characterization give the book authenticity; the reader feels a bond between the author and her characters. This creator/creation bond, which exists in all books discussed here, has a strong influence on plot and theme.

In *The City Within*, Kate and Julia are a lesbian couple of eight years' standing. Kate leaves Washington to take care of family and business matters while Julia (the narrator) stays at home, becoming more deeply involved with her friends and co-workers and having an affair with a nightclub singer. Julia, and to a lesser extent, Kate, encounters jealousy, infidelity, envy, passion and love and learns to cope with these feelings as an individual but also as a person who is half of a twosome. Respectability and the long-term relationship are clearly perceived by the author and by her characters as the primary values, and it is interesting to watch the conflicts the characters undergo while pursuing their ideals. Readers will quickly realize that the book reflects neither a gay activist nor a feminist outlook; Julia and Kate are well-educated, upper middle class, professional women in their forties with very little identification with the gay subculture. They sleep in separate beds, they have a maid, and their dream is to buy a house. The author's description of a gay bar, like her catty comments about other gay women, indicate certain negative feelings about homosexuality and about being female. Julia does succeed in overcoming some of her "holier-than-thou" attitude toward other lesbians, but when Kate returns to her at novel's end, she discovers a person whose experiences have left her fundamentally unchanged. Thus, the reader's pleasure at finally finding a realistic treatment of lesbianism is eventually replaced by a feeling of having been sold down the river by yet another author whose attitude toward lesbianism is at best ambivalent.

Fortunately there are a couple of novels which combine good writing technique with feminist, specifically gay feminist, perspective. Dissimilar in style and content, Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* and Elana Nachman's *Riverfinger Women* do however share a constructive, almost lyrical, attitude toward women and gayness and take up where *The Well of Loneliness* left off in raising class-consciousness.

This concludes the first of a two-part series. The conclusion of "Plain Brown Wrapper" will be printed in our April issue and will include a discussion of *Rubyfruit Jungle* and *Riverfinger Women*.

Point Blank, Texas. Point Blank, thirteen miles north of Coldspring in San Jacinto County, was originally named Blanc Point by a French woman who had emigrated from Alabama. Known successively as White Point and Point White, it eventually became Point Blank.

Ruth Hansbro
The Handbook of Texas

Pointblank Times is a new effort in communication by a small group of lesbian/feminists. We don't have as much power (read "money") as William Randolph Hearst, but we do have the know-how and the desire to create a vehicle through which women may be able to communicate. We welcome letters, articles, essays, poetry, short fiction, artwork, cartoons, photographs (all photos will be printed as line shots unless you can afford a halftone) and whatever else you've got to offer.

We'd like to hear your ideas. This space will be reserved each month for editorials from the community. If you have something to say on any subject of interest to lesbian/feminists, please feel free to submit it for printing.

Of course, we aren't rich enough to pay. This issue of *Pointblank Times* is complimentary. Beginning in April (we hope to publish monthly) we will ask 25¢ per copy. We hope you think it's worth it. If you help with creativity and support, it will be.

Please share this copy with a friend. If this issue falls apart, please staple it back together.

Send all submissions, questions, input, and money, to *Pointblank Times*, 1241 W. Bell #4, Houston, Texas 77019. All written submissions must be typed.

Deadline for our second issue is April 10th.

alisonkitamandalindavickiellenrose

coming out

daddy says
i ain't much of a woman.
i know what he means.

he means my face is bare
and there's a tear in the knee
of my thrift-store jeans.

he says the way i wear my hair
seems like i couldn't care less
if it's there on top of my goddam
hardheaded woman dream.

sometimes he makes me want to scream
but more

he makes me want to sink and cry
inside some dark wet cave.

he makes me want to find a sudden grave.

when i leave the room
my silent mother
follows silent
down the silent hall.

she reaches me.
she touches me.
she whispers to me
like a waterfall:

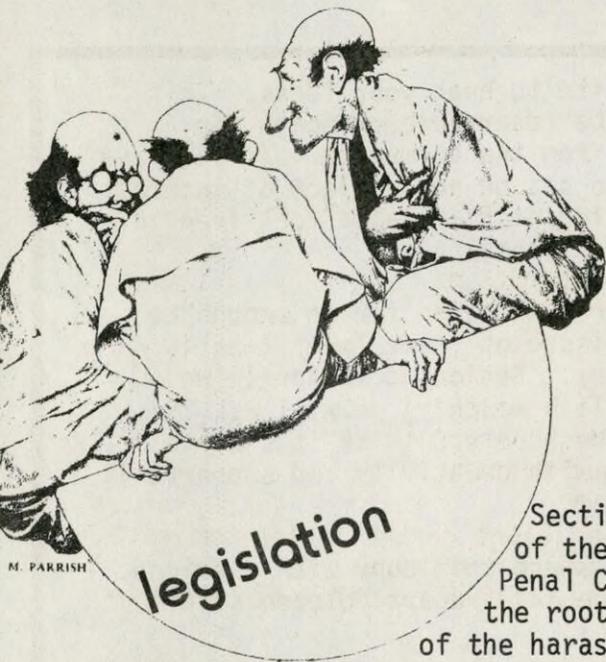
*i love you daughter.
you are wildflower strong
in a desert longing
beautiful brave and all
that's left of me.*

be who it is you want to be.

linda j. lovell

To prohibit discrimination on the basis of affectional or sexual preference, or for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Civil Rights Amendments of 1975".



Section 21.06 of the Texas Penal Code is at the root of much of the harassment and legal discrimination against gays in Texas. The section reads:

Homosexual Conduct

a) A person commits an offense if he engages in deviate sexual intercourse with another individual of the same sex.

b) An offense under this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

The law, then, makes private and consensual sex between gays illegal. After a request by members of the Texas Gay Task Force, a statewide coalition of gay organizations, Representative Craig Washington (Houston) introduced a bill, H.B. 759, to repeal Section 21.06. The bill was introduced in the Texas House of Representatives on February 17 and has been referred to the House Committee on Criminal Jurisprudence. Rep. Washington is chairperson of that committee. The bill has no companion bill sponsored in the Texas Senate.

Geneva Johnson, Secretary to Rep. Washington, suggests that gay people and supporters flood their state representatives with letters urging support for H.B. 759. Representatives from Houston to write to at Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78701 are:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Ron Waters | Anthony Hall |
| Joseph Pentony | Mickey Leland |
| Woody Denson | Senfronia Thompson |
| John Whitmire | Kay Bailey |
| Larry Vick | Bill Caraway |
| Herman Lauhoff | Raymond Green |

So begins H.R. 166, the first gay civil rights bill ever introduced into Congress. The bill, sponsored by Representatives Bella Abzug (NY), Ed Koch (NY), John Burton (CA), Pete McCloskey (CA), and Robert Nix (PA) will amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to protect gay people from discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and federally funded programs.

As used in the bill, the term "affectional or sexual preference" means "having or manifesting an emotional or physical attachment to another consenting person or persons of either gender, or having or manifesting a preference for such attachment."

H.R. 166 was introduced on January 14, 1975 and has now been referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary. Naturally, it is essential that a large number of representatives support passage of the bill. To make your feelings known, write any or all of the following representatives at the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.:

- The Honorable
- Barbara Jordan
 - Bob Eckhardt
 - Bob Casey
 - Wright Patman
 - Jack Brooks
 - Olin Teague
 - J.J. Pickle
 - W.R. Poage
 - Henry Gonzales

The South Central Region of the Gay Academic Union will hold a one-day conference in Austin on Saturday, April 12. The purpose of the meeting is to create an opportunity for gay teachers, students, researchers, administrators, and professionals to meet and discuss problems of mutual interest.

Attendance at the conference is open to all gay academics. More information can be obtained from Art Addington, Chairperson, 900 West Avenue, Austin, Texas, 78701.

Impressions, Feelings, Memories of Flight

Power Felt:

The turning of the whale,
Crescendo of engines til the monster shakes with contained ecstasy
Spilling out in a lurch forward,
Assurance recovered, it accelerates with purpose, dragging along earthclinging bodies,
Ponderous, mammoth momentum, straining, bulging, jerks its nose skyward
And crushing tender earth underfoot with a powerful spring, surges crudely into the air
Partial release in partial conquest.

Power Feeling:

Rhythmic, flowing strides, toe pressing firmly til heel finds bottom ahead,
Breathing *in 2 3 in 2 3 out 3 4 out 3 4*;
To measured, pounding run, methodically breathing
In 2 3 4 Out 2 3 4 In 2 3 4 Out 2 3 4;
Until rounding a bend and looking out to the horizon, I let loose
And am suspended in the roar of the wind and motion for a timeless moment
It gives way to IN OUT IN OUT IN OUT IN OUT, and I take the controls again.
In 2 3 Out 2 3, In 2 3 4 Out 2 3 4, In 2 3 in 2 3 Out 2 3 out 2 3.

Moving, flowing, surging, faster and faster until being is suspended, motion is all.
Energies building, unleashed but concentrated, growing and growing higher and higher
Exploding into wholeness my body bursts into the air
And I soar and swoop and somersault and spin and spiral
Twisting, rolling, turning, falling, stratching, flying
In unbounded space with unlimited fullness of fearless joy
In complete abandon, without resistance or choice,
Until awareness and self consciousness creep in
And I feel myself tightening and closing and growing heavier,
And I start thrashing, groping for control, clinging to the moment,
And even as I feel myself plummeting earthwards in a panic,
There is resignation in knowing it had to be
And I wake, earthbound as clay, but at peace.

Ellen MacInerney

international women's year 1975

by Octavian

With a theme of "Equality, Development, Peace," International Women's Year, sponsored by the United Nations, has begun.

Plans to make IWY 1975 were initiated in 1972, and the program is seen at the UN as an international call to action

- * to promote equality between men and women,
- * to integrate women into the total social and economic development efforts of nations, and
- * to recognize women's increasing contribution to strengthening world peace.

"It is important that everyone give serious attention now to International Women's Year 1975," said UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim in making the proclamation. "We are talking, after all, about half the world's population. We must think positively about how the position of women in their respective societies and in international affairs could not only be improved, but their large potential contribution better utilized for the benefit of all."

The highlight of IWY 1975 will be a major UN conference on women's equality, to be held at Bogota, Columbia, in June. This first world meeting on the topic held at the governmental delegation level will be a serious effort to evaluate women's status in all countries. Special attention will be given to the situation of women in developing nations, where emancipation is considered essential to their countries' progress. An action plan to increase women's contributions in global development is an important agenda item.

Behind the scenes of IWY 1975 is the UN Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1946. With representatives from 32 countries elected by the Economic and Social Council, the women's commission previously sponsored seminars on Status of Women in Family Law (Bogota 1953), Participation of Women in Public Life (Addis Ababa 1960), and The Family in a Changing Society (London 1973).

A big thrust will be made within the UN itself to secure ratification of several international accords supporting women's rights. Among topics at the top of the list are equal pay for work of equal value, political rights, suppression of "traffic in others" (prostitution), discrimination in employment, occupation, and education. Marriage will be viewed as to women's rights in consent, age, and registration.

Helvi L. Sipila, Assistant Secretary-General for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, has pointed out the need for IWY 1975.

"We must remember that no woman in any country had the right to vote 82 years ago, and that no woman in any country could become a member of the national parliament only 69 years ago," says Sipila. "Most women have gained their political rights during the last two or three decades. The present generation of women are therefore still newcomers to political life at every level, particularly at the international level."

A declaration against discrimination, passed by the UN in 1967, is the unifying agreement of IWY 1975. It specifically advocates the abolition of all existing laws, customs, regulations, and practices discriminatory to women in all member countries of the UN. Also outlined in the 1967 declaration are

- *equal rights to vote in all elections,
- *equal rights to hold public office,
- *the same rights as men to acquire, change, or retain nationality,
- *equal rights with men under civil law,
- *equal educational rights with men at all levels,
- *equal rights in economic and social life.
- *equal rights in economic and social life.

At its 25th Session in 1974, the Commission on the Status of Women re-emphasized this declaration, and called for "intensified action" during IWY 1975 to secure legal rights for women where they do not now exist.

The United Nations' selection of 1975 as International Women's Year was largely the result of a recent study showing that worldwide the general tendency in most cultures was to value men more than women.

The study clearly demonstrated that:

*Among the more than 700 million illiterates in the world the majority are women, in some areas 85 percent.

*In 1969, the percentage of females to males enrolled for higher education in Asia was 28 percent; in Africa, 25 percent; in Latin America, 34 percent, and in Arab states, 23 percent.

*Percentages of girls to boys enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the same region in 1969 was under 40 percent. The average ratio of female to male enrollment in the five to fourteen age group reached one-to-one only in Latin and North America.

*Although women constitute more than one-third of the world's gainfully employed labor force, they are in most countries concentrated in unskilled and low-paid jobs. Women's access to high-level, well-paid jobs is severely limited.

*In the majority of countries, only a small percentage of women hold policy-making posts -- legislative, judicial, or executive.

*In the U.S., the President's Council of Economic Advisors reported that in 1973, while 43.8 percent of working women were employed, they were clustered in low-status jobs, and their pay averaged only 66.1 percent of men's wages.

*At present, under the laws of many countries, a married woman is deprived of a number of important personal and property rights, including the right to seek employment outside the home without her husband's consent.

Speaking out for the importance of IWY 1975, Helvi Sipila said that the UN itself was largely a male-dominated organization.

"Women are adequately represented at the General Assembly, on the Regional Economic Commission, and in the Economic and Social Council and all its functional commissions and other activities," says Sipila. "With the exception of the Commission on the Status of Women, women are left out of the process of promoting the advancement of women even in areas of special interest to women."

The situation continues to exist, says Sipila, despite the fact that in 1970, the Programme for Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women was adopted by the General Assembly at the same time as an International Development Strategy. According to Sipila, because the Programme was considered a "woman's issue," it was initiated and developed in different UN bodies than the Strategy. As a result, women were left out of the formulation of policies at both the international and national levels. Present plans and priorities in economic and social development don't reflect women's views and concerns.

Calling attention to the inter-relationship of the UN's World Population Year 1974 and International Women's Year 1975, Sipila says "they are two sides of the same coin." Without full participation in decision-making, women can't exercise choice in their child-bearing role. The UN can't realistically hope to reduce the rate of population growth until women are able to participate more widely in their societies.

Sipila has issued a special appeal to UN members to set aside their prejudice in 1975, whether they are prejudices of race, sex, language, or religion. Then, she says, "we can confront the problems of such magnitude before us with all, not half, of humanity, and all, not half, of our human resources."

Emmanuelle: Pretentious Porn

by Rose

Decadent, decadent, decadent, decadent. *Emmanuelle* is a well-financed pretty fluff of soft-core pornography with pretensions of being Meaningful Art. Pretty sunsets, pretty faces, pretty bodies, pretty scenery are accompanied by some of the most ludicrous pseudo-intellectual absurdities ever heard.

'Tis the tale of vacuous (but pretty) French girl's search for the meaning of love and the meaning of womanhood in the rather unlikely (but pretty) milieu of idle wealthy Europeans in Thailand. Our heroine, Emmanuelle, is a recent arrival in Bangkok who must be initiated into the intricacies of fighting off boredom with squash and sex. Her mentors comprise an entire cast of cliches.

First, there is Jean, your typical liberal male chauvinist pig husband. Jean and Emmanuelle fuck under the mosquito netting. This inspires the houseboy to rape the maid. Emmanuelle is then introduced to a catty bitcherie of pool-side loungers by Marianne, your typical lascivious older woman. Marianne comes across as some kind of villainess, but she gets to deliver some of the better lines, such as "You go through life...with the blank stupid trust of a rosy-cheeked baby to whom nothing has happened."

Emmanuelle recollects (or fantasizes-it's unclear) fucking two men on the flight to Bangkok, one in her plane seat and one in the bathroom. Very strangely, this is the most convincing sex in the entire film, perhaps because cold and mechanical sex is more believable between strangers than between acquaintances.

Emmanuelle falls in love with an archaeologist named Bea, your typical liberated career woman. Their affair is so schmaltzy one almost expects a break into slow motion romps through fields of flowers. Emmanuelle and Bea make love, but we don't see much of that. Bea tells Emmanuelle that she likes her but doesn't love her. Crushing.

Her heart broken, Emmanuelle returns home to Jean. The consensus of opinion seems to be that it's time for her to become "a real woman" by having an affair with Mario, who "collects situations." Mario is not your typical dirty old man; he's your ultimate slimy old fart. Furthermore, he's a pompous, impotent, the kind of self-enamored person who can deliver with conviction such self-contradictions as, "We have to make love without reason or restraint....Eroticism is...remaining very clear and rational. It's the victory of dream over reality."

So Mario initiates Emmanuelle into Womanhood, and teaches her what Love is all about. Getting fondled by a drunken soldier. Getting gang-raped in an opium den. Getting fucked in the ass by a Thai boxer.

Visually, the film has some good scenes. Emmanuelle's introduction to Bangkok is effective, and the metamorphosis of Emmanuelle's make-up is excellent. She begins as a rosy-cheeked baby and by the end of the movie, she looks like a seventeen-year-old female impersonator.

To be honest, I suffer from an old prejudice against European-made movies. Too often what you see in no way matches what you hear. In *Emmanuelle* we are blessed with such spectacles as pompous lectures on "total freedom" being delivered by Mario as he actively degrades and exploits everyone he comes in contact with. Total freedom for whom?

Most damning, *Emmanuelle* is boring. Movies about boring people usually are, even if they do have their clothes off.

we ain't got it easy

by Vicki

"Lavendar Jane Loves Women." 1974.
Women's Music Network, 215 West 92nd
St., NY, NY 10025. \$5.35.

"Lavendar Jane Loves Women" is the only item I've ever ordered from a half-column-inch ad in the back of a magazine, and not regretted. The product of three gay women - Alix Dobkin, Kay Gardner, and Patches Attom - Lavendar Jane has a message that is perhaps best summarized in the words of one of its creators: "Sharing music by women, about women, for women, with women everywhere, is what Lavendar Jane means to me. It's good to be here."

It is an unusual record, in that it combines political persuasion with musical refreshment. No sooner is our consciousness raised, and we become convinced not to let *maneuvering*, *manipulators*, *manpower* and *mankind* keep us apart, than we are reminded through flutes, cellos, and guitars of the softness of a woman's smile.

Of course, Lavendar Jane is not a perfect record (but what lesbian will realize this when caught under its lavender spell). Most listeners will probably eventually tire of the Balkan voice exercises on side one. "Hug-ee-boo," an original composition by Alix Dobkin's partner, is tough to relate to on those days when you don't especially feel like hugging anyone. And quite a few feminists will flinch when they are called "girls" in "Lesbian Talk."

Nonetheless, I believe the only real drawback in this record is the fact that it's so hard to get. Don't expect to find it on sale at Record Rack. The only way to acquire it is by sending \$5.35 to the publisher at the above address. But don't let the hassle stop you from getting a copy of Lavendar Jane.

After all, hassle sort of characterizes the lesbian way of life, doesn't it? As Lavendar Jane says, "We ain't got it easy, but we got it."



WHO'S GONNA SHOE YOUR PRETTY LITTLE FOOT?

American Folk Song

Who's gon - na shoe your pret - ty lit - tle foot? Who's gon - na
glove your hand? Who's gon - na kiss your
red ru - by lips? Who's gon - na be your man?

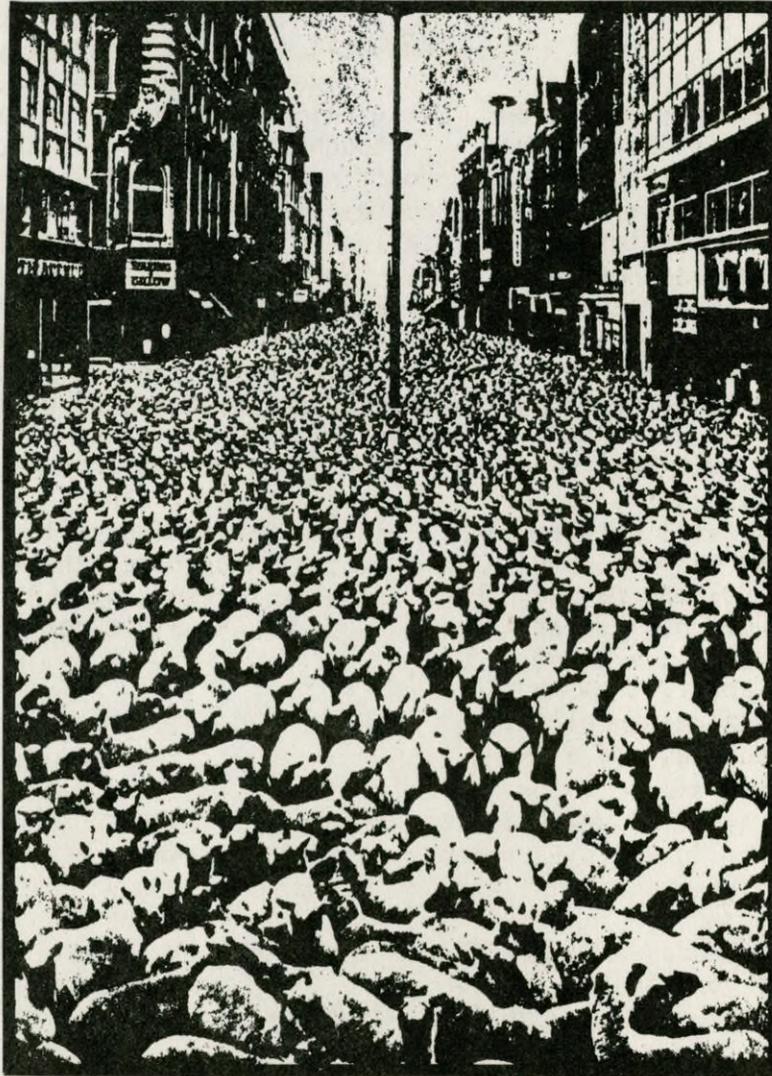
Who's gonna be your man?
Who's gonna be your man?
Who's gonna kiss your ruby red lips?
Who's gonna be your man?

Papa's gonna shoe my pretty little foot,
Mama's gonna glove my hand,
Sister's gonna kiss my ruby red lips,
I don't need no man.

I don't need no man,
I don't need no man,
Sister's gonna kiss my ruby red lips,
I don't need no man.

The longest train I ever did see
Was a hundred coaches long.
The only woman I ever did love
Was on that train and gone.

On that train and gone,
On that train and gone,
The only woman I ever did love
Was on that train and gone.



she or sheep ?

SUPPORT THE
ERA
Equal Rights Amendment

ERA 8007
Nov. 1980