

Review: *An Intimate Wilderness,*

edited by Judith Barrington. Oregon: The Eighth Mountain Press, 1991.

Maira

I am absorbed by all the genuine words, the familiar questions, the fullness of the lesbian experience that these 45 writers have created in *An Intimate Wilderness*. Edited by Judith Barrington, this collection is a response to the question she raises: "How was art reflecting life — that is literary art and lesbian life?" Barrington looked for writers who were not merely arousing, but who illuminated our sexual lives. She says in her introduction that until now lesbian sex has been inarticulate. In creating this anthology she challenges women to find new language to express our intimate experiences.

This collection of works includes both fiction and non-fiction as well as poetry. A wide range of styles, ideas and attitudes are included. Barrington addresses the need to incorporate sexuality into our whole identities. In light of very real homophobic fears this is not an easy task. All in all, Barrington has put together a collection that feels very genuine, a true collection of the lesbian voice.

The book starts with a non-fiction essay by Marilyn Frye. She writes about a study done on couples by Blumstein and Schwartz. In this survey it is stated that lesbian couples "have sex" far less often than heterosexual or male homosexual

couples. Frye explores what is considered as "having sex" between lesbians. She is at times quite humorous, other times absolutely enlightening, while looking into the cultural and psychological reasons for the slanted results of the study. She speaks of the need for a new vocabulary to explain our unique experience as lesbians. She also sees the need to maintain a sense of humor about "foolish studies that lesbians don't have sex as often as, aren't as sexual as, and use fewer sexual techniques than other folks."

There are quite a few good short stories in the collection. One that is especially entertaining was written by Sarah Schulman, titled *The Penis Story*. Yes, it's hilarious! We find Ann, who's desperately in love with Jesse, awakening one morning with a penis. The author tells us, "By the time Ann finished riding on the F train she had developed a fairly integrated view of her new self. She was a lesbian with a penis. She was not a man with breasts. She was a woman. This was not androgyny, she'd never liked that word. Women had always been whole to Ann, not half of something waiting to be completed." Funny, very funny, but a lot more.

Along with insightful non-fiction and delightful short stories, there are poems. One poem was simply exquisite. Written by Suniti Namjoshi, it's titled *I Give Her The Rose*.

I give her the rose with unfurled petals.
She smiles And crosses her legsI give
her the shell with the swollen lip
She laughs. I bite
and nuzzle her breasts.
I tell her, "Feed me on flowers
with wide open mouths,"
and slowly,
she pulls down my head.

This collection is filled with such provocative, beautiful expressions of lesbian love. The writers also cover many of the hidden areas of sexuality. Themes of incest appear in works by Louise Wisechild, Maureen Seaton and Leslea Newman. All very personal and honest in their content. Another area deals with a woman's illness and subsequent body changes, written beautifully by Barbara Rosenblum, Melanie Kaye and Sandra Butler. Themes of loving someone who's married or straight are expressed in pieces by Janice Gould, Irene Klepfisz and Emma Peraz. There are also marvelous love stories and poems from Pat Parker, Marilyn Hacker and Adrienne Rich.

In glancing through the biographies of the 45 contemporary writers, I see women of different backgrounds, ages and ethnic groups. Diversity is shown here, but commonality is more apparent. That commonality is a commitment to the word and the expression of new ideas. For those of us out in the wilderness, this work is greatly appreciated. ▼

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