

April 14, 1973

Lesbianism and Feminism: Synonyms or Contradictions?

Robin Morgan

This is the keynote address given by Morgan at the West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference, held in Los Angeles, California, in spring 1973.

Very Dear Sisters,

It seems important to begin by affirming who, how, and why, we are. We all know the male mass media stereotype of the Women's Movement: "If you've seen one Women's Libber—you've seen 'em all—they each have two heads, a pair of horns, and are fire-spouting, man-hating, neurotic, crazy, frigid, castrating-bitch, aggressive, Lesbian, broom-riding Witches." So I want to start by saying that this shocking stereotype is absolutely *true*. The days of women asking politely for a crumb of human dignity are over. Most men say, "But you've become so *hostile*," to which one good retort is a quote from a nineteenth century Feminist who said, "First men put us in chains, and then, when we writhe in agony, they deplore our not behaving prettily." Well, enough of that. We are the women that men have warned us about.

That settled, I want to talk about a number of difficult and dangerous themes relating to what others have variously called "The Lesbian-Straight Split." This is the first speech, talk, what-have-you, that I have ever written down and then read—and it may be the last. I have done so because the content can so easily be misunderstood or wilfully distorted, because misquoting is a common occurrence, because the risks I will take today are too vital for me to chance such misrepresentation. If there are disagreements with what I have to say, at least let them be based on what I *do* say, and not on some people's out-of-context mis-memory of what they thought I meant. So, for the record, one copy of this talk is lodged at the offices of *The Lesbian Tide*, another with sisters from *Amazon Quarterly*, and still another in a secret safe-deposit box guarded day and night by the spirits of Stanton and

Anthony, Joan and Haiviette, and a full collective of Labyris-wielding Amazons. I also want to add that the lack of a question-discussion session when I finish was decided upon not by me but by the conference organizers, for lack of time and in light of the necessity to get on with the Agenda.

Before I go any further, I feel it is also necessary to deal with who, how and why I am here. As far back as a month ago, I began hearing a few rumbles of confusion or criticism about my "keynoting" this conference—all from predictable people, and none, of course, expressed directly to my face. "Is she or isn't she?" was their main thrust. "Know anyone who's been to bed with her lately? Well, if we can't *prove* she's a Lesbian, then what right has she to address a Lesbian-Feminist conference?" Now, such charges hardly devastate me, having been straight-bated before. So. It is credential time once again.

I am a woman. I am a Feminist, a radical feminist, yea, a militant feminist. I am a Witch. I identify as a Lesbian because I love the People of Women and certain individual women with my life's blood. Yes, I live with a man—as my sister Kate Millett. Yes, I am a Mother—as is my sister Del Martin. The man is a Faggot-Effeminist, and we are together the biological as well as the nurturant parents of our child. This confuses a lot of people—it not infrequently confuses us. But there it is. Most of all, I am a Monster—and I am proud.

Now all of the above credentials qualify me, I feel, to speak from concrete experience on: Feminism, Lesbianism, Motherhood, "Gay Male Movements" versus Faggot-Effeminist consciousness about women, Tactics for the Women's Revolution, and a Vision of the Female Cosmos. I am an expert with the scars to prove it, having been, in my time, not only straight-bated, but also dyke-bated, red-bated, violence-bated, mother-bated, and artist-bated. As you can see, the above credentials further qualify me for being an excellent target, available not only to the male rulers but also to any woman just dying to practice—even on a sister.

But, finally, to the subject. In order to talk intelligently about the so-called "Split" it is necessary to recap history a little. In the early days of the current Women's Movement, many of us were a bit schizoid. The very first-consciousness raising session I ever went to, for example, gave me the warning. We were talking about sexuality, and I described myself as a bisexual (this was even before the birth of the first Gay Liberation Front, and long before bisexual became a naughty or cop-out word—besides, it did seem an accurate way of describing my situation). Every woman in the room moved, almost imperceptibly, an inch or so away from me. Wow, I thought. It was not the last time I was to have such an articulate reaction.

Later, with the creation of GLF, a few of us Jewish Mother types spent a lot of time running back and forth between the two movements, telling the

straight women that the Lesbians weren't ogres and telling the Lesbians that the straight women weren't creeps. Simultaneously, the intense misogyny coming against Lesbians from gay men drove many women out of the "gay movement" and into the Women's Movement. There was a brief and glorious sisterhood-glazed honeymoon period among all women in our Movement. Then, those contradictions began. For example, a personal one: I had announced my Lesbian identification in *The New York Times* (which is a fairly public place, after all) in 1968, before the first GLF had been founded. Then, in 1970, one group of Radicalesbians in New York said to me, "Don't you dare call yourself a lesbian—you live with a man and have a child." Now, while I might (defensively) argue the low-consciousness logic of this, since statistically most Lesbians are married to men and have children, I had nonetheless learned one important thing from all my previous years in the Left: *guilt*. So all my knee-jerk reflexes went into action, and I obeyed. Six months later, another group of Radicalesbians confronted me. "We notice you've stopped calling yourself a Lesbian," they said, "What's the matter—you gone back in the closet? You afraid?" Meanwhile, the monosexual straight women were still inching away from my presence. Wow, I thought, repeatedly.

The lines began to be drawn, thick, heavy. Friedan trained her cannon "the Lesbian Menace." (In a show of consistent terror and hatred of Lesbians, and indeed of women, one might say, she only recently announced in *The New York Times* that the Lesbian and radical feminists in the Movement were CIA infiltrators. We met her attack with a firm political counterattack in the press, never descending to a level of personal vilification or giving the media the cat-fight which they were trying to foment.) In 1970, backlash began, starting in NOW and infecting radical feminist groups as well. The bigotry was intense and wore many faces: outright hatred and revulsion of Lesbian women; "experimentation"—using a Lesbian for an interesting experiment and then dumping her afterward: curiosity about the freaks, dismissal of another woman's particular pain if it did not fall within the "common" experience, and many other examples.

Meanwhile Lesbians, reeling from the hatred expressed by the gay male movement and the fear expressed by the Women's Liberation Movement, began to organize separately. Of course, a great many Lesbians had been in the Women's Movement since its beginning—a great many had, in fact, begun it. These included some women who were active in Daughters of Bilitis under other names, not only to keep jobs and homes and custody of their children, but also so as not to "embarrass" NOW, which they had built. In addition, a great many formerly heterosexual or asexual women were declaring themselves Lesbians, as they found the support to "Come Out" of their kitchens and communes as well as their closets. Some women *were*

pressured, not necessarily, although certainly sometimes, by Lesbians. The pressure came mostly from confusion, contradictions, pulls in different directions, paths which each might have led to a united Feminism but which the Man exploited into warring factions; he was aided, of course, by the internecine hostility of any oppressed people—tearing at each other is painful, but it is after all safer than tearing at the real enemy. Oh, people *did* struggle sincerely, hour upon hour of struggle to understand and relate—but the flaw still widened to a crack and then to a split, created by our collective false consciousness. We are now teetering on the brink of an abyss but one very different from what we have been led to expect.

At present, there are supposedly two factions. On one side, those labeled heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, and celibate women. On the other, those labeled Lesbians. Not that the latter group is monolithic—far from it, although monosexual straight women can, in their fear, try to hide the bigotry behind such a belief. No, there are some Lesbians who work politically with gay men; some work politically with straight men; some work politically with other Lesbians; some work politically with only certain other Lesbians (age, race, class distinctions); some work politically with all Feminists (Lesbians, heterosexuals, etc.): and some, of course, don't work politically at all. As Laurel has pointed out in an incisive and witty article in the current *Amazon Quarterly*, there are sub-sub-sub-divisions, between gay women, Lesbians, Lesbian-Feminists, dykes, dyke-feminist, dyke-separatists, Old Dykes, butch dykes, bar dykes, and killer dykes. In New York, there were divisions between Political Lesbians and Real Lesbians and Nouveau Lesbians. Hera help the woman who is unaware of these fine political distinctions and who wanders into a meeting for the first time, thinking she maybe has a right to be there because she likes women.

Still, the same energy which created *The Ladder* almost twenty years ago (and we mourn its demise last year and we all hope for its resurrection this summer)—that same energy is now evident in the dynamism of *The Lesbian Tide*, the dedication to the fine points of struggle and contradiction in *Ain't I A Woman?*, in the analytical attempts of *The Furies*, and in the aesthetic excellence and serious political probings of the new *Amazon Quarterly*, to name only a few such publications. That energy, contorted into hiding and working under false pretenses for so long, has exploded in the beautiful and organized anger of groups like Lesbian Mothers (begun in San Francisco and now spreading across the country), to defend and protect the rights of the Lesbian and her children, and, by extension, to stand as guardian for all women who, the moment we embrace our own strength, rage and politics, face the danger of having our children seized from us physically by the patriarchy which daily attempts to kidnap their minds and souls. The development of this consciousness, so tied in with ancient Mother-Right, is, I think,

of profound importance to Lesbian Mothers, all Mothers, indeed all women—it is one of the basic building blocks in our creation of a Feminist Revolution. And again, that energy, which drove my sister Ivy Bottini to almost single-handedly keep the New York NOW chapter afloat for several years (despite the ministrations of Betty Friedan) has now impelled her and other sisters to create Wollstonecraft, Inc. here in Los Angeles, the first major overground national Feminist publishing house; to say nothing of Shameless Hussy Press, Diana Press, Momma, and other small radical Lesbian-Feminist presses. That woman-loving-woman energy, freed into open expression and in fact into totally new forms of relationship *by the existence of the Feminist Movement*, has exploded in marches and demonstrations and dances and films and theater groups and crisis centers and so on and on—a whole affirmative new world within the world of women.

And yet.

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Feminist Revolution: both Betty Friedan and Rita Mae Brown condemned me for being a “man-hater.” Both *Ms.* magazine and *The Furies* began to call for alliances with men, *The Furies* at one point implying that Lesbians should band together with gay and straight males (preferably working-class) in a coalition against the enemy: straight women. Indeed, in one by now infamous statement, Rita Mae declared that Lesbians were the only women capable of really loving men. Now of course this did come as a shock to many a Lesbian who was obviously under the misguided impression that one had become a Lesbian because she in fact loved *women*, and was indifferent-to-enraged on the subject of men. But now that the “correct line” had fallen from heaven, one was supposed to penitently dismiss such counterrevolutionary attitudes, learning to look at them *and* other women who still clung to them with contempt. One was also supposed to place issues such as the Vietnam War, political coalition with men, warmed-over marxian class analyses, life-style differences, and other such un-lavender herrings in the path, in order to divide and polarize women. While doing all this, one was further supposed to hoist the new banner of the Vanguard. You know, the Vanguard—Lenin leading the schlemiels.

Before we get into Vanguarditis, we have to backtrack a little, take some dramamine for our nausea, and talk about men—and male influence, and male attempts to destroy the united Women’s Movement. This is such an old subject that it bores and depresses me to once more have to wade through it. I feel that “man-hating” is an honorable and viable *political* act, that the oppressed have a right to a class-hatred against the *class* that is oppressing them. And although there are exceptions (in everything), i.e., men who are trying to be traitors to their own male class, most men cheerfully affirm their deadly class privileges and power. And I *hate* that *class*. I wrote my “Good-

bye To All That" to the male left in 1970—and thought I was done with it. Del Martin wrote her now classic article "If That's All There Is" as a farewell to the male gay movement, soon after—and said it all again. We were both touchingly naïve if we thought that sufficient.

Because there is now upon us yet another massive wave of male interference, and it is coming, this time, from *both* gay men and their straight brothers. Boys will be boys, the old saying goes—and boys will indulge in that little thing called male bonding—and all boys in a patriarchal culture have more options and power than do any women.

Gay men first, since they were the ones we all thought were incipient allies with women, because of their own oppression under sexism. I won't go into the facts or the manners of the male-dominated Gay Liberation Movement, since Del did all that superbly and since most women have left the "Gay Movement" a long time ago. But I will, for the sake of those sisters still locked into indentured servitude there, run through a few more recent examples of the "new changing high consciousness about male supremacy" among gay organizations and gay male heavies. Are we to forgive and forget the Gay Activists Alliance dances only a few months ago (with, as usual, a token ten percent attendance by women), at which New York GAA showed stag movies of nude men raping women? Are we to forgive and forget the remark of gay leader and "martyr" Jim Fouratt, who told Susan Silverwoman, a founder of New York GLF, that she could not represent GLF at a press conference because she saw herself too much as a woman, as a Feminist? Are we to forgive the editors of the gay male issues of *Motive* magazine for deliberately setting women against women, deliberately attempting to exacerbate what they see as the Lesbian-Straight Split, deliberately attempting to divide and conquer—are we to forgive the following:

Once, when I was telling one of the Motive editors, you Roy Eddy, about the estimated nine million Wicca (witches) who were burned to death during the Middle Ages—something that appeared to be news to you—you paused for a moment, and then asked me, "But how many of those nine million women were actually lesbians?" For a moment, I missed your meaning completely as a variety of sick jokes raced through my mind. "How many of the six million Jews were Zionists; how many of the napalmed Indochinese babies could be said to have lived outside the nuclear family?"

Then it hit me: you had actually expressed a particle of your intense hatred for all women by asking how many of the nine million were lesbians, so that you would know how many of these victims to mourn, because YOU DIDN'T OBJECT TO WHAT WAS DONE TO THE OTHER WOMEN! This is as close as I have ever heard a man come to saying in so many words that he didn't object to men torturing and incinerating millions of women (provided only that they met his standards for burnability).

—this is a quote from the second issue of *Double-F, A Magazine of Effeminism*, in which even the faggot-effeminist males declare *their* Declaration of Independence from Gay Liberation and all other Male Ideologies.

Or are we, out of the compassion in which we have been positively forced to *drown* as women, are we yet again going to defend the male supremacist yes obscenity of male transvestitism? How many of us will try to explain away—or permit into our organizations, even, men who deliberately re-emphasize gender roles, and who parody female oppression and suffering as “camp”? Maybe it seems that we, in our “liberated” combat boots and jeans aren’t being mocked. No? Then it is “merely” our mothers, and *their* mothers, who had no other choice, who wore hobbling dresses and torture-stiletto-heels to survive, to keep jobs, or to keep husbands because *they* themselves could *get* no jobs. No, I will not call a male “she;” thirty-two years of suffering in the androcentric society, and of surviving, have earned me the name “woman”; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of his being hassled (which *he* may enjoy), and then he dares, he *dares* to think he understands our pain? No, in our mothers’ names and in our own, we must not call him sister. We know what’s at work when whites wear blackface; the same thing is at work when men wear drag.

And what of the straight men, the rulers, the rapists, the right-on radicals? What of the men of the Socialist Workers’ Party, for example, who a short two years ago refused membership to all homosexual people on the grounds that homosexuality was a decadent sickness, an evil of capitalism, a perversion that must be rooted out in all “correct socialist thinking”—who now, upon opportunistically seeing a large movement out there with a lot of bodies to organize like pawns into their purposes, speedily change their official line (but not their central-committee attitude on homosexuality) and send “their” women out to teach these poor sheep some real politics? Are we to forgive, forget, ignore? Or struggle endlessly through precious energy-robbing hours with these women, because they are after all *women, sisters*, even if they’re collaborating with a politics and a party based on straight white male rule? We must save our struggle for elsewhere. But it hurts—*because they are women*.

And this is the tragedy. That the straight men, the gay men, the transvestite men, the male *politics*, the male styles, the male attitudes toward sexuality are being arrayed once more against us, and they are, in fact, making new headway this time, using women as their standard-bearers.

Every woman here knows in her gut the vast differences between her sexuality and that of any patriarchally trained male’s—gay or straight. That has, in fact, always been a source of *pride* to the Lesbian community, even in its greatest suffering. That the emphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, non-emotional involvement, and tough invulnerability, were

the *male* style, and that we, as women, placed greater trust in love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, strength, commitment. Then what but male style is happening when we accept the male transvestite who chooses to wear women's dresses and make-up, but sneer at the female who is still forced to wear them for survival? What is happening when "Street Fighting Woman," a New York *all-woman* bar band, dresses in black leather and motorcycle chains, and sings and plays a lot of the Rolling Stones, including the high priest of sadistic cock-rock Jagger's racist, sexist song "Brown Sugar"—with lines like "Old slaver knows he's doin' all right/hear him whip the women just around midnight . . ." What is happening when, in a mid-west city with a strong Lesbian-Feminist community, men raped a woman in the university dormitory, and murdered her by the repeated ramming of a broom-handle into her vagina until she died of massive internal hemorrhage—and the Lesbian activists there can't relate to taking any political action pertaining to the crime because, according to one of them, there was no evidence that the victim was a Lesbian? But the same community can, at a women's dance less than a week later, proudly play Jagger's recorded voice singing "Midnight Rambler"—a song which glorifies the Boston Strangler?

What has happened when women, in escaping the patriarchally enforced role of noxious "femininity" adopt instead the patriarch's *own* style, to get drunk and swaggering just like one of the boys, to write of tits and ass as if a sister were no more than a collection of chicken parts, to spit at the lifetime commitment of other Lesbian couples, and refer to them contemptuously as "monogs?" For the record, the anti-monogamy line originated with men, Leftist men, Weathermen in particular, in order to guilt-trip the women in their "alternative culture" into being more available victims of a dominance-based gang-rape sexuality. And from where but the Left male "hip" culture have we been infected with the obsession to anti-intellectualism and downward mobility? Genuinely poor people see no romanticism in their poverty; those really forced into illiteracy hardly glorify their condition. The oppressed want *out* of that condition—and it is contemptuous of real people's real pain to parasitically imitate it, and hypocritical to play the more-oppressed-than-thou game instead of ordering our lives so as to try and meet our basic and just needs, so that we can get on with the more important but often forgotten business of making a Feminist Revolution.

What about the life-style cop-out? The one invented by two straight white young males, Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, for the benefit of other unoppressed straight white young males? What about the elite isolation, the incestuous preoccupation with one's own clique or group or commune, one's own bar/dance/tripping, which led one Lesbian to announce that the revolution has already been won, that she isn't compelled, like the rest of us, to live in a man's world anymore? As Jeanne Cordova has written in *The*

Lesbian Tide, "An example of these politics is Jill Johnston's calling for tribes of women capable of sustaining themselves independent of the male species. How very beautiful! Truth, justice, and the womanly way! How very unreal." And Cordova is right in pointing out that this is the "personal solution" error—the deadly trap into which so many heterosexual women have fallen. It should be obvious how painfully much everyone wants even a little happiness, peace, joy in her life—and should have that right. But to remain convinced that your own personal mirage is a real oasis while a sandstorm is rising in the desert is both selfish and suicidal. There is a war going on, sisters. Women are being killed. And the rapist doesn't stop to ask whether his victim is straight or Lesbian.

But the epidemic of male style among women doesn't stop there. No, it is driving its *reformist* wedge through our ranks as well: women breaking their backs working for McGovern (only to have him laugh in their faces): women in the Lesbian community especially breaking their backs to elect almost invariably *male* gay legislators, or lobbying to pass bills which will, in practice, primarily profit *men*. Myself, I have never been able to get excited over Tokenism, whether it was Margaret Chase Smith in the Senate or Bernadine Dohrn in the Weather Underground, let alone a few women to give GAA a good front (which women, by the way, are finally getting wise to and leaving), or to serve as periodic good niggers for the cheap porn reportage of *The Advocate*, *Gay*, *Gay Sunshine*, and the like.

Susan Silverwoman, a New York-based Lesbian Feminist active for years in the Women's Movement and at one time in GLF, has written a moving and courageous paper called "Finding Allies: The Lesbian Dilemma" which is available for 25 cents by writing to Labyris Books, 33 Barrow Street, New York City 10014. In it she writes, "Men have traditionally maintained power over women by keeping us separated. Gay men capitalized on the split between feminists and lesbians by suggesting and insisting that we [lesbians] were somehow, basically different from straight women . . . Gay men preferred to think of us not as women, but as female gay men." She goes on to say, "It is imperative that we identify with the total feminist issue . . . if we continue to define straight women as the enemy, rather than sisters . . . we rob from ourselves a movement which must be part of ourselves. We are choosing false allies when we align politically with gay men who can never understand the female experience and who, as men, have a great deal of privilege to lose by a complete liberation of women. Whether or not straight feminists come out, as potential lesbians they are far more likely to understand out experience."

Language itself is one powerful barometer of influence. More and more women use Lesbian proudly in self-description, calling on the history of that word, dating from an age and an island where women were great artists

and political figures. Why do *any* of us still use "gay" to describe ourselves at all—that trivializing, male-invented, male defining term? If we are serious about our politics, then we must be responsible about the ways in which we communicate them to others, creating new language when necessary to express new concepts. But the sloppy thinking and lazy rhetoric of the straight and gay male movements pollutes our speech, and when Jill Johnston in one column claims Betty Friedan as a Lesbian and then, a few months later, after Friedan's attack in the *Times*, calls Friedan a man—I for one get confused. And angry. Because the soggy sentimentality of the first statement and the rank stupidity of the second *mean nothing politically*. The point is, very regrettably, that Friedan *is* a woman. And can stand as one of many examples of the insidious and devastating effect [of] male *politics*.

There *is* a war going on. And people get damaged in a war, badly damaged. Our casualties are rising. To say that any woman has escaped—or can escape—damage in this day on this planet is to march under the self-satisfied flags of smug false consciousness. And get gunned down anyway for her pains.

Personally, I detest "vanguarditis." I never liked it in the Left, and I find it especially distasteful weaseling its way into the Women's Movement. I think that if anything like a "vanguard" exists at all, it continually shifts and changes from group to group within a movement, depending on the specific strategies and contradictions that arise at given times, and on which groups are best equipped and placed to meet and deal with them—when and if called for [by] the movement *as a whole*. The responsibility of a vanguard, by the way, is to speak from, for, and to *all* of the people who gave it birth. Lesbian Nation cannot be the Feminist solution, much less a vanguard, when it ignores these facts. And it won't do to blame the straight women who wouldn't cooperate—after all, it is the *vanguard's* responsibility as leadership to hear messages in the silence or even the hostility of *all* its people, and to reply creatively, no matter how lengthy or painful that dialogue is. A willingness to do this—and then to *act* on the message—is what *makes* the vanguard the vanguard.

I don't like more-radical-than-thou games any better than more-oppressed-than-thou games. I don't like credentials games, intimidation-between-women games, or "you are who you sleep with" games. I don't like people being judged by their class background, their sexual preference, their race, choice of religion, marital status, motherhood or rejection of it, or any other vicious standard of categorization. I hate such judgments in the male power system, and I hate them in the Women's Movement. If there must be judgments at all, let them be not on where a woman is coming *from*, but on what she is moving *toward*; let them be based on her seriousness, her level of risk, her commitment, her endurance.

And by those standards, yes, there could be a Lesbian vanguard. I think it would be women like Barbara Grier and Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin and Sten Russell, and others like them who, at the height of the Fifties' McCarthyism, stood up and formed a Lesbian civil-rights movement, and whose courage, commitment and staying power are ignored by the vulgar minds of certain younger women, newly Lesbian from two months or two years back, who presume to dismiss such brave women as "oldies" or "lifestyle straights" or, again, "hopeless monogs."

There is a new smell of fear in the Women's Movement. It is in the air when groups calling themselves killer-dyke-separatists trash Lesbian Feminists who work with that anathema, straight women—trash these Lesbian Feminists as "pawns, dupes, and suckers-up to the enemy." It is in the air when Peggy Allegro writes in *Amazon Quarterly* that "at a certain point, flags can begin to dominate people." For instance, women are oppressed by the flag of the freak feminist dyke. There are all kinds of rules, shoulds and shouldn'ts, in this community, that result because of the image's power. We must beware the tendency to merely impose as new hierarchy . . . a new ideal ego image to persecute people. It is in the air when ultra-egalitarianism usurps organic collectivity, or when one woman is genuinely scared to confront another about the latter's use of "chick" to describe her lover. It was in the air when I trembled to wrench the Stones' record from the phonograph at a women's dance and when I was accused of being up-tight, a bring-down, puritanical, draggy, and of course, doubtless, a hung-up man-hating "straight" *for doing that*. The words are familiar, but the voices used to be male. And the smell of fear was in my gut, writing this talk, and is in my nostril now, risking the saying of these things, taking a crazy leap of faith that our own shared and potentially ecstatic womanhood will bind across all criticism—and that a lot more Feminists in the Lesbian Movement will come out of their closets today.

Because polarization does exist. Already. And when I first thought about this talk, I wanted to call for unity. But I cannot. I am struck dumb before the dead body of a broomhandle-raped and murdered woman, and anyway, my voice wouldn't dent the rape-sound of the Rolling Stones. So instead, my purpose in this talk here today is to call for further polarization, but on different grounds.

Not the Lesbian-Straight Split, nor the Lesbian-Feminist Split, but the Feminist-Collaborator Split.

The war outside, between women and male power, is getting murderous; they are trying to kill us, literally, spiritually, infiltratively. It is time, past time, we drew new lines and knew which women were serious, which women were really committed to loving women (whether that included sexual credentials or not), and, on the other side, which women thought Feminism

meant pure fun, or a chance to bring back a body count to their male Trot party leaders, or those who saw Feminist Revolution as any particular life-style, correct class line, pacifist-change-your-head-love-daisy-chain, or easy lay. We know that the personal is political. But if the political is *solely* personal, then those of us at the barricades will be in big trouble. And if a woman isn't there when the crunch comes—and it is coming—then I for one won't give a damn whether she is at home in bed with a woman, a man, or her own wise fingers. If she's in bed at all at that moment, others of us are in our coffins. I'd appreciate the polarization now instead of then.

I am talking about the rise of attempted gynocide. I am talking about survival. Susan Stein, a Lesbian Feminist with a genius for coining aphorisms, has said, "Lesbianism is in danger of being co-opted by Lesbians." Lesbians are a minority. Women are a majority. And since it is awfully hard to be a Lesbian without being a woman first, the choice seems pretty clear to me.

There are a lot of women involved in that war out there, most of them not even active in the Women's Movement yet. They include the hundreds of thousands of housewives who created and sustained the meat boycott in the most formidable show of women's strength in recent years. Those women, Feminists or not, were moving *because* of Feminism—such a nationwide women's action would have been thought impossible five years ago. They are mostly housewives, and mothers, and heterosexuals. There are asexual and celibate women out there, too, who are tired of being told that they are sick. Because this society has said that everybody should fuck a lot, and too many people in the Women's Movement have echoed, "Yeah, fuck with women or even with men, but for god's sake *fuck* or you're *really* perverted." And there are also genuine functioning bisexuals out there. I'm not referring to people who have used the word as a coward's way to avoid dealing honestly with homosexuality, or to avoid commitment. We all know *that* ploy. I agree with Kate Millett when she says that she "believes that all people are inherently bisexual"—and I also know that to fight a system one must identify with the *most* vulnerable aspect of one's oppression—and women are put in prison for being Lesbians, not bisexuals or heterosexuals *per se*. So that is why I have identified myself as I have—in the *Times* in 1968 and here today. Although the Man will probably want to get *me* for hating *men* before he gets me for loving *women*.

We have enough trouble on our hands. Isn't it way past time we stopped *settling* for blaming each other, stopped blaming heterosexual women and middle-class women and married women and Lesbian women and white women and any woman for the structure of sexism, racism, classism, and ageism, that *no* woman is to blame for because we have none of us had the *power to create* those structures. They are patriarchal creations, not ours. And if we are collaborating with *any* of them for *any* reason, we must begin

to stop. The time is short, and the self-indulgence is getting dangerous. We must stop settling for anything less than we deserve.

All women have a right to each other as women. All women have a right to our sense of ourselves as a People. All women have a right to live with and make love with *whom we choose when we choose*. We have a right to bear and raise children if we choose, and *not* to if we don't. We have a right to freedom and yes, power. Power to change our entire species into something that might for the first time approach being human. We have a right, each of us, to a Great Love.

And this is the final risk I will take here today. By the right to a great love I don't mean romanticism in the Hollywood sense, and I don't mean a cheap joke or cynical satire. *I mean a great love*—a committed, secure, nurturing, sensual, aesthetic, revolutionary, holy, ecstatic love. That need, *that right*, is at the heart of our revolution. It is in the heart of the woman stereotyped by others as being a butch bar dyke who cruises for a cute piece, however much she herself might laugh at the Lesbian couple who have lived together for decades. It is in their hearts too. It is in the heart of the woman who jet-sets from one desperate heterosexual affair to another. It is in the heart of a woman who wants to find—or stay with—a man she can love and be loved by in what she has a right to demand are non-oppressive ways. It is in the heart of every woman here today, if we dare admit it to ourselves and *recognize* it in each other, and in *all* women. It is each her right. Let no one, female or male, of whatever sexual or political choice, dare deny that, for to deny it is to *settle*. To deny it is to speak with the words of the real enemy.

If we can open ourselves *to* ourselves and each other, as women, only then can we begin to fight for and create, in fact *reclaim*, not Lesbian Nation or Amazon Nation—let alone some false State of equality—but a real Feminist Revolution, a proud gynocratic *world* that runs on the power of women. Not in the male sense of power, but in the sense of a power plant—producing energy. And to each, that longing for, the right to, great love, filled in reality, for all women, and children, and men and animals and trees and water and all life. An exquisite diversity in unity. That world breathed and exulted on this planet some twelve thousand years ago, before the patriarchy arose to crush it.

If we risk this task then, our pride, our history, our culture, our past, our future, all vibrate before us. Let those who will dare, begin.

In the spirit of that task, I want to end this talk in a strange and new, although time-out-of-mind-ancient manner. Earlier, I “came out” in this talk as a Witch, and I did not mean that as a solely political affiliation. I affirm the past and the present spirit of the Wicca (the anglo-saxon word for Witch, or wise woman), affirm it not only in the smoke of our nine million martyrs, but also in the thread of *real* woman-power and *real* Goddess-worship dat-

ing back beyond Crete to the dawn of the planet. In the ruling male culture, they have degraded our ritual by beginning conferences and conventions with a black-coated male, sometimes in full priestly drag, nasally droning his stultifying pronouncements to the assemblage. Let us reclaim our own for ourselves, then, and in that process, also extend an embrace to those Lesbians who, because they go to church, are held in disrepute by counterculture Lesbians. And to those women of *whatever* sexual identification who kneel in novenas or murmur in quiet moments to, oh irony, a male god for alleviation of the agony caused by male supremacy.

The short passage I am about to read is from "The Charge of the Goddess," still used reverently in living Wiccan Covens, usually spoken by the High Priestess at the initiation of a new member. I ask that each woman join hands with those next to her. I ask your respect for the oldest faith known to human beings, and for the ecstatic vision of freedom that lies hidden in each of your own precious, miraculous brains.

Listen to the words of the Great Mother. She says:

"Whenever ye have need of anything, once in the month, and better it be when the moon is full, then shall ye assemble in some secret place . . . to these I will teach things that are yet unknown. AND YE SHALL BE FREE FROM ALL SLAVERY . . . Keep pure your highest ideal; strive ever toward it. LET NAUGHT STOP YOU NOR TURN YOU ASIDE . . . Mine is the cup of the wine of life and the cauldron of Ceridwen . . . I am the Mother of all living, and my love is poured out upon the earth . . . I am the beauty of the Green Earth, and the White Moon among the stars, and Mystery of the Waters, AND THE DESIRE IN THE HEART OF WOMAN . . . Before my face, let thine innermost self be enfolded in the raptures of the Infinite . . . Know the Mystery, that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee . . . For behold, I HAVE BEEN WITH THEE FROM THE BEGINNING. And I await you now."

Dear Sisters,

As we in the Craft say, blessed be.