

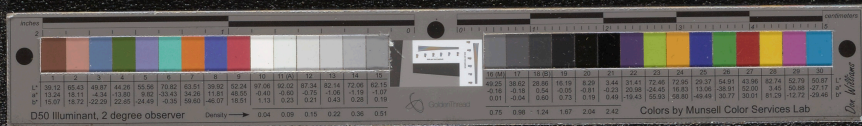
Joanna Russ, 46 Highland Ave., Binghamton, N.Y. 13905

24 April 1975

Dear Tip,

Where can I find Anna Wickham's work?

Thanks for the symposium contribution. Your answer to Suzy is everything I would have liked to say. And it's unfortunately true that having you around gives us women a chance now and then to refresh ourselves by holding you down, beating you, yelling "Male chauvinist pig!" for 1/2 hour and then going back to our work, much eased. This is hard on you. If I'm continually angrier at anybody, it's Ursula. Here is a woman, loaded with honors and money, with a writer-mother (which none of the rest of us ever had) and what does she write about? Heroic men who do heroic deeds in exciting places whilst their contented wifies wait for them and never quarrel with them and never sulk about the other men they could've married, and there is one (count 'em, one) homosexual per planet, who must be very lonely. And then she goes on with the hatred is so unfruitful and we must construct alternatives business and what do we get? Anarres, I should hope to kiss a pig. Everybody's equal here, brother. Right, brother. Can I have a pastry, brother? Sure, brother. How come you got breasts, brother? This is nothing but the Two Steps Behind theory all over again. Ursula may be a confused house nigger but she is still a house nigger, projecting herself into male protagonist after male protagonist and of course everybody loves her (though I'd hate to hear what they say behind her back). Of course I try not to say any of ~~ms~~ this in public. And when I find s.f. going all whooeey about her marvelous invention of "propertarianism" all the old Marxist in me (though I'm not an old Marx-



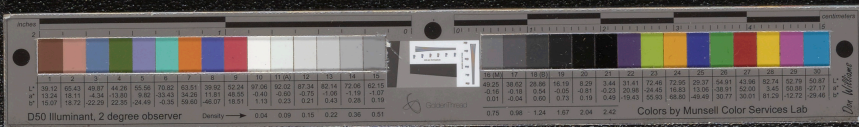


ist ~~xxxx~~ rises up and says O people, how stupid can s.f. readers get? Don't tell me; I already know.

In an hour or so I'm going to the doctor again. I've been in some sort of ghastly stew for a year now, and have been going around on the assumption that there was something wrong with me: dreadful depressions, worse rages, tears every morning, hopelessness, even some suicidal fantasies, yelling at friends, and feeling as if I were going to fall apart. The dr. wants to do a lower GI X-ray (and have my carburetor taken out as well) and since I went to him to find out why I have sudden climbs in temperature every now and then, with a precipitous drop within 2-3 hours (chills, then heat and chills, and finally plain heat, sometimes with my fingers going blue in the chill period) I can't see the connection. Of course ever since last March I've been shaking all over every day and waking up crying, but that ~~a~~ couldn't be relevant, could it? My blood tests are normal, and this idjit has become fascinated with my spastic colon (which I've had for 22 years) so I think I'll have to re-orient him.

And crying some more, I sat down and thought, don't know how ~~for~~ why. I have a friend who went through real hell for about a year before finally leaving her husband; her (usually dormant) ulcer got awful; her blood pressure dropped to the point where she often fainted upon standing up; she got severe asthma, lost weight, couldn't sleep more than three hours at a time, and in general she was falling apart. Within three weeks after the separation, all her physical symptoms disappeared. Mind you, she does have asthmatic allergies, she does have an inactive ulcer (and has for years) and she has always had low blood pressure. She told me once, "What they don't tell you is that after a long period of stress, your body goes on you."

So what have I been doing? During my first  $1\frac{1}{2}$  years at Harpur I assumed I'd get tenure; I relied very much on having money and status and felt that ~~if~~



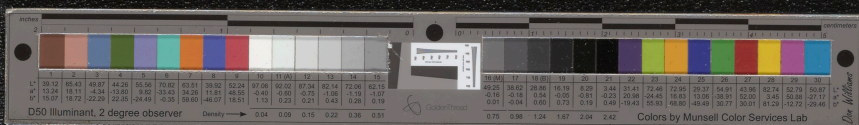


they were inalienably mine and I could put off the vexing problem of people. First year: I lost a potential lover, with attendant exploitation and emotional ups-and-downs I won't bore you with. It was the usual thing; the only men who act to me the way I imagine men should (emotionally involved, admiring, aware that our relation is a complex one and that we shouldn't rush into it, that it grows out of friendship, aware that he himself is a beautiful body)--and the way women do--either turns out to be an exploiter or a bruised mess. This one was both, mostly the former. My back turned, he acquires a 19-year-old, whom he marries. Well, that's not so bad. Of course I can't go around saying I'm not a "man-hater" and not a "lesbian" and smiling confidently about it any more. But never mind.

Then I lost my job. The power, the money, pulled out like a rug. And I realized how precarious it always is. And went into a screaming hysterical funk. And spent three months, 4 hours a day, with what amounted to a legal case, running into that nebulous male conspiracy, in which men who recommend that your teaching is rotten tell you to your face that your teaching is good, and nobody will admit what they said or did because of "confidentiality" and I began to feel the world was swimming around me. (I only realized this because of reading Michael Korda's Male Chauvinism--those unbearable pieces of shit wanted me to LIKE them even while they were firing me; can you believe it? So they lied and lied and lied.) I found out about the lying and they still approached me with this Gee, I really did defend you, you know, but the rest of the department....

No job.

My best (and until then only) female friend decided she had to choose between believing me and believing the department that might fire her and told me I was a very bad teacher because they said I was. A climax to a long association with this crazy lady, kind of but hopelessly weak, who never said any-





thing clearly, evaded talking clearly about herself or anyone else, and called me up four times a week so I should be her momma, always telling me "The most terrible thing has happened" in a "thrilling-but-horrified" voice. E.g. the cat ate part of the rug or something. So I stopped seeing her. I couldn't stand it. **X** No lover. No friend. No job.

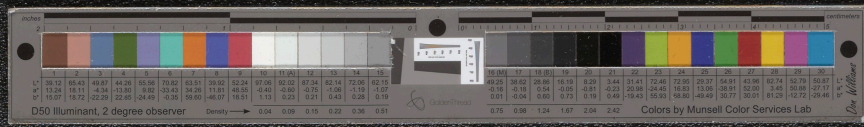
Then I spent compulsive months job-hunting, terrified out of my mind that I'd lost my middle class status forever and would end up doing all the jobs that had almost driven me mad in my 20's.

I got a job.

But I lost my confidence in the Great Tradition of culture--and believe me, that is the most painful thing of all--there is no conserving of great art, there is no inner circle of artists, there is no Olympus. Things get lost. The cultural preservers are as biased and sloppy and stupid as anyone else. It is just more monkey-talk.

I don't believe Academia is where I should be. But I can go no place else.

Then I tried for the last time to come to some sort of genuine modus vivendi with my parents over Christmas, after cherishing fantasies that if worst came to worst, they could help me. Only to find that they have not changed since 1950, **x** that their relations with each other are so stylized and false that I literally do not know what they want or feel or what the straightforward meaning of anything is that they do or ~~say~~ say. It was a nightmarish visit. I think I'm lucky to have escaped real schizophrenia. Everything's a double signal. They take me to some place so I will be happy & enjoy myself and when I comment volubly on something I do like, they fall silent and sulky. I get hopeless & shut up and then they **x** perk up and start enjoying themselves. Then they turn to me and say "But aren't you enjoying yourself, dear?"





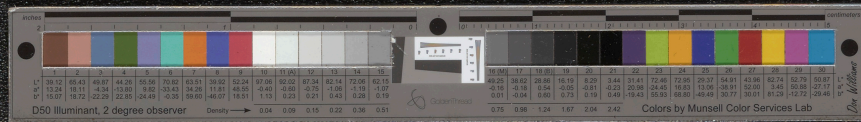
My father tells my mother, "Oh do come out tonight; you'll like it when you go and everyone wants to see you at the party." My mother says "Oh dear, I hate parties; I'd rather stay home." My father urges. Finally she goes. (He treats her throughout like an invalid. His expressions are at least readable.) ~~She~~ He then says "See, you're enjoying yourself." She says "Oh ~~years~~, dear, you were right; I should have come" (not "I'm enjoying myself" but "I should have") and then pleads a headache, after sitting there looking rigid for two hours. She then says, "I'm so glad I went." They are automatons, robots, un-people. They argue for twenty minutes about the pronunciation of a word. I suggest the dictionary. They (comfortably): "We haven't got one." I think they are truly mad. I get angrier and angrier and blow up & then tell my mother, "Look, I don't want to get mad at you but if you're angry at me I wish you'd say so, just say so." (When she's angry, her behavior gets kittenish and more and more odd and inappropriate, as well as very annoyingly intrusive.) And I took her hand, trying to be open and be real. She said ~~xxxxxxx~~ "Oh, I couldn't be angry with you no matter what you did" (holding my face hard enough to bruise it) "I might want to hit you but I wouldn't really be angry, dear" (giggle). Then she said, suddnely serious. "Of course, you are very difficult, dear." And smiling happily, trotted off to bed.

It took me 20 minutes to realize that I was not "difficult". Their whole plot with each other is such a stylized scenario that I find it difficult to believe they were ever alive. And the guilt. And the terror.

Scratch one family.

Then I got the flu.

Bedbound for three weeks. Hysterical. Eyestrain all fall, getting worse.





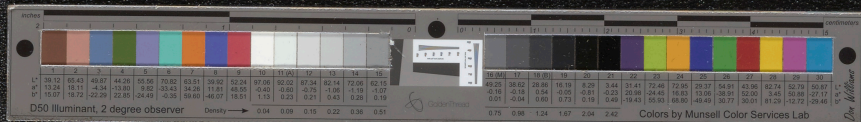
Everybody else working. Nothing to do but read. All friends busy.

No structure. No friends.

Now I will add something else. You have been so damned decent that I feel I can tell you, but don't, please, tell anyone else. Well, that's unnecessary. Anyway, on top of all this: no job, no point, no direction, no family, best friend gone, lover gone, I finally put into the mail a Lesbian novel I wrote last year.

I am going to have to come out, publicly. FM ~~wxxx~~ will be as nothing compar'd with this. I don't know what to do. I am scared witless. I don't even know if I am a Lesbian--do Lesbians keep getting attracted to men? I have almost no sexual experience as a Lesbian. I don't even think I had any real sexuality until I hit about 33, only a series of "oughts" and a deep distrust of anything I felt on my own. I like men's bodies. I've lik'd sex with men, which has been, on occasion, what you might call technically adequate. In fact, in one c-r group I attended several years ago, I found I was the only woman there who'd ever had orgasm with a man during intercourse. Me! Me, the Lesbian, can you believe it? AM I a Lesbian? What is a Lesbian? *(And what are those other women?)*

I am going to be pilloried for something I don't even understand. One love affair several years ago, and the instant conviction that this was the real thing, that somehow there was a freedom, an emotional freedom, I hadn't had with any man. I know nothing about heterosexuality and I believe ~~x~~ hardly anyone else does, either; heteroinstitutionality gets in the way so. Most women I know are heterosexual-love addicts but it isn't erotic and it isn't sensual. And feel very sensual about men's bodies. Yet there's something missing. And from what I know of male heteroinstitutionality, it is so abominably deformed that there is hardly anything really erotic or sensual in it. Yet I don't know, really, what other people's experience has really been.





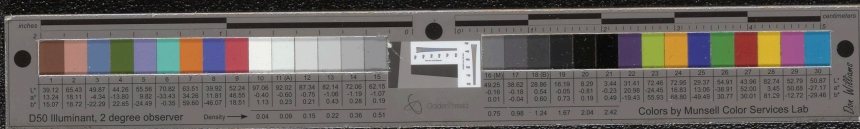
There are Lesbians who sleep with gay men, both parties saying "Of course we couldn't do it if we weren't both homosexual." And they're right, somehow. All the labels are wrong, wrong, wrong. Bisexual? With two heads, like the Roman-off eagle? Utter nonsense. I'm not two people or even two sets of responses. And I'm certainly not indiscriminate. And what I feel about women is not simply a substitute for what I feel about men; they're different. Although the actual sensuality is not different.

The only celibate Lesbian ~~x~~ on the East Coast.

My God, how mucked up it is. Only I do know that "Lesbian" <sup>m</sup> means outcast, witch, heretic, unbeliever, burn burn burn burn her. It isn't the sex that has anything to do with it. I am simply publicly rejecting phallus worship.

With my male lover, I kept being surprised she(see?) he didn't have breasts. Honest. With my female lover, I announced first time round, "Oh, you have an erection" (it was her hipbone). Yet it's not confusion. I think it's an attempt to recover some kind of wholeness. For which our only word is androgyny, a word about men specifically. "Gynandry" has a different, and much less pleasant, history.

Women who are announcing now that they were Lesbians at age 3 (couldn't help it, see) tend to stress that in every other way they are perfectly normal and respectable. I'm not. And Lesbianism is ~~x~~ inextricably bound up with feminism, no matter what myopic ladies like Ursula say. But none of it's simple. I think I learned a "masculine" pattern of self-identity (which one can hardly avoid with an I.Q. of 200) but one very much tempered with feminine virtues, and tried to impose this gynandrous pattern on my relations with men. The only





(+ whom I loved)  
quasi-love-affair I ever had with a man which was really friendly and nice (all we did was kiss once or twice) was a gay man I knew in high school, who later disappeared into the Village and got very swish, I guess because he had to choose and it was expected of him.

So: no job, no power, no lover, no friend, no structure, no faith, no future, no family, and anticipated persecution plus identity-muddledment.

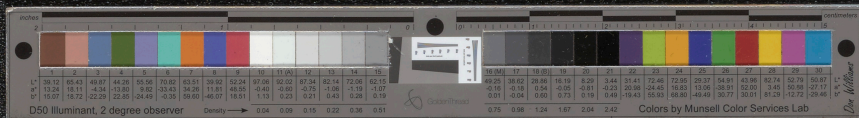
What do I have to be so upset about?

I suppose it's a miracle I'm still walking around.

That Lenny Bruce personality, where your strongest weapon is theatricality and being striking, and yet you are immensely vulnerable. Same thing.

I suppose, really, that women like me are simply trying to be whole women and what I do, however odd it looks, is always for that. Including the sex. If men thought like gynaandrous women....or humans, for that matter....Anyway, it's hard to explain the difference between love affairs that were disasters from the beginning and my one love affair that, although it ended badly, was simply real all through. It's not simply a "sexual preference" as so many gay people try to say, i.e. We're just like you except for this one little thing. It's all very complex. It has everything to do with everything else because sex is in the head. That I know, if I know nothing else.

I've been going around like the famous Cornell student who went to his adviser and said, in effect: My father just died, my mother's in a mental hospital, my sister's pregnant and tried to kill herself, my roommates are constantly on acid and I'm scared of the police and what I want to know is: why can't I study?



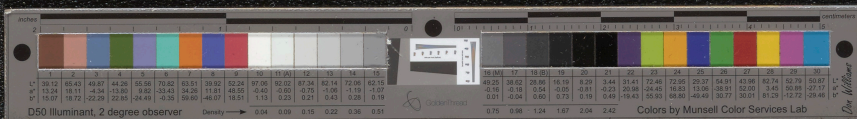


Oh yes. We've forgotten the usual civilized schizophrenia of fantasies going in one direction (about sex) and reality in another. Surrounded by billboards. Books. TV. Friends. Apes. All bombarding us with heteroinstitutionality which (I am convinced) has nothing to do with heterosensuality. The only way it works is either with very plastic, stupid people or (especially) if you are the subject and She the Plastic Thingie You Are Supposed To Desire. If she only keeps her mouth shut. And even then it doesn't seem to work very well. Of course part of the trouble is all this is so abstract; men learn about women by jerking off to color photographs, not by messing around with the little girl next door when they're 12. Criminal deformation.

It's not a question of my family's "accepting" that I'm a Lesbian. First of all, "Lesbian" is a highly inadequate description of what I am and feel and second of all, my family has never accepted me as a living organism at all. They get hideously upset at any show of feeling: tears, rage, even grief. When my aunt died, they told me my cousin behaved "peculiarly." By which I suspect they mean she got angry, a perfectly appropriate response, considering the way ~~her~~ her refrigerator of a mother treated her.

And all the anger with all the world coming out. Tip, I am an orphan. And I always was. And wandering around this insane world with an I.Q. of 200-plus and trying to be a "girl," which I couldn't even understand what it was, let alone what it had to do with me or anything real. I kept seeing through things. At times I feel like a Martian. Must trust people. Trusting people is hell. s hard.

I've lost everything, especially the faith that somewhere was a safe place where my books, if not me, could be stored up and loved. That it would





make a difference to history. Mild success is enough to show how utterly absurd that is, but now everything seems absurd.

And I have to face this Doctor who thinks I am a car in an assembly line and wants me to be ill for days with apprehension and then sick from laxatives (I did that once for another test and had to stay inbed 2 days) and then lie and weep for days because I'm in jail and can't get up and at least get out.

And everybody says, "Oh, Colorado will be better." Any bets?

Of course it's poets' own fault that they kill themselves. I used to be afraid of it. Now it seems as absurd as anything else. Even momentary pleasures don't matter if there's no meaning left. I suppose I have lost ~~my~~ my faith in history.

I need a lover. And probably am really too rageful and depressed to be endured by someone who isn't the same, whom I couldn't endure.

Well, now it is in your lap--no, it's not; there's no way to do that, though it's very tempting, I must say. I must off to the Doctor who is so fascinated by my large intestine & tell him it doesn't belong to him.

Don't fall under this avalanche of misery. The worst thing about this damned world is that it really does hurt its best people, including you, I suspect. Please, please, write a book about what it means to be a misfit man. I think monkey flashers are saying: Look, look, isn't it pretty? (if they're trying to attract females), a view I concur with heartily. But human beings are insane and we are the only animals capable of that. That's our problem.

Penis = Power. Sure. Everyone knows that. So how can such a ♂ enjoy sex? Slater says they don't. It explains a lot.

Much love,  
Joanna

