

Reading recently: *The Marriage Between Zones Three, Four, and Five (As Narrated by the Chroniclers of Zone Three)* by Doris Lessing. This book (the second novel in a series of five, is much better than the first (*Shikasta*), at least in terms of readability. Where the first is written in bureaucratese, this second book is written in alegory/fairy tale style. And there are some very sympathetic, warm characters to like. The "zones" referred to are not normally thought of as places with geographical designations... except perhaps, by poets and dreamers. If I had to pin it down, I'd describe it as the place archetypes exist and live daily humdrum lives. Anyway, in this place of zones and archetypes, Piercy shows the parallel crisis to the one *Shikasta* (earth) is experiencing. Only as we are destroying ourselves with pollution and wars, the zones are becoming isolated as their boundaries calcify. The people in the zones have a hard time remembering the time when the boundaries were not barriers and in fact have developed peculiar social customs to prevent people from thinking about other zones. Memories are preserved in children's songs though, and so the children of zone four sing of the mountains of zone three, and the children of zone three sing of the deep blue of the skies above their mountain tops. Children in zone four caught looking up at the mountains are fitted with neck braces to prevent their ever doing so again. Anyway into this setting, the plot intrudes, and the land (as is the case in so many archtypal lands) is no longer flourishing but dying of drought and sickness—reflecting the bad health of the community. In order to bring life back to the land, the queen of Zone 3 and the king of Zone 4 must marry...and it is this interaction that makes the book worthwhile. It's a lovely story. One of the absurd boundaries that must be broken down by the unwilling couple is the king's (and his zone's) extreme sexism and its (and his) pre-occupation with warfare. Things get remedied with far less tragedy than *Shikasta* managed its cure in the first

novel of the series. But still, I'd recommend both.

Another book, *Vida*, is really marvelous. It's the story of a woman who was involved in an SDS-like group during the '60's, and was further involved in a bombing for which she was fingered by the group's "pet" FBI agent. The story is about the changes she goes through during her underground existence during the years that followed. The changes she goes through as a woman, realizing the real nature of the role women played in the left during the '60's. The changes she goes through of necessity in order to survive: It takes more than safe houses and financial aid (offered by the "network"—of surviving '60's leftist groups and sympathizers, trying to keep the revolution alive). During her college days, *Vida* (short for *Davida*) was known as a flamboyant and powerfully charismatic speaker and leader. She became involved in the political movement, it becomes obvious, not only for reasons of deeply held conviction, but because she enjoyed the sensation of being in the public eye of being a "star." She is an extrovert in the public, political sense. All that had to be repressed once she goes underground, however. Her beautiful red hair dyed a mousey brown, her fearless stride changed to a concealing slump, and all political action done in secret—credit given to the group, never an individual. The story of this transformation, alone, makes the book tremendously interesting. But best were the comparison between her old love (her husband, in fact, but living "on top"), and a new lover, somewhat of a feminist. It reminded me a great deal of *The Bleeding Heart*. I could almost feel Piercy, as I could feel French, struggling to imagine a man and a relationship that was not a problem for her grown-up feminist character, and to imagine a relationship that could last. Interestingly, both authors manage to describe a relationship believably enough that lasts...for a while. Both relationships collapse of internal pressures after a while though, like a house of cards. But a good, good book. (Two other interesting things about *Vida*: 1) that it came out at the same time as the woman who was wanted on a '60's bombing charge turned herself in, in New York City (no connection, I think), and 2) That once again, as with

Janus 17 is out now and some of you will have gotten it by now. I say some of you, because we have had to so drastically cut out mailing list that not many of you are on the list at this point. We are trying to stay completely in "the black" now, printing only what we can afford to print. Mostly we're making our costs through newsstand sales now (and some subscriptions), but eventually we should be able to substantially supplement that with ads tastefully segregated in the back of the zine. Still, this time, we had to cut down our print run and pretty much cut out most freebies, like the kind I've sent to some of you to hint that we'd like written or drawn contributions from you or such. We've also had to cut our trade list practically in half. Ah well, the recession hits all over. I'm pretty pleased with the issue — especially with how easily it was put out with our new organization. I was glad too, that we got in the ERA/WorldCon bid article. We are already hard at work planning issue number 18 which will have a post-holocaust theme (as used in a lot of feminist SF). If any of you would like to do a review of a book or story you think might be appropriate to that focus, do let me know right away.

I had a great, wonderful, marvelous, neat time in Detroit as GoH for Auto-clave. (How can one NOT have fun in such a situation, I ask you.) I fell in love with Greek food (having had dinner all three nights in Greektown), and managed to get a group of people together in Madison for a Greek dinner and recreated my favorite meal: lamb with artichoke hearts and lemon sause. I saw the Renaissance Ctr. & was most impressed with its beauty (very organic, just begs to be explored), and felt reasonably good about the programming I participated in. Had wonderful times with wonderful people (sorry for ommitting the list, but I'm afraid this really has to be the last page, you see). I want to go back again next year.

I'm feeling a little old. I turn 29 next month and my kid sister just

started college. "Please write!" she writes.

And my job is still swell (to those of you waiting for the crash to come, waiting for me to start trotting out frustrations and start saying I'm tired of it). I have, in fact, been with the DNR now for a whole year. I just got my annual review and came out grinning with pleasure.

So, I'm fine. How are you?

It really looks like I don't have time for mailing comments. ("Looks like it was the wrong day to quit amphetamines.") *AnneLaurie*: re, your comments on the "hermetically sealed building" you work in, have you heard about the studies coming out recently about the awful effects some of these buildings have which have a slow circulation, air-exchange system? Germs and airborne materials generated from super thick insulating materials are raising the home-sick rates...///*Gayle*: I liked your comments on mother-daughter relationships. A great comment hook: I'd like to see us share some of our experiences in this area with each other. This is "a note to myself that I want to do that next time."///*Rebecca*: You still haven't sent me a postcard to get on the Madison Review of Books list. Well?

Next time I promise more and better mailing comments. What else are apazines for, anyway?

Please think about book reviews for *Janus*' post-holocaust theme-issue. I'd really like to see more of you involved in the zine.

But now I must go. See you in November.

Love,



The Rest of Us

By Jacquelyn Mitchard

Capital Times Staff Writer



... but words will ever hurt me

A man in a bright yellow Volkswagen cut me off the other day. I honked at him in fury. When we stopped side by side at the light, he rolled down his window.

"You dumb whore!" he cried.

Now, I had not offered him sex for a price. I hadn't offered him sex at all. He could've called me rude. He could've called me a fool.

Later, I was kvetching to male colleagues about the reasons men still feel they can demean a woman sexually who offends them in a wholly unsexual way.

"He didn't really mean you were a whore," they told me. "It's just an expression." And they told me they couldn't believe the old Personhole Cover Debate was still bothering me. Don't write about it, they warned. You'll look like a fool.

But I wanted to write about it. I wanted to find a counterpart insult that women could use against men which would carry the same components of sexual and moral disgust as "whore."

I tried "vile catamite." Nobody knew what it meant. I tried "you dumb rapist."

"Ridiculous!" my friends laughed. "We would never rape anyone!"

"It's just an expression," I said.

But it was true, it did sound silly. It sounded just like what it was: a grasped straw that had no history. There is no counterpart to "whore" nor to any of a raft of other insults men use against women.

My friends, however, said I was paranoid. They did not agree. They told me "whore" applies to men as well as women. You don't hear "male whore" much because "there just aren't as many." So nasty as it was, it wasn't sexist.

In fact, I was told, a four-letter word for female genitalia, used to insult both women and men, is the consummate insult one man can offer another. So how could it be sexist? When it didn't seem to cheer me to realize that an attribute for femaleness was the scum-standard of insults, my friends were puzzled.

Women, I sighed, just don't have as many words to insult men. Untrue, I was told.

I offered proof provided by "An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Dirty Words," by Ruth Tadasco and "Women and Words" by Kate Swift and Casey Miller, both of which present exhaustive lists of male, female, and neuter insults. Lists which show that even everyday words for women — words with traditionally respected meanings such as madam — have come to have debased connotations.

But my colleagues did not consider feminist books a complete accounting. And in any case, they told me, whining about the words people use isn't going to change the words or the people. Slang, they told me, our private lan-

guage, reflects the attitudes of our culture.

When "things" change, words will change. "If women didn't act like bitches, there wouldn't be any word for 'bitch,'" a male colleague earnestly explained.

And I wondered if, in 1968, he would have informed a black man that if some blacks didn't act like "niggers," well, there just wouldn't be any word for it? I wondered silently.

As most women do.

They shake their heads when men continue to define them according to their own needs. They cringe under put-downs they invite merely by believing in ways which offend a man's perception of their roles in his world.

My colleagues told me there were male equivalents for the insults women find so degrading. "OK," I said. "Try these: Cow. Old maid. Slut."

Well, how about stud? Bachelor? Don Juan? They mean the same things, don't they? But even in our sexually-revolutionized world, it doesn't take perfect pitch to hear the edge of loathing in "old maid" and the smug back-handed compliment in "bachelor."

And they reinforce the notion that men doing the same things as women somehow retain a veneer of acceptability. Even now.

Nor can women inspire the same sense of despair in men by turning their insults back against them. Women's apparatus for turning back such smears on their sexuality is embryonic; even the words a woman uses to identify her normal sexual needs, as Ruth Tadasco writes, prejudice her person. Most — not all — but most of the raunchy sexual insults in our language are feminine.

There are very few words a woman can use to describe a normal man sexually in anything but a positive fashion.

Most of those raunchy terms are used casually, even unintentionally: a husband lovingly refers to his wife as a "great little broad." But hurling them back at men is not going to desensitize them. Nor is, as Lenny Bruce once suggested, saying "them over and over again until they lose their meaning."

"What's the point then?" one man shouted. "You can either give people a whole lot more words to hurt each other, or you can start taking away words. The people who want to use them will just make up new ones! Stop being a harpy!"

(Should I have called him a pterodactyl?)

Maybe people would make up new words if we got rid of "the prostitute series," except to describe real prostitutes. But "nigger" and "coon" seemed to all but vanish when it became distinctly unwise to use them. And no new words have replaced them.

More importantly, children are growing up now who don't use them, and presumably don't think them. And that is how attitudes change.

Yes, I am paranoid. I know that words can break your spirit better than stones can break your bones.

An irony of my business has been too long that one of the highest compliments a male colleague can give me has to do with my reportorial "guts," and it consists of offering me the mythical loan of a couple of sexual organs: testicles, to be exact.

And the worst shot I can give that male colleague consists of the mythical loan — to him — of one of my sexual organs. I can paint him weak and spineless. I can call his courage into questions.

I can call him a woman.