

PREFACE

The second wave of feminism has always been deeply and deliberately engaged in personal and emotional questions, which have been central to its political development. The insistence that "the personal is political" is so firmly established within our movement that it no longer attracts much attention from feminist theorists. However, in this issue of *Feminist Studies*, two provocative essays by Berenice Fisher and Elizabeth Wilson challenge us to reexamine some long-standing presumptions embedded in contemporary feminism and to probe the complexities of the implicit moral code they have generated. In "Guilt and Shame in the Women's Movement," Fisher points out that "guilt" is a basic theme in feminist discourse, but that the term is most often used to refer to psychological judgments of the self rather than judgments of actual wrongdoing. By thus conflating "guilt" and "shame"—defined as a judgment that one has failed to live up to an ideal—feminists have been unable to gain insight from these emotions into the political problems to which these moral judgments implicitly refer. Fisher's essay explores the judgment of shame in relation to the feminist ideal of political action, as it emerged out of the civil rights movement. She suggests that the contradictions inherent in the gap between this ideal and the realities of social existence generate shame, and she explores the implications of this dynamic for feminist intellectuals in particular.

Elizabeth Wilson's essay, "Forbidden Love," also ventures onto the difficult terrain of feminist moral judgments, but in relation to a very different object: lesbianism. Wilson chronicles the historical shift from nineteenth-century cultural constructions of lesbianism as a form of rebellion, and as totally antithetical to femininity, to contemporary feminist conceptions of lesbianism as "the transcendent moment of sisterhood." Reflecting on her own personal history as a pre-women's movement lesbian, who felt (and yet suppressed) intense hostility to the idea of lesbianism as a form of identification with other women, Wilson argues that feminists were far too quick to dismiss both the nineteenth-century notion of the lesbian as rebel and the associated imagery of romanticism itself. Romanticism, she suggests, with its evocations of danger and tormented passion, is a critical aspect of eroticism, both for lesbian and heterosexual women. Wilson calls for a reevaluation of romanticism in its full complexity within the ongoing feminist debates about sexuality.

Contradictory impulses toward difference, integration, and transgression of gender and sexual identity are not new, but have

a long history and repetition in feminist thought. Indeed, the “mad, bad” nineteenth-century romanticism which Wilson evokes had a secret feminist counterpart in Louisa May Alcott, otherwise known as a literary paragon of domestic women’s culture. Karen Halttunen’s study of “The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott” operates at several levels of cultural and social-historical criticism. It examines Alcott’s plays and fiction as enactments of the tense Alcott family psychodrama and explains how each struggle between “passionate self-expression and domestic self-restraint” was resolved in favor of the latter. This accommodation, Halttunen argues, was symptomatic of a change in bourgeois culture from “boundlessness” to “consolidation” in the High Victorian age of capitalism. Although this may accurately describe a general cultural transition, we still need to know more about its implications for feminist thought and practice, which have historically encompassed the contradictory tendencies creatively expressed in Alcott’s work: transgression of gender and sexual identity, commitment to difference and to a distinctive women’s culture, and a desire to integrate women into the “man’s world” to enjoy social and civil equality.

The theme of sexual transgression also emerges in Dodie Bellamy’s short story, “The Debbies I Have Known.” Other work in this issue includes poetry by Kathleen Fraser, and an extraordinary art essay by Eliana Moya-Raggio on Chilean *arpilleras*, a unique popular art form which is practiced by women and which constitutes a powerful form of cultural resistance to the military government in Chile. As Moya-Raggio emphasizes, the *arpilleras* are constructed around themes pertaining directly to events in Chile and express strong oppositional social and human values.

This issue includes two pieces of analysis of domestic politics as they involve women. Lin Nelson’s “Promise Her Everything: The Nuclear Power Industry’s Agenda for Women” explores the way in which the nuclear power industry has cultivated women as a special—and particularly resistant—constituency, as part of the broader effort to win popular support for nuclear energy. Nelson documents the efforts of Nuclear Energy Women, an industry-sponsored organization, to highlight the centrality of women to the industry’s public relations efforts and the importance of feminist resistance to nuclear power. Also, Nancy Hartsock, in our “Comment and Debate” section, reports on feminist involvement in William Murphy’s Baltimore mayoral primary last year, offering some interesting insights into the potential as well as the dif-

ficulties in coalitions between feminists and black politicians. Many feminists have had political experiences of this kind, yet they are seldom systematically recorded (particularly when, as in this case, the campaign is unsuccessful). *Feminist Studies* would welcome other submissions documenting political efforts of this type.

The two review essays in this issue also deal with directly political themes. Elsa Dixler's discussion of three important recent historical studies of women's relationship to socialist movements in England, the United States, and France offers some provocative suggestions about socialist feminist theory and politics at the general level. Finally, Bonnie Nardi explores the recent controversy over Margaret Mead's work provoked by Derek Freeman's well-publicized book. Nardi concedes that some of Freeman's substantive points are accurate, yet persuasively argues that the celebrity status he briefly enjoyed in the American media can only be understood as antifeminist backlash—an all too familiar part of the political landscape in 1984.

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for the editors