



3 1223 01721 4694

W3-41

811

AL78L

Alta, pseud.

Letters to women. Berkeley, Calif.,  
Shameless Hussy Press [n.d.]

1 v. (unpaged) illus.

Poems.

1. Lesbianism. I. Title.

100



# Letters to Women

alta

this book is dedicated to every woman who is as  
isolated as i.

811  
AL78L

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1223 01721 4694

Shameless Hussy Press

berkeley, california 94703



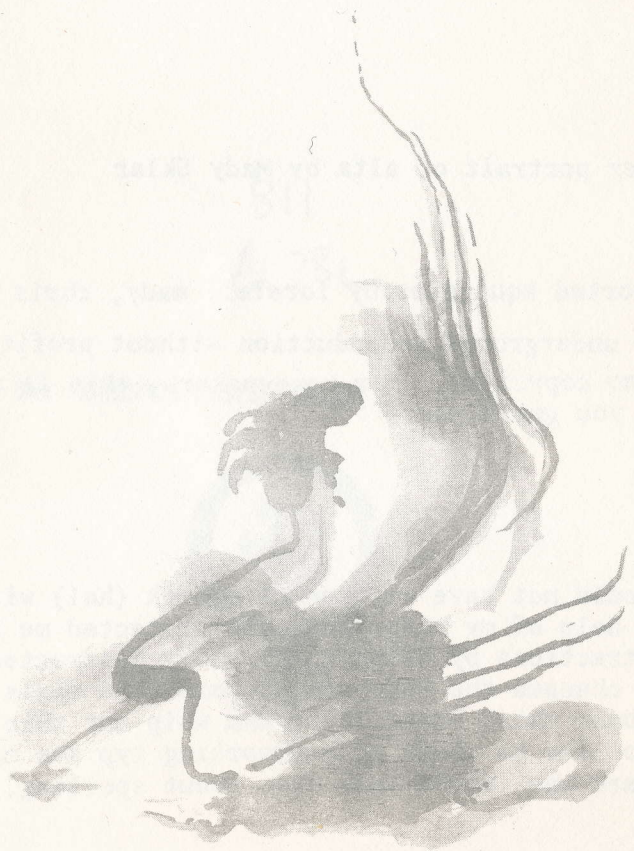
cover portrait of alta by Mady Sklar

assorted squiggles by lorelei, mady, chris & alta.

for underground reproduction without profit, there  
is no copyright. for moneymakers, this is copyright,  
and you gotta pay.

i could not have written this book (ha!) without  
the help of my wife john, who protected me from  
distractions by being continually distracted, and  
who changed the baby and prepared the meals so's  
i could think Great Thots and whip out this Book.  
also like to thank my hardworking typists matthew  
& mark who don't know shit about spelling.

some of these poems were  
Aphra, New: American & Canadian  
Babe, The Ladder.



letter to mary

clear gaze full face no turning away  
our bodies shake with the ache of real touching  
inside look inside i see you see me deep into  
your satisfied body & angry heart raise a rock  
at the children stoning the possum to death  
scream at the man in the bulldozer as the trees crunch  
to death/ let them live let me live let you live  
don't deny

letter to lyn

I.

the door stained red with wine  
glass shattered in the corner  
outside the air is cold  
the neighbors very far away  
all the way  
across the street  
no where to go.  
shocking to tell the truth  
tell the truth  
tell the truth

II.

i see soul pain eyes  
hidden in blue shadow  
fur lashes deny the real  
hair/ acceptable above the brow  
not below the knee  
i see your eyes, sister  
i see your soul  
you call your breasts wrinkled lemons,  
hide them under 1/2 inch foam, learn  
to like your thighs only to hear  
you have ugly feet.  
how long will we listen to men  
who tell us they love us?  
who call us frigid or maniac & turn away?  
how long will we stand as dolls on a shelf  
buy me buy me  
one house & i'm yours.

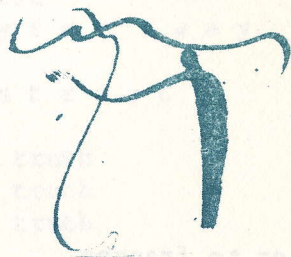
i'm mine, sister.  
how about you?

letter to frances

you sat holding my husband when he was 2,  
your mother placidly smiling her resentment  
fierce/ rebellion in yr eyes staring at yr husband  
on the other end of the shutter.  
now we speak as women less afraid  
but cannot speak of yr son's life with me  
how i shake him at dawn with angry whispers  
wake up you satisfied bastard wake up wake up

letter to lvs.

its past time for you to ask yourself why you keep up this insulting lie. now that i'm no longer sick & dependent, you crawl out of the woodwork babbling love. where were you when i needed you?



letter to mnk

you/ shocked  
(his nose bleeding  
all down his lip.)  
alta how could you?  
you didn't care  
what he did to me,  
i shoulda been gentle!  
with friends like you,  
who needs husbands?

open letter to r

1. women have already had our history censored out "for our own protection" so we wouldn't bother our pretty littl heads. you want to do this to me.

2. i am not "getting too" angry. i have always *been* "too angry, but it was turned against me as attempts at suicide illness, careless decisions.

3. the only heroes i was offered were betsy ross & floren nightengale, can you dig it? i had heard of susan b. anth but only that she wanted the vote, not that she was the great freedom fighter she really was.

4. this is not the first time you have used me to rant about women's liberation. i quote:

you take liberation too seriously.

women's liberation is bullshit.

you can't be happy without john.

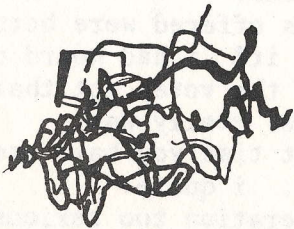
and now you said:

you shouldn't read those books. they're making you too angry!

it took a rape to radicalize you but you still won't support me in my fight for freedom. standing up was bad enough but now that i'm trying to walk, i walk alone.

5. lucy stone said "it shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer." that's the business of my life too, and you can keep your liberal insults. use them on yourself & see how free you get.

"there's a sunset on this peach"  
curly hummingbird  
peace & love but no rent,  
curly hummingbird -  
what would anne hutchinson say now  
& how do we measure a minstrel's worth?

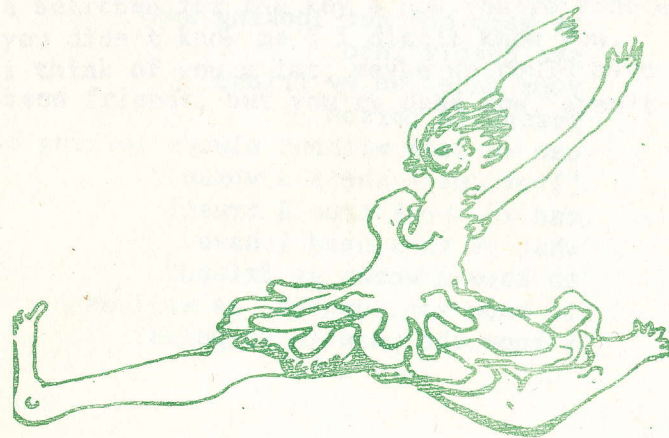


"i don't know how to play, either."

let's frolic, dear friend  
tho we're 30 & bitter  
& our faces attest to our pain.  
let's dance without music  
and laugh without reason;  
to hell with the circus they give us.  
let's run in the sun  
and run in the moon  
and run in the light august rain.  
i'll chase you upstairs &  
you chase me with washcloths  
that you used to wipe up the wine.  
i love you i love you  
let's run & let's frolic!  
i love you i love you  
let's learn how to play!

letter to S

DO IT NOW  
give in to joy.  
let the baby suck your breast,  
dance in sun, run in rain,  
sleep where stars can see you.  
let your lover rub your cunt.  
if you can't come, go on strike.  
(you don't leave *him* hanging, do you?)  
your body has these needs  
because you have these needs.  
you & your body are one.  
give in to joy.



LEAP LEAP

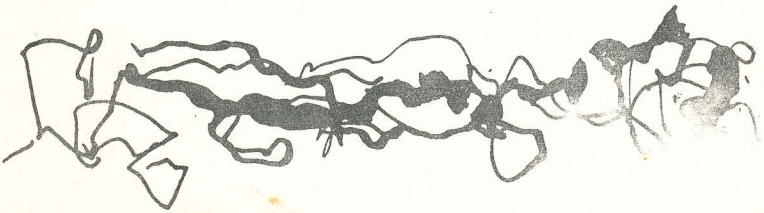


letter to andrea

feel the edge  
a relationship  
with a woman  
speak deep & true  
eyes meet, hostile  
or warm but not looking away,  
see deeply into  
your face/ be my friend  
person to person  
can we love without always jerking back  
"look out - she's a woman!"  
can we speak true & trust?  
what is this need i have  
to know a woman as friend?  
to know you, andrea, as well as  
i know the pain in yr poems.

letter to janis joplin

the night i heard you died  
i smeared peanut butter on the walls.  
"can't do anything in this damn house!"  
the news said "heroin was blamed" for  
your death. heroin, not jagger, not  
reagan, not hunt, not the man who buys  
land for freeways so we can go fast  
from place to place & miss the whole  
journey. blame heroin, not the women  
who blame us for trying to be whole.  
i hate dedications to the dead. i hated  
seeing you live lonely all your life &  
get salutes in rolling stone because you  
died.  
you sang ball & chain & i felt our chains  
& searched for the key & now you're gone &  
you didn't know me & i didn't know you.  
i think of you a lot; maybe we could have  
been friends, but you're dead now, aren't you?







connie connie connie  
4 years of isolation  
i'm so glad you didn't die!  
open your eyes to me we smile tearless  
now after all those years, you crying  
in your bedroom in richmond, me crying  
in my bathroom in berkeley,  
didn't anyone want us  
didn't anyone know us who were we  
connie connie  
who were we?

### Letter to Ginny

a rather sad, apologetic older woman,  
how can i hang my vulnerability out again?  
you asked, "how can alta's children be happy  
with her for a mother?"

& i crumpled inside, sorry i told you  
how i feel & cry:

i'm a human being, perverse & hostile  
like everyone. but who wants to hear.  
it's true it's true like everyone.  
but who wants to hear.

i should wait for witty confidence:  
make you laugh with glee rather than pain.  
as if you did never strike your child in anger.  
as if you did never beat off with black net to entice you.  
safer to lie. no, i never struck my child,  
never beat off where i could  
see what i was doing. witty confidence.  
jokes of office work & asshole executives.  
clever remarks without revelations.  
i'm a human being, perverse & hostile  
like you. but who wants to hear  
it's true it's true like you.  
but who wants to hear.

after reading sylvia plath:

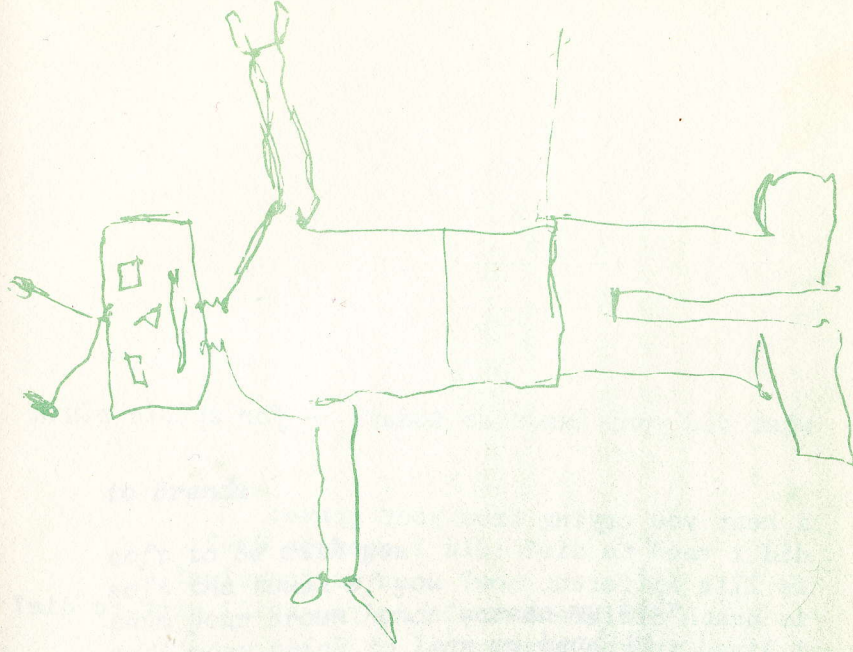
i opened my door to this nutty witch. i've been suicidal  
all day after our conversation: serves me right for trying  
to relate to a suicidal poet. her long fingers are not caught  
in the grave: her cry lives in our mouths, i am not the only  
person writing this & i am getting progressively more fright-  
ened. the following poems came to me last week. they all  
speak for both of us, i feel. none of them were deliberately  
like hers. the resemblance is uncanny.

I.

ivy ivy trailing down your little suckers clutch the house  
green life from my flesh, you call me sustenance;  
(this awful loneliness attracts people.)  
they crowd around, "o, don't be lonely. i love you!"  
i shrink back in fear (i've heard that line before)  
i see their teeth. "just people"  
i reassure myself, but cannot bear their clasp:  
i believe you i believe you!  
i cry, bursting free

II.

"let me help you - "  
oh the pain in my head red  
red flashing twitches "iloveyou"  
she says, he says, i fragment, have  
a finger, a toe, that part of me  
is your very own. help the red  
pain tightens help the love tightens  
help i need solitude help i need  
space help i will not  
beg why am i on my knees



what did your hands do today? - for sylvia plath

i hear you crying from your grave:  
did i need to die? did i need to die?  
is life different now? can we function?  
is death different now? do you still want to die?  
i lived in the oven.  
i died in the oven.  
auschwitz was my kitchen stove.  
what is that to you?  
when you bake bread, do you shut your hand in there  
to wither?

to Brenda

soft to be with you  
soft the touch of you  
thin your brown hands caress my hair  
soft your thigh to lean my head on  
soft to whisper kiss  
whisper kiss



hands on my yearning belly,  
i watch you walk away  
holding your daughter's hand.  
you don't let me touch you  
when others can see.  
i don't turn away, i  
just get sadder.

it's true  
those men might harm us  
if they knew.

my heart opened to you when you woke.  
we are real; we have real faces.  
freckles & lines & our hair turning grey.  
look in my eyes & don't look away:  
i am not afraid to be seen by you.

i kiss your breasts my hand warm  
in you my body one hunger  
30 years wasted trying to touch missing people  
are you real is our touch  
real where are you reaching from  
where are you turning we're  
opening we're opening hold  
my hand my body's opening  
hear my words my spirit's  
opening 30 years of waste  
are we too late help me  
touch are we too late touch  
me love are we real your  
lips open i open you open  
touch in me love, in me  
i want you oh god, brenda

full your breasts down on me  
full in my fingers  
small & gentle you are  
so dark & defined your  
beauty startles me,  
i love to see you.  
i love to touch you.  
you make my heart glad.

i feel you unfolding.  
"she showed me 2 poems so  
i showed her 2 poems. just 2."  
but i feel you learning freedom:  
i feel you learning to dance.

cosmopolitan:  
look like you don't really look;  
act like you don't really act;  
sit like you wouldn't sit if you were home alone.

Sammy Egan



there's more to life than daily pain  
there's you & me & walks at nite.  
our daughters know us while  
friends scream "deserters! deserters!"  
our daughters watch, eyes knowing *freedom fighters*  
*freedom fighters*  
our daughters watch us & reach  
for our hands

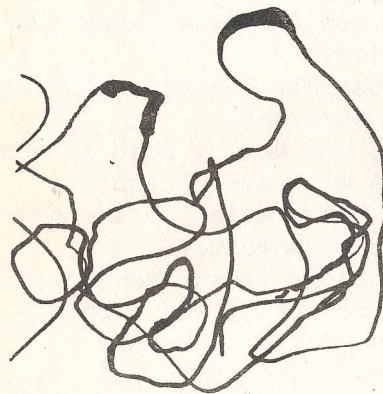
she got caught biting her nails  
on the 51 bus.

for Pat Parker,  
who also has a "lousy attitude, frankly"

writing to you is hard  
as talking with you.  
we were made to play  
basketball in thick sun, grove park,  
learn revolution  
to ease the wars inside us.  
we're hired last, fired fast,  
we got "lousy attitudes."  
you bring me cider  
'cause i can't walk.

.sister.

48



lorelei  
i go to prepare a world for you  
the pain of it too much i want  
you to live free breathe clean  
drink clean walk safe, i  
didn't make this world, i fought  
& i'm fighting, dear daughter.  
i treasure your touch.

The Vow

*for Anne Hutchinson*

sister,  
your name is not a household word.  
maybe you had a 2 line description  
in 8th grade history.  
more likely you were left out,  
as i am when men converse in my presence.  
Anne Hutchinson:  
"a woman of haughty & fierce carriage."  
my shoulders straighten.  
you are dead, but not as dead as you  
have been, we will avenge you.  
you and all the nameless brave spirits,  
my mother, my grandmothers,  
great grandmothers (Breen Northcott, butcher's wife,  
the others forgotten.) who bore me?  
generations of denial & misuse  
who bore those years of waste? sisters & mothers  
it is too late for all of you. waste  
& waste again, life after life,  
shot to hell. it will take more  
than a husband with a nation behind him  
to stop me now.



JUL 17 1973