

# GNOSIS

*(for Gillian)*

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Woman-words

shaped by what comes out of  
mouths, into mouths,  
unceasing, relentless  
flow of biologic sea  
where we learn to swim or we drown

Gnosis

when the Word is born  
She transforms

Logos/Loss

tongue-ache, heart-break  
alone in the alien corn  
we grieve, we weave,  
weave endlessly.  
was it Penelope  
who waited out a war?  
who wove the world a new reality  
and, night after night,  
destroyed her own creation

Her name is Heather and she is afraid to eat a muffin. She runs away from muffins, runs, runs as fast as she can. If she stops running, she will get fat.

Anorexic, she has read all the texts. She knows the theory, the therapy and the history. But this is a double-track affair: body stubborn, dumb against the mind's yammering.

Her boyfriend teaches her wind-surfing. He makes her work out like an Olympic athlete. In the end, she can out-sail many men. But she cannot eat a muffin.

Wave-rider, she is hanging  
between surf and sky  
sail swollen with spirit-wind  
muscle-clenched, waiting for delivery

Into: power-dressing, post-feminist, past-thinking world. When Pat Carney sits down with the Americans, she doesn't blink. Her words are hard balls: they smash into her opponents, they drive all wimps off the court. This is carnage with a vengeance, with a flair, and her shadow self, REAL WOMEN, waiting in the wings. REAL WOMEN have no trouble with muffins: they serve them hot to politicians, sweet backlash bribe

Gnosis: what is that song the peace women sing?

You can't kill the Spirit  
She is older than the mountains  
on and on she goes  
on and on and on

England, 1985. The Greenham Common women are out on Salisbury Plain. Babies on their backs, kids underfoot, a teapot, a kettle. They are out to see the sites, dolomites and middens, stone maidens who used to dance with the moon on the left, the sun on the right. There is a sign which says: KEEP OUT MILITARY FIRING RANGE.

Halifax, 1986. The NATO foreign ministers are coming to town. The sky is full of helicopters. The harbour swarms with submarines. 1000 extra police and security guards. This is an occupied city.

You can't kill the Spirit  
but you can throw women into ditches  
into jails and dungeons  
behind veils, locked in kitchens

Logos: Who's in charge here? Who's your leader? The men talk tough, thrust phallic weapons at soft target-rich environments. Deep Strike at the Enemy. High-tech aggressivity. When Agamemnon sought a wind for the Greek fleet at Aulis, he sacrificed his daughter. Slit her throat for the sake of a war.

Biologic is the Word  
waves of blood, sea changes  
Logos scourges Gnosis  
I, thy God, am a jealous God

Her name is Eleanor and she is afraid she cannot bear the pain.  
An iron cage holds the disc in place. If the disc slips, it will sever  
the spinal cord.

She used to be a nun but has left the Church to marry a man who  
used to be minister but has left the Church and his first wife to  
marry Eleanor.

Spirit-talker, she is praying  
between operations  
body stiff with arthritis  
head in a cage

Her husband comes to visit her and says:

We both left the Church  
now I must leave you  
sometimes God is  
where you least expect Him

“What if God is She?” asks Eleanor. “I came all this way — I can’t  
turn back now. This caged head, this stiffening body, this absence  
where you used to be. Can anyone find a meaning to what is  
happening to me?”

Pentecostal tongues have lost  
flame, there is a humming  
in the air, high wire voltage  
sizzles, smoke from the top of the head

Logos: power-talking, the language of authority shapes our  
dreams. When we come to the garden, the gate is locked: **KEEP  
OUT TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED.** The flaming  
angel smoulders against the sky: Transform yourselves or you die!  
We shave our legs obediently, anoint our bodies with perfumes,  
clothe ourselves expensively. Civil servants, we collect statistics  
endlessly.

(all the women's magazines say:

How to lose 100 pounds in 10 days  
and keep your man interested  
how to fight cellulite  
and keep sagging breasts uptight!)

Heather swims, she swims as fast as she can. 10 metres, 30, 40.  
Each day she has to swim faster, further. She's becoming slim as a  
model, thin as a refugee.

(Heather's boyfriend says:

Watch out for your thighs  
cellulite and fat, fat and cellulite  
you might be more beautiful  
if you lost more weight)

Heather's mind blurs the words on the page. She can't study,  
can't write. Her periods stopped months ago. The doctors threaten  
hospitalization. She eats a muffin. Vomits. Eats another half  
muffin. Does not vomit. When she sees herself in the mirror, her  
head is full of muffins. Her head is full of dread.

You can't kill the Spirit  
She is older than the mountains  
She is younger than children  
laughing under trees

His name is Authority. He wears a uniform, guards gates, forms  
lines to keep trespassers out. He addresses the Greenham women  
sharply: "Do you want to get your bleedin' heads blown off?" "Oh  
dear," say the the women, "it's time for tea."

Authority has to have tight security. The NATO ministers are  
meeting in top secrecy. The policemen form a line around the  
Halifax World Trade Centre. Arms akimbo, legs apart, they  
straddle a noon-day shadow. When the cannon fires to signal  
12:00, they jump round, reach for their guns. False alarm. No  
terrorists here. Just us women approaching slowly so they won't  
shoot us by mistake. Dressed as clown doctors, we carry measuring  
devices, pictures of weapons advertising. We are testing for MOGS,  
the milito-genital-confusion-dependency syndrome.

You can't kill the Spirit  
She is older than Logos  
She flows through cracks  
She gushes: water, blood

Eleanor sits like a queen receiving visitors. "They will operate again," she says, "and again and again. Job complained to the whirlwind but I awake in the hospital night and remember his words: 'Am I a sea or a whale that thou settest a watch over me?' I never dreamt freedom could cost such pain."

On Christmas Eve  
she decorates the cage:  
a white peacock  
mistletoe and holly

Shape-changer, she has made  
herself in the likeness of a bird  
her caged head blossoms  
like an amaryllis in February

She tells her friends:

"If you listen closely, you will hear the white peacock scream!"

Biologic: in our bellies we carry the sea, source, fecundity. When the moon draws the tides, we double up with pain, we are born again and again. The old women frighten us. They clutch us with their hands: "It doesn't get any easier!"

Wave-riders, we are flung up  
between surf and sea  
capsize in the green troughs  
dream we are drowning again

Gnosis: rock-a-bye in water womb. Amphibian ambiguity. Assertiveness-training will not save us. We struggle to breathe in the alien air.

The Greenham women slip round. Suddenly find themselves on the other side of the line. The policemen scramble to regain lost territory. Shoulder-to-shoulder, they close ranks against the women, the children, the babies. The officer shouts, "No trespassing!" "Oh dear," say the women, "time to change babies' nappies." And they do.

In Halifax, we tell the policemen: "You're doing a good job protecting us from those MOGS carriers inside. MOGS is the dreaded militarization disease." Some of the policemen smile, hands move away from guns. We tell the media: "MOGS is contagious. If we could only get to the NATO ministers, we could save them from this disease, this addiction to weapons and weapons technology."

The media says: "Trivializing war! This time you've gone too far, ladies!"

Confronting Authority  
they trespass, we trespass  
slip around the lines  
the fences, the signs,  
face noon-day guns  
night-flying missiles

Biologic. Gnosis.  
if some of us die  
before we're done,  
we'll shake old  
women's bones in the sun;  
cry aloud in tongues  
and proclaim:  
You can't kill the Spirit  
She shall rise again!