

Censored/Uncensored: Lovers in Dialogue

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This paper considers the practice – and art – of personal letter writing in the context of ‘second wave’ feminist politicization of personal relationships. It focuses on excerpts and analysis of a brief correspondence between Carole Harwood and her husband Kevin Littlewood when Harwood was imprisoned for dancing on the nuclear missile silos at Greenham Common Airforce Base in 1983. Reversing the traditions of domestic letter writing as the extension of a waiting wife’s role as well as the gender paradigms of men leaving home for war, these letters reflect a transformation of gender relations that can also be seen in published epistolary literature of the time. At the same time, the letters’ playfully elliptical allusion to Harwood’s burgeoning lesbian feminism suggest that letter writing reflected the fears and fantasies that feminist relationships could involve, even as it helped to carry women and men into new and challenging relations in the context of 1980s activism.¹

‘Love is more complex than theory ... the letters are ultimately about love.’ This was Robin Morgan’s assessment of the eight unsent letters she wrote to her husband Kenneth Pitchford between 1962 and 1969, and published in her collected writings *Going too far: the personal chronicle of a feminist*, in 1977 (Morgan, 1977: 22). As Morgan equally argued, however, the transformation of ‘love’, especially in sex, has been a central aim in feminism, and this article deals with personal letters that reflect this front line of relationship politics in the heyday of the ‘second wave’. It is unsurprising that few were as bold as Morgan in publishing their personal correspondence with lovers, but even the everyday private letters of those who did not consider themselves writers can be a revealing source of ideas about both masculinity and femininity, and the transforming impact of feminism on relationships. As ideas of sexuality as a key to

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patriarchy became popularized alongside economic and political theories, such discussions could become wishful, painful or simply evasive: Morgan did not send her letters to her husband for seven years. More commonly, correspondences, with relationships, broke off. However, there are arts to censorship, just as there are arts to confession. If we take censorship to be the blunt end of a wide spectrum of construction in everyday communications, we can see such letters are creative texts: writing practices whose truth is relative precisely to the degree that it is relational.

I focus my discussion on a brief correspondence between British peace activists Carole Harwood and Kevin Littlewood to demonstrate their reversal of the canonical scene of heterosexual letter writing, a waiting woman writing to keep up a military or travelling man's morale. Littlewood wrote to his wife while she was imprisoned for dancing on the nuclear missile silos at Greenham Common Airforce Base in 1983 in awe of her evolving feminist ideals and with wry humour about his role as 'house husband on the home front'. Harwood's replies are brief, partly because she was writing on rationed prison stationery, partly because she was also writing to Bridget Evans (this is a pseudonym), a woman she had met and who was to become her lover during the campaign. I situate this correspondence in a broader consideration of feminist letters as auto-/biographical and political forms that transformed a legacy of familiar letter writing as women's duty and a feminine art. However, I will also suggest that letter-writing was complicit in avoiding the confrontations that feminism could provoke in personal relationships, even as it registered, and sometimes facilitated, new and challenging relations in the context of 1970s and 1980s activism. Harwood and Littlewood's letters tiptoe at points over their emerging differences as Harwood discovered lesbian feminism even as such new silences were a necessary effect of new dialogues between women, eloquently expressed in Harwood's romantic correspondence with her lover. That I do not discuss this correspondence is due to the latter's requests for privacy. The saving, archiving and publishing of old letters raises its own questions of constructive censorship, dialogue and necessary silences. This, however, is the subject of another paper: suffice here to say that it is further evidence of the way that letters even in their after-life continue to participate in the relationship politics of the women's movement.

Harwood and Littlewood's correspondence, as well as the permutations of their relationship, symbolizes the relative and historically specific nature of gender separatism for many. Yet I make no claim to be representative here. If such letters show the sophistications of

love (and the contracts of love *are* sophisticated in this story), like all life writing, they remind us that this is because love is so particular. For this reason, I begin with a biographical narrative that incorporates sections of the correspondence, before providing an analysis. Such a narrative is intended to honour the idiosyncrasies of the relationships involved, while also suggesting what the letters do not say as well as what they do.

* * *

In 1982, the year Carole Harwood first went to a women's peace camp at Greenham Common Royal Airforce Base, to protest about the siting of American cruise missiles in Britain, she and Kevin Littlewood had been together for six years. They had met as mature students doing a history degree at the University of Cardiff. Carole had left her first marriage because of going to university and had begun concurrent relationships with Kevin and their history professor, G.A.W. Neither was Welsh – Carole Scottish-English, Kevin English – but they had each lived in Cardiff for years, Carole looking after her three children, Albert, Rupert and Emma, who were then 12, 17 and 19, and Kevin working in the sphere of history, museums and heritage. Carole had been a peace activist far longer than she had been a feminist, imprisoned at the age of 16 for peace protests with the early CND in 1961. When she got involved with Greenham, aged 36, she was embarking on a teacher training course, but soon felt that life at the peace camp was far more important, not to mention exciting, promising a women's scene and outdoor living she had long fantasized about. Kevin was happy to support her, as he was used to participating in protests such as the Miners' Strike and the Anti-Apartheid movement. G.A.W., her other lover and 20 years older, was more uncertain about Carole's plans to commute to a peace camp known for its feminist and lesbian activities (Harwood, 2003a; Littlewood, 2003).

The correspondence excerpted below was written during 14 days in February 1983 when Carole was in Holloway Prison, London, for dancing on high security missile silos at Greenham Common with 43 other women on New Year's Day.² It expresses all the idealism of the peace camp in its heyday and is ironically reminiscent of the morale-boosting letters sent during war campaigns. Reversing this canonical form of marriage by post, however, it shows Kevin's amused promise to 'keep the home fires burning' in Carole's absence. His descriptions of the everyday doings of their house in Radyr, punctuated by visits to sardonic G.A.W. with whom he was great friends, and their favourite coffee shop Astleys, show a

quiet shift in views on who does the housework as well as who can be a public martyr – and indeed, who does the letter writing. Carole’s letters, meanwhile, are addressed to Kevin and the children together – with requests that Kevin keep G.A.W. up-to-date – crammed in tiny writing on rationed prison paper. According to the accounts she gave at the time to journalists and later to Sasha Roseneil, who has written the most thorough academic treatment of Greenham to date, Harwood had felt moved to protest because of her fears for her children’s future in the nuclear cold war and her letters home continue this maternal vein (Roseneil, 2000: 255-56). Significantly less personal, they express the difficulty of writing in prison but equally the difficulty of writing about her discovery of radical feminism.

Ironically, therefore, it is Littlewood’s letters that register the changes that were imminent for both of them, and where we glimpse how sexual politics met peace politics in the Greenham protest. Characteristically joky, this is nevertheless the drive of the letters’ ongoing story of ‘Ant’ and ‘Bee’, cartoon characters taken from Angela Banner’s children’s book primers, who play out Carole and Kevin’s relationship in fictional form (Banner, 1969; 1970).

* * *

Kevin to Carole: 14 (?) February 1983³

Dearest love: No big speeches (as such!) I think the less I say, the better, since both of us suspect the grand gestures!

I’ll be thinking of you and all your brave sisters. At New Year I thought of you, and once again I watch you going off to fight, confront, upturn the state. Do what you can, my love, and you know I am with you – when it all seems too much & too far & too high, just think of all the people behind you. I know it seems as if they are complacent – but you are in the vanguard and must jolt *all* our consciousness. One day soon, it will be comprehended.⁴

The following day, Carole, together with 43 other women, was tried for ‘breaching the peace’ and on the 16th she was found guilty and bound over ‘to keep the peace’ (Hopkins and Harford, 1984: 104). With 37 others, Harwood refused this sentence and went to prison for 14 days in lieu, believing that ‘you’ve got to force the state to follow . . . through to the conclusion’ (Roseneil, 2000: 264). Kevin heard the news on the radio, just after he had written the following:

Kevin to Carole: 16 February 1983

Everyone's well here. I'm just sitting in Astley's after doing some shopping, and I'm on my way to G.A.W.'s to do the newscaster job & tell all. Must mute the women angle – perhaps I'll tell him you were all men in disguise, that'll cheer him up. A quiet week so far – I bought Al an inner tube ... and Ru is in & out as usual. I saw Una L-M and she was her usual Hobbes-ian self (nasty, brutish & short!) she tried a parting shot. 'It's ok going on these demos, but you need men to look after your kids'. 'Well' said I 'you can always ask women to do it'. Exit Ant, right, polishing his mandibles. Exit U.L-M eating passers by.

Littlewood informed a telephone tree of supporters of the arrest and promised to get G.A.W. to write to Carole. Four days later:

Kevin to Carole: 21 February 1983

Reading between the lines, Newbury D[istrict] Council is applying the pressure, although I don't understand their ultimate aim – soon *no one* will be able to walk on that 'common' so they'll have to call it 'Greenham Private' or 'Greenham Rare' or 'Uncommon'. So then you'll be 'Uncommon Women' which is a very apt description of you all.

Well, today, Monday I packed off the Joeys to school with packed lunch etc, And then I went round to G.A.W.'s for he was typing out some stuff for me. Then I went on to college, where many asked after you. Then at 4 p.m. G.A.W. picked me up & I did Quicksave shopping and he drove me home & I cooked dinner. So a very fruitful day, and I think I'm clear now.

... I enjoyed meeting your friends and I think they're super women. Speaking of 'soup' -er I had a call from Bridget, who is burning herself up flitting backwards & forwards to London, Yorkshire & All points South/N/E.West. I hope she takes a rest soon. Anyway she'll be seeing you on Wednesday, and sends her love.

Oh Bee, won't we have a time when you're here again, won't we snuggle and hug and huggle so snug. Do I like hugs? Pie face—now you know I love you! P. Chops – oh wot love, wot love!

By the bye, forgot to tell you but the Virago piece was a really excellent article, very mature & also very gripping. You write with your heart Bee, and it comes through in so many ways.

... [G.A.W.] misses you a lot, and I tell him stories from the 'Reconstructed Ant's Joke Book' & he snaps out of it quite quickly. Do I miss you? Ant keeps a stiff upper mandible and gazes at the rainbow in the West, and plays his 2d-concertina to those who will listen, singing songs of Bee and her sisters and of all the peace in the world & how we will keep it safe.

Carole had received concussion in the police van and was in the prison's hospital wing (Hopkins and Harford, 1984: 106-11). After two days she was passed fit to return to ordinary cells but she refused until Bridget Evans, with Kevin's help, got the story covered in the *Guardian* newspaper.

Carole to Kevin and children: 20 February 1983

Darlings, How are you all. I Imagine you tonight, Sunday, getting ready for school, having baths, watching 'Heart to Heart'!! Dear souls I miss you all but it won't be long now. . . . Dear Albert [*sic*] to give the karate instructor my apologies on Tuesday (will Kevin or Ru take you & pick you up? Is Jeremy going?) Well chaps here we are – my 5th day! It's all very curious & I'm learning an awful lot. What a delight to see you Ant, though gloomy facing you across a table. I was most impressed by the picture of you writing 4 letters at once. I keep it by me. It's so jolly to have a letter, even a few lines, it breaks up the day. We are not being allowed to work . . . so getting up at 7.15 makes for plenty of reading. . . . [my] apologies for the smudgy pen – they took mine, pens all my paper etc, off me when I arrived. Presumably they are terrified you might make some intelligent use of your time, the regime seems dedicated to producing inanimate, insensient vegetables! Still that's by the way. Albert when you are a self made millionaire you shall buy me a new biro! Did you stay at Emma's on Friday night (was Ru O.K?) & did you go out with G.A.W. on Saturday? Drop me a note telling me, briefly – no hassle, what you've been doing.

In the same letter Carole asks if Kevin is coping, 'especially with money', suggesting that her mother and G.A.W. would lend some if necessary, and that people can bring 'gifts like homemade pies'. She also asks Kevin to let the Employment Exchange know that she cannot sign on for a couple of weeks. On the 21st February, her sixth day inside, she writes:

The post has just arrived – I seem to have an awful lot of contacts in Formby!! Tell Heather I'm really grateful & give her my love, she is a good sister to us. Lots of messages of encouragement & thanks from all over Britain, it's very moving. The best tribute anyone can pay, though, is to take responsibility themselves & act. It's very important & urgent. That's why I so appreciate what you're all doing at home – without your support, encouragement & courage I wouldn't be able to take the stand I feel so committed to. Thank you, I know it's not easy. How about the shopping etc. Can G.A.W. give you a lift etc. How is he? . . . wow, another letter from Liverpool C.N.D! I've applied for

more letters but that, I now realize, means very little so don't expect another for a week. I don't know if we are going to court in the [crowd?] tomorrow or not – seemingly the simple eviction (which seems 59 of us) can be heard in our absence, I hope not, I fancy a day out.

In the same letter Carole asks Kevin to tell Bridget that she will write if she can. Carole was already falling in love with Bridget, to whom she had sent a rose in the witness box during the trial.

Kevin to Carole: 22 February 1983

I send my love to you for all the days we are apart and trust that we will enjoy our days together despite the uncertainty of life. I know that your path is marking itself out, and whatever you do I will be with you in spirit if not always in body!

I am ordering a rainbow for your return, and the riverbank will be at peace once more when you are home. If you're only here for a short time, if you have to go on your journeys soon, we will make the time that [much] more precious. The coffee in David Morgan's is piping hot – I had one this morning & drank to you & your sisters – and we'll be sharing one soon.

Kevin accompanies this with a drawing of Ant thinking smilingly of Bee who is flying back from a peace/women's sign. Around that day Carole wrote to him and the children:

Darlings – I laughed & laughed at your letters & drawings—Ru what a poet, Al what an artist; who could ask for more?! I can't begin to tell you what a difference it makes, you are the very best of chaps. I look forward to seeing you tremendously. I hear [the School of Oriental and Asian Studies] is asking if Ru will accept a 'B' or a 'C' off them! Consider it carefully Ru, I think you should ask them to put a bit more effort into it, say you may accept them with 3 'A's – don't go throwing yourself away. Well done – seriously, they must have been very impressed. What a surprise to see such a young & bouncing striped toad in the prison today (did he get in/out in a laundry basket dressed as a washerwoman's daughter?) How jolly of you to hop along. I expect by the time this reaches you, Ru, your interview will be over but good luck anyhow. . . . Losing your freedom, even for a short time makes sounds & smells & the countryside & friends (especially you two) so precious, & after all that's why we're here. Keep the world safe for me! We have to make it good for everybody. . . . Sorry I couldn't write to you both individually but getting a letter & envelope is like purchasing New Mexico! But I do think of you all the time & your exquisitely

silly letters make me warm all over (or is it the central heating?). Keep an eye on each other, keep a special eye on little Al' at school our Ru, at the moment. I love you both lots & lots & will soon be home – what a mindless, semi literate letter this is – ah well.

In the early hours of 25 February, six women from the campaign climbed into Holloway and onto its roof to protest the conditions of women prisoners (Roseneil, 2000: 223). Harwood heard them inside and wrote the following:

Carole, prison diary: 25 February 1983 (?)

The world is turned upside down! Here we are begging for bread & water instead of tea & cakes while our brave sisters break into the prison! I can hear the women outside – wow what a noise. The authorities are very grumpy – Police, in groups of 4! Patrolling the grounds & Nell chewing on her raw carrot. God I'm starving. Tomorrow's Saturday – I can't believe its so short a time to go now. Finished 'Wives & Daughters', an endearing book, you live in it in a curious way but curiously unexciting. Kevin, Al & Nan came to see me today – what fun. Albert looked very Dennis the Menace, he & Kevin have gone off to sub aqua & Mum is coming back in the morning with G.A.W. & Ru; I feel much visited – its extremely pleasant. This prison is going to be a quieter place after next Tuesday. Skeeter & I have been swapping fantasies about natural yoghurt & nuts – its getting really out of perspective!! A letter from [her first husband] Mark. I felt very curious. At the same time I had a letter from the camp saying Patriarchy was dying – it dies hard all the same. I've come a long way since Mark & there's no going back. I hope I, it, us is what Kevin wants – I must be a very different woman from the one he met in 1976. So many complexities. Nell's singing 'Take the Toys from the Boys' out the window – the whole of Islington seems to be alive with music – massed choirs outside the gates. Now all the prisoners, not just the Greenham women, are singing. We are on our way, hand in hand women everywhere.

This unsent 'diary', which seems to end with an address neither to her family nor to herself but to a posterity that will recognize 'Greenham women' as the important subject, suggests what could not go into the cheery letters: it seems symbolic that she wrote it on the back of a letter from Kevin. The final exchange of letters is equally ambiguous about what will happen when Carole returns home, even as it reminds us how vital organized letter writing is to political campaigns for keeping up morale:

Kevin to Carole: 26 (?) February 1983

It will be so good to be together once more, and breathe the air of freedom. And won't we have a jolly time then, and you can do whatever you want with no restrictions. . . . some quiet times together and some gentleness & softness for my darling Bee, my only love. We've come so far together my sweetheart and we've a long, long way to go yet, together.

I guess the days pass slowly for you; I wish I could speed them for you, but letters don't last long do they? Still, we can share something, although it's only small. A phone would be a handy thing, would they put one in for you? I've been a reconstructed Ant & paid all the bills & written all the letters & tidied up. It keeps me occupied, I do miss you my little Scottish cauliflower. I think of you hard at 7 p.m. each night and hope a little of it gets through to you. We really must perfect this thought transference lark, it'd be so useful! . . . Emma rang, I dissuaded her from spending all her cash on the train, I hope that's the right thing? She has kept in touch and I think the day in court had quite an effect upon her. She seems strong in her resolve. We haven't actually seen her, they are still decorating! . . . I've been writing the diary which may fill in some blurred outlines for you, tho' I think you know most of what's gone on. I hope your spirit is still strong, and you're winning through.

Carole to children: 27/28 February 1983

I was desperately sorry not to have seen Ru on Saturday. I had a message in from the peace camp that a young man called Ru was without; as opposed to within, or rather without his mum. Dear soul, how dreadful, G.A.W. should have waited but I don't think he knew the form – not being a regular visitor at H.M.P.

I imagine we will all feel very disorientated when we get out – in order to survive you adapt & having adapted the old norm has to be re-found. I'm not explaining it very well. In many ways it's been unbelievably emotionally harrowing but so informative, so instructive – we are all feeling very strong & determined, there is so much injustice. I had an outraged letter from David Fernbach saying he's writing to the Guardian & is going to quote something I'd said about 'the state apparatus is even now aimed at our foreheads'. I don't, offhand, remember saying it, it's not something that trips off one's tongue but I daresay they talk of nought else at Heretic Books! But it was a lovely letter & I was most touched. By the way do thank Gill Boden for the enormous bouquet of flowers – how good people are. Lots more letters including one from Charlie Swain & Cardiff Trades Council which is

absolutely hilarious – how we (the women of Greenham) show that Britain is still *great!* We'll lead *mankind*; are *fighters* for peace etc. Also a very curious letter from Sue Maudlin – Polly sends her love to Albert. How are you Joeys – I can't draw pictures etc as I've already had one of my letters last week returned for re-writing so I send you lots of sunshine, rainbows, flowers, moons & stars & everything jolly. Dear things I miss & miss you but it really *isn't* long to go now. . . . Having been reprimanded for what I wrote in a letter a few days ago I feel more than usually inhibited & will save all the really significant things I have to tell you till when I get out. Until then my Five Darlings (you are feeding the canary aren't you!?) plus other resident creatures take care of each other. . . . My love to you all – Al, Ru, Em, Kevin, Bridget, G.A.W., Nan, Gill & Co, everyone . . . Chin up Chaps. . . . All my love Mum, Carole⁵

* * *

In Angela Banner's children's books, Ant and Bee are two gentlemanly insects who live in a teacup together, but venture out to have educational adventures that enable learning the names of countries, colours and how to spell. Ant carries a cane and wears a bowlerhat. He has a playful nature, occasionally getting into trouble. The practical-minded Bee, with moustache, umbrella and floppy hat, keeps Ant from getting too carried away. In the letters, these innocent creatures appear a light-hearted way to avoid overt gender roles in a heterosexual context, as well as to explore changes at a distance: it is notable that they are described in the third person. As Ant, Littlewood casts himself as soft and excitable to Harwood's principled strength. His potentially phallic mandible here becomes a comically diminished weapon, ironically polished after his successful defence of his 'new masculinity' in the face of the sexist Una-L.M. In one letter, praising Carole's 'magnificent' contribution to a book on peace, he teases 'I had to stiffen my mandibles in order not to cry & put the Rayburn out'.⁶ In another letter, 'Ant' is accompanied by a smaller ant representing 12-year-old Albert, scurrying to catch a train to London to visit Bee. The childlike world of 'Ant' and 'Bee' present him as loving, emotional and earthbound in relation to his magisterial, yet smiling and round airborne partner.

But as Ant, Littlewood signals that Carole/Bee is on a journey away from him. Having just heard her sentencing on the news, he does not assume that his partner will come straight home from prison, writing, 'In your own time, Bee, all in your own time'. Another letter includes a drawing of Bee that he explains is 'on a silo

on the far horizon', alluding to the trespassing dance on the silos for which Harwood was arrested, and adds: 'I send my love to you for all the days we are apart and trust that we will enjoy our days together despite the uncertainty of life. I know that your path is marking itself out, and whatever you do I will be with you in spirit if not always in body!⁷ This is illustrated by Ant thinking smilingly of Bee flying back from a peace/women's sign. He continues: 'I am ordering a rainbow for your return, and the riverbank will be at peace once more when you are home. If you're only here for a short time, if you have to go on your journeys soon, we will make the time that more precious [*sic*]'.

What the letters do not say overtly but hint at is that Carole was beginning a new relationship with Bridget Evans, who was getting deeply involved with Greenham against her employers' wishes and who also had an ongoing relationship with another woman. Both Carole and Kevin mention Bridget frequently in their letters, Kevin even visiting Bridget's parents' home with her after a mutual visit to Carole in prison, and at one point Carole asks Kevin if Bridget has 'unwittingly babysat an Ant'? To respect requests for privacy, Bridget's version of events and her correspondence with Carole are not part of this paper. But it can be acknowledged that Bridget and Carole's passion was clearly beginning to press at Carole's relationship with Kevin in a way that Carole's open relationship with G.A.W. had not, despite the fact that Bridget often visited the family home. Eventually Carole and Bridget broke up, though for more than a year Carole maintained Bridget and Kevin in an open relationship alongside the bemused G.A.W., and Carole was never to return to an exclusively heterosexual lifestyle.

Letters have always been unsteadily poised between censorship and confession – classically rhetorical in their ability to persuade or even deceive, yet also celebrated for their spontaneity and innocence of aesthetic intention. Partly this is because they make plain the particularities of the writer–reader relationship that at some level underlies all writing and indeed, speech genres too; the fact that all meaning fluctuates according to who interprets it, and when, and where. But though letters are flamboyantly explicit about the relationships that sustain them, they are more than simply substitutes for speech. Part of what defines their ambiguous authority is precisely that they dramatize feelings towards writing itself – its abstraction, its tones, even simply, many people's sense that they cannot be articulate on paper. For that reason, the most typical epistolary themes are mediation, confidence and reading (Altman, 1982; Gilroy and Verhoeven, 2000: 8), that is, writing about writing and interpretation itself. The

consequence is that ‘the reader is always obliged to seek to measure the sincerity of the letter’ (Porter, 1986: 4): truth in letters involves an even more slippery and particular pact than in diaries or autobiographies.

In the context of the second-wave women’s movement, the issue of sincerity in personal letters was especially marked as a genre historically associated with both feminine art (though this has often been expressed as women’s ‘natural’ spontaneity) and women’s labour (Jolly, 2002). In novels, poems and essays, the epistle was adapted to foreground the politics of communication between women and men. The ‘Three Marias’ *New Portuguese letters*, censored on publication by the Portuguese government ostensibly for its sexually explicit accounts of women’s (heterosexual) relationships, was a high profile example of an epistolary manifesto that refused old patterns of waiting woman and travelling man and the breakdown in communication that ensued (Barreno *et al.*, 1975). Others, such as Kathy Acker’s *Great expectations* (Acker, 1983), Marge Piercy’s *Braided lives* (Piercy, 1983: 149, 260–261) and Ann Oakley’s *Taking it like a woman* (Oakley, 1984), were more ambivalent in their addresses to men. Oakley’s address to a lover, published under the tongue-in-cheek title ‘A French letter’, for instance, painfully admits her desire and fear of his rejection alongside awareness of men’s sexual power and abuse. Juxtaposing frank descriptions of their love-making with details of her everyday domestic mess, she seems to break down false oppositions of mothers and lovers. But the title’s punning reference to a condom suggests that there is still the need for ‘protection’, whether of the woman who may be hurt by a man for whom she cares too much, or of the man who does not really want to hear about either her everyday life or her desire. Although the letter-condom makes their sex ‘safe’, it also signifies what still separates them even in their intimacy.

It is unsurprising therefore, that the hope for new honesty in relationships between women and men was more usually displaced by the discovery and celebration of women’s relationships with each other, emblematic in the rise of an epistolary motif of women as each other’s *confidantes*. Three published at the same time as the Harwood-Littlewood correspondence demonstrate this theme: Alice Walker’s *The color purple* (Walker, 1982), Gillian Hanscombe’s *Between friends* (Hanscombe, 1982) and even the deliberately mainstream Jill Tweedie’s *Letters from a fainthearted feminist* (Tweedie, 1982; 1983), in which the fainthearted feminist writes to her radical separatist friend rather than sorting out a better relationship with her sexist husband. (Interestingly, the protest at Greenham is the

one political protest that both the faint-hearted and the radical feminist can agree upon.) The traditional division of labour and cultures of sentimental friendship that produced correspondence between women is reworked as a romantic identification between political allies.

Perhaps most pertinent to the question of sincerity in feminist letters is the one novel that came out of Greenham, *Mud*, by Nicky Edwards who lived there through 1983. This is a novel with a fascination for the problem of what letters do not say. The plot concerns a somewhat jaded former peace camper who is writing a play about First World War soldiers in order to understand 'men's motives' for going to war. Befriending a First World War widow, Ada, she gets to read Ada's letters from her husband John from the front in 1916:

I saw what Ada meant about him not telling her anything. The longer he was out, the less informative his letters were. After a year, they were almost straight formula notes, with very little of himself coming through, as if he was in another world from which he could not make the mental effort to drag himself back and would not drag her into. He thought he was trying to protect her from distress, but it seemed all of a piece with him not being able to bear hearing a bird singing in the one blasted tree left standing in their hundred square yards of nothingness. No part of him could be spared for another life. So he talked about the weather and grumbled about the food and kept the woman he used to talk to 'not like most blokes would' at arms' length, for fear that she would make him realise that not all the world was a muddy ditch in the middle of a war. . . . I felt angry for her sake, as I put the last of the say-nothing, don't-risk-a-feeling letters down. What a real man. How bloody British. 'There, there, dear, don't you worry about me. I'm fine.' Of course he wasn't. Making endurance possible, by putting whatever unmanly feelings made him able to talk to her aside for the duration. Making killing possible. And Ada reading these letters all down the years, trying to wring out some scraps of meaning or caring that he hadn't been able to put in, for fear that he'd see the emperor's new uniform for what it was.

(Edwards, 1986: 54–55)

Here military censorship is overdetermined by the everyday self-censorship of British masculinity in the misguided name of 'protecting' women. In contrast, Carole and Kevin's correspondence cheerfully protests against both the appalling scene of war and its investment in an ideology of gender that represses both men and women, further demonstrated by Carole's commitment to talking to the soldiers at the camp (Roseneil, 2000: 242). But Edwards' novel is equally

symptomatic of the new kind of communicative difficulties that arose from feminist anti-militarist protest. For while *Mud* protests the separation of men from women in war, there is an ironic parallel between life at the peace camp and in the trenches, where the intense, dangerous and primitive conditions as well as the women-only community counter the desire to communicate to those ‘outside’. Although Edwards’ protagonist criticizes the First World War soldier John’s inane letters home to his wife, she too finds that she is unable to write a word about her experiences when she is at Greenham – even to her woman lover, with whom she eventually breaks up. Life at the all-women camp is so dramatic, immediate, all-encompassing, there is an almost traumatic adjustment period on return to what feels like a ‘civilian’ life of heteronormativity. Indeed, Edwards conveys no confidence in the immediate future for communication between men and women. While she champions the need for men to stop censoring their feelings and for heterosexual couples to break down their barriers, the narrator herself prefers to be separatist. Separatism of course was a very real element of Greenham’s appeal. In the novel, the narrator tries to explain to herself as much as to the baffled and critical outsiders why she went as precisely the urgent need to focus on women not men:

And there I fit, like so many other women. Turned up and clicked into place as though held by strong magnets. Finding a real women’s space for the first time, after years of polite feminism, always prey to co-option in the let’s-not-be-too-threatening-here world of giving them credit, they are trying, the poor lambs, mixed politics. Not having to compromise. Being able to make a virtue of rejecting men, instead of hiding or disguising it. . . . I should be writing about [Ada], rid myself of this tiresome interest in why men do the stupid things they do. Who cares? Let them go off and slaughter each other. We can look after ourselves. Women treat each other as important. No time to lose.

(Edwards, 1986: 112-13)

Sasha Roseneil’s sociological study of Greenham shows that the decision for the camp to be women-only and the ensuing flowering of lesbian relationships there were crucial to its magic for the protestors and arguably for the camp’s political efficacy too, at least in terms of its feminist aims. As she put it:

Greenham was an arena in which [the hegemonic construction of] ‘woman’ was deconstructed and rejected, and alternative notions of ‘woman’ were formed. The woman of Greenham was different in many respects from the woman of patriarchal creation. She was a woman

who transgressed boundaries between the private and public spheres, she made her home in public, in the full glare of the world's media, under the surveillance of the state. She put herself and other women first, acting according to her conscience, taking responsibility for her own actions. She dressed according to a different aesthetic, in warm, comfortable clothing, removing many of the markers of femininity, but often adorning her body in ways which celebrated her independence of fashion. She was confident and assertive in the face of authority, rejecting its power to control her behaviour, testing it and taunting it. She developed close friendships and often sexual relationships with other women. This woman was stepping outside many of the restrictions of patriarchy.

(Roseneil, 1995: 156)

The gauge for such a transformation was precisely that it was women like Carole, who came as mothers protesting on behalf of children rather than explicitly feminist reasons, who underwent the greatest politicization towards feminism and personal change (Roseneil, 1995: 157). In her interviews with 35 protestors Roseneil showed that more than half who had identified as heterosexual when they first went to Greenham became sexually involved with women (Roseneil, 1995: 158). In interview with Roseneil, Carole herself emphasized this as an impact even greater than the anti-militarist message:

One of the things that I feel personally is that it brought the possibility of a lesbian lifestyle to the surface for women ... from all backgrounds. It's put 'lesbian' back into the vocabulary. They might have been burly, and they might have been muddy, and they might have been grubby, but ... people didn't say they're a gang of well-meaning housewives. They said that they're a gang of dykes, and on balance they were right. I think that's been very important. And the idea that women can take control of their own lives, and take control of other people's lives, and can say to politicians, we're not going to have this sort of shit.

(Roseneil, 2000: 316-17)

In this context, Carole's relationship with Bridget seems less a symptom or a cause than a necessary passion, in some ways parallel to Bridget's decision to join the campaign despite the warnings of her employers. For many women at Greenham such changes were threatening to male husbands and partners (Roseneil, 1995: 150-51). Carole's decision to incorporate a lesbian relationship into an already non-monogamous household and to balance mothering with the needs of two lovers was perhaps unusual, but presented its own

dilemmas. The fact that Carole's letters to Kevin tell us nothing of this, and that Kevin's to Carole tell us only of his hopes and jokes as a reconstructed househusband is significant. When Carole again leaves the family in November 1983 for as one of five British women who took the United States government to court as a last ditch strategy to prevent the deployment of cruise missiles, her journal is filled with passionate identification with Greenham's politics and her worry about leaving her children, leaving little clue as to the ever more complex sexual relationships that sustained her.⁸ And while Kevin continued to write morale-boosting letters from Ant to a now 'superwoman' Bee, they said nothing of his own much more serious difficulties and infidelities burgeoning at home.

* * *

In these circumstances, the letters of peace campaigners here are ironically like those of military couples, conditioned by their need to preserve relationships and for that same reason, both reassuring and deceptive. It seemed and, to an extent, was genuinely physically dangerous to protest at Greenham: as Kevin remembers, 'it sounds melodramatic but you didn't know if people were going to come back' (Littlewood, 2001b). But at stake, too, was a permanent change in women and men's personal relationships. At one end of the spectrum, women confessed to continuing needs and desires for men, finding it difficult to reconcile this with their politics. But at the other end of the spectrum, as for Harwood, the discovery of feminist community and lesbian relationships meant that changes were happening that could not be expressed in writing at all, indeed that perhaps obviated the need to communicate with men. While letter writing between lesbian lovers during this period was exceptionally rich and confident, even as it often thrashed out puzzles of difference or infidelity (Turner and Tornatore, 1996), correspondence between feminist heterosexual lovers or partners was faced with the potential asymmetry of men and women's needs, as women needed to explore their identities as women without men, while men needed to come to terms with new and more equal relationships with women. Although some men tried to find a parallel interest in gender, prompting some infamous men's groups, the tactful 'editing' I have outlined in my reading of Littlewood and Harwood's correspondence is probably more representative of communication at the time. David Morgan's *Discovering men*, an early academic summary of what men's groups had been tentatively exploring through the 1980s, suggests the problem that this poses for the need to analyse, and ultimately to change

gender ‘interactionally’. Thinking about ‘the importance of the audience for studies of men and masculinity and the conditions of their productions’, he suggests that:

While there may be times which are appropriate for all-men groups to discuss and share such issues, more and more of the discussions must take place in mixed audiences. And this also means that men, as well as exploring their own practices, should also continue to work for change in the institutions in which they work so that their contexts of discovery may also be truly mixed.

(Morgan, 1992: 199)

Letters, however, sometimes written precisely because of the emotional distance opening up in a relationship, underline Morgan’s point that if men cannot be separatist, women may often have to be. This invites the usual conundrum of how to find women who are going to be willing to maintain political as well as sexual conversation with men, for the more politicized – and perhaps, ironically – the more lesbian that women become, the less interested they may be in doing this.

This is a conundrum much less talked about these days. Times have changed dramatically since the early 1980s and even since 1990 when David Morgan’s book came out. The evolution of queer politics, in which strategic alliances between women, men or transgendered people who identify as sexual/gender dissidents, is perhaps a logical response to the separatism of lesbian feminism, just as lesbian feminism was a necessary response to the male-centred terms of sexual liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. The shape of a correspondence like Harwood and Littlewood’s testifies to the fact that separatism, like censorship, was ultimately a fictional affair in both senses. On one hand, Littlewood’s phallic-less Ant and Bee and joky cheers for a women-led peace protest and on the other hand, Harwood’s motherliness and light allusions to her other lovers, are certainly creative responses to the very complex way that lesbian feminism entered a heterosexual marriage as well as to the immediate exigencies of political imprisonment. But as love letters and family letters they tell of the queer sensibility that was already there in 1970s non-monogamy and even Greenham’s lesbian feminism, as much as a story of a woman with an irrepressible taste for adventure and a man of libertarian ideals.

Carole’s future was not with Bridget any more than with Kevin. Carole and Bridget separated after a year of combining an open relationship with Kevin, at which point Carole and Kevin became

involved in a three-way relationship with another woman. These days Carole writes poetry and has ‘ten horses, one pig, eight piglets, geese’ and ‘two lovers’: a woman with whom she has been involved for nine years and a horseman from a gypsy background (Harwood, 2003a; 2003b). Kevin, still a historian and political singer-songwriter, is about to move North with his partner (Littlewood, 2003). Feminism and anti-militarism are still important for Carole: she was involved in a woman’s direct action against the US invasion of Iraq this year. Kevin, meanwhile, looks back to the early 1980s with fondness as an ‘incredibly creative time of action’, though muses that ‘twenty years seems a long time in politics, let alone love’ (Littlewood, 2003):

We had the ideals – and I still believe in what I wrote/thought/did, and still think of myself as a socialist, communist, whatever – libertarian? But it all seemed to break up on ‘the personal’ – love, jealousy, possession, obsession – all those damned bourgeois notions, don’t y’know! But we still think it might just work, one more time.

(Littlewood, 2001a)

Letters between lovers, even and perhaps especially when they idealize or omit, inevitably confirm the subsequent evolution within feminist thinking of a sense that desire was a hole in the political programme. Must we conclude then, with Robin Morgan, that ‘love’ must always outstrip theory in its personal joys and madneses? This would be unjust to all the relationships in this story that expressed so eloquently the experimental ideals of their time. As perhaps precisely ‘theoretical’ as well as literal dialogues, letters confirm that new relationships were an essential source as well as effect of the women’s movement and that writing had a distinctive role in their mediation.

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NOTES

1 Carole Harwood has requested that her real name be used and I have respected her wishes. Kevin Littlewood has also given permission for his real name to be used. However, as I have not been able to speak to the lovers or their descendents personally, I have disguised their identities. Carole’s lover from

Cardiff is referred to as G.A.W. Her lover from Greenham is referred to as Bridget Evans, the name used by many Greenham women to protect their identity. Her first husband is referred to as Mark. Clearly, the identities of all persons discussed here are ultimately traceable since the letters are in a public archive, but I have felt this to be the most ethical policy. I would be pleased to hear from any persons who have further questions or interests regarding this matter.

2 Harwood's memory of the action is given in Roseneil, S. (2000: 208–10).

3 I have indicated where the dating of letters is uncertain.

4 All the letters cited or discussed are held in the Feminist Archive (South), in Bristol. I have reproduced them in the form they were written, excluding ellipses and a provisional attempt to date them where they are undated.

5 Harwood gives a public account of her stay in Holloway in Hopkins, S. and Harford, B. (1984: 106–11).

6 This was probably written on Tuesday, 22 February.

7 Letter dated as received 24 February 1983.

8 The diary is held in the Feminist Archive (South), in Bristol.

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