Here I am once again, bringing you OBSESSIONS 19 (and Obsessive Press #57) on typically short notice. I mean, I had to call up AnneLaurie last night to ask her if she'd be at the worldcon so I could deliver this to her there. Otherwise, I couldn't make the deadline. Even so that doesn't leave me much time. Insert violin music here. Anyway to continue with the colophone, you can reach me at 2018 Jenifer Street, Madison, WI 53704 or 608-241-8445. All materials copyrighted © by Jeanne Gomoll, 1980; all material by same, unless otherwise stated.

OBSESSIONS.

An article in the paper the other day had some suggestions for snappy come-backs for dumb questions. Since I've been afflicted with more than my due of dumb questions lately I found some of them quite amusing and thought I'd reprint some of them as a public service.

Someone screeches "What do you think you're DOING?!" You calmly explain "Annoying you. How's it working?" or screech back, "Think? You expect me to THINK about it?"

"Am I interrupting something?" — a question never asked unless they are interrupting something can be replied to most effectively by saying "Not yet," and going back to what you were doing.

Or the question that I would most have liked the answer to in recent days: "Is your work more important than our relationship?" There are several possible responses to this goodie. "Could you put that in a memo?" or "No, but it pays better." and best yet: "Our relationship is my work. I go to the office for fun."

"Are you doing anything Thursday night?" the tentative friend asks. You say "Thursday night? BINGO NIGHT?!"

I'm hoping that having typed them out

here, that they will be engraved indelibly in my memory and I won't forget them like so many good jokes.

In the further interest of (dark) humor:

(Open Road) -- Residents in a West Berlin neighborhood were shocked one morning after reading a letter sent to them from local government authorities.

The notice, found in their mailboxes, asked Berliners whose life should be saved if there was a nuclear accident. It said that there were only 3,000 places available in a special nuclear shelter in a subway station, and that "to avoid a disordered distribution of places in the event of a disaster, we want to appropriate the available space now,"

People were asked to name those worth saving, give the reason why, and send their suggestions to the Berlin government.

It turns out that the notice was a fake put out by a local anti-nuke group. Police said it was, "well forged, and could have passed as an official release."

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Tomorrow, I go off to Boston and the Worldcon...hope I see a lot of you there. What I'm also hoping to have done is to have seen Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* on Thursday when I arrive.

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 interraction 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) preoccupation 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 believeably 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 inter esting 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

other Piercy novels, I feel as if there is a strange sort of autobiography being written. Not that the main character is Piercy, but that a minor, supporting character is the author, commenting from a shadowed corner. This time I thought it was Natalie, Vida's sister. Check out the notes about the author at the end of the book and see what you think.

I'm also reading *Neighbors* by Thomas Berger. No comment yet. But what a bizarre nightmare of a book it is so far!

I should perhaps go into a brief description of recent events because I know I won't get too many mailing comments done tonight and won't have much energy left over afterward to do this update.

I've been getting much more logo design work (freelance) lately than I ever got when I was trying to survive on it before I got the state job. I am, in fact, paying for my Boston trip with the proceeds of that work. Word of my work and (more probably) my rates seems to be getting around town, and people keep recommending me to their friends. I haven't even been advertising. That has put a bit of a crimp on art work for fannish places (like even Janus!), and certainly art shows which I don't really do well in anyhow. My stuff seems to be more popular as illustrations (or lately, letterheads), and is not the sort of thing people normally think about putting on their walls. So, in case you wondered, I decided to skip the hassel for worldcon this year all together. I would have had to practically kill myself to get stuff together for that show, and then probably wouldn't have made back the rather large entry fees for my trouble. Really, I'm doing better doing things on a commission-basis. What I'd like to do, and what I'm making some progress towards, is to start sending out one-shot (one frame) cartoons to various magazines. This seems to be a market that should be good for my sort of work and good as well for my schedule. Even if there is a deadline, after all, how long can one cartoon take to do. Those

sound like famous last words, I know, but allow me my fantasy. It sounds reasonable to me. Richard Bruning and I are still collaborating, still selling our poster -the "Guide to Campus Life." But neither of us are very business-oriented and we discourage easily. We decided to take up the University of Wisconsin (or at least the department that publishes Wheat and Chaff, which is the zine that origin: ally published our cartoon as a page of itself) on their offer. Which was to print up the poster themselves (on much better paper than we could have managed, and bigger too), and do all the Madison distributing, for half the profit. By the time we found out all the work that was going to be involved in the distribution, both Richard and I agreed that this was cheap. Also, the re going to print an over-run which we can purchase at cost to distribute elsewhere, if we want. At this point, for this fall semester, I don't think that's possible, but maybe next semester I will try that. ("Someday my Prince will come...and he'll be an agent," was our tune.)

So much for the artwork front. I've been working with Bread and Roses again, still, whatever. I did a review of the last two novels by Doris Lessing (previewed here, right here, in this very apazine), and some art, and even an advertisement for Janus). It looks as if I will be their resident Science Fiction reviewer and that my regular appearance there may turn, eventually, into a formal column.

My health has been weird... I've been having to take more iron pills to keep reasonably active, but I've got a really sympathetic doctor at the clinic now, and she's just as eager as I am now to get to the reason for my iron drain. Maybe I'll find out soon. Speaking of health, I lump mosquito bites right in with that...(I'm very alergic to the things)...and this year has been absolutely horrid for mosquitos (I mean they are simply flourishing. I find myself hoping for an early freeze...me, a Wisconsinite! [This is the first time I've spoken of the two things together, and I was struck with the wild notion of iron-sucking mosquitos...!...no, that's impossible though; the same thing happens to me during the winter.]

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 freebes, 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 postholocaust 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 Autoclave. (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 comeing out recently about the awful effects some of these buildings have which have a slow circulation, airexchange system? Germs and airborne materials generated from super thick insulating materials are raising the home-sick rates...///Gayle: | 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, Some





... 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 language, 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 putdowns they invite merely by behaving 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 sexuallyrevolutionized world, it doesn't take perfect pitch to hear the edge of loathing in "old maid" and the smug backhanded 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 beencame 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.