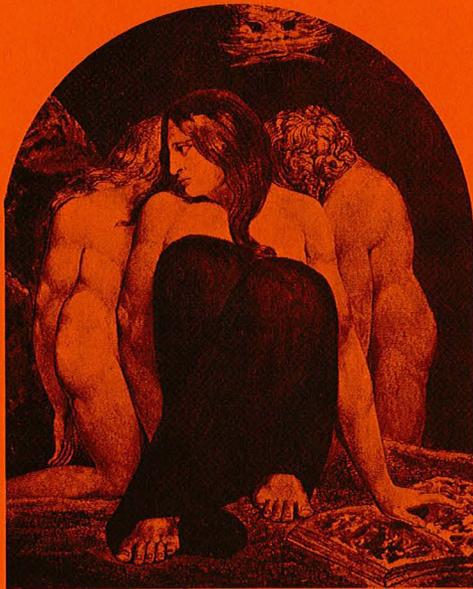


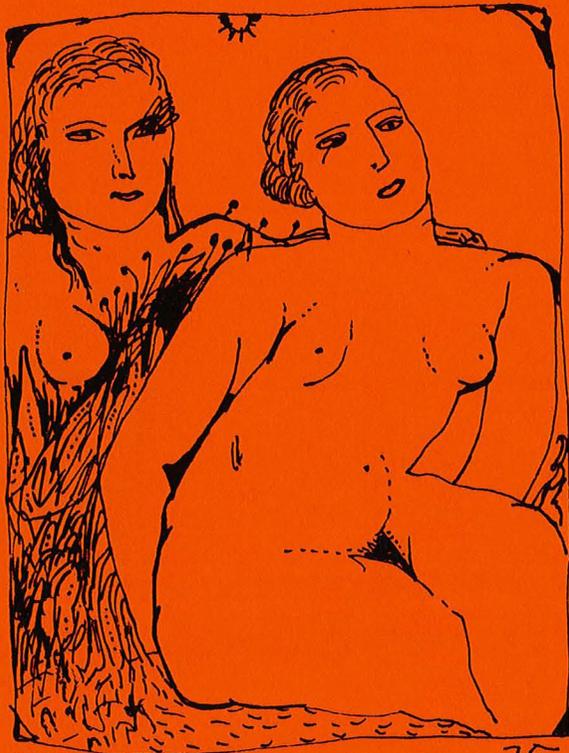
HECATE

*A Women's
Interdisciplinary
Journal*



VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2
JULY 1975

A\$1.50



M.B.

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HECATE
A Women's
Interdisciplinary Journal

Vol. 1, No. 2
July 1975

HECATE

A Women's Interdisciplinary Journal,
G.P.O. Box 99, St. Lucia,
Queensland, Australia. 4067.

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This issue was produced with editorial assistance from Merle Thornton and Claire Williams, and technical assistance from Isabell Clarke, Anne Draper, Janet D'Urso, Helen Fraser, Chris Kellow, Ann-Marie O'Keefe, Billy Thorpe, Karen Trenfield and Jan Turner-Jones. Help with distribution was given by Sharon Dexter and Carol Treloar.

We are interested in all material relating to women: articles and reviews of books, films, plays, art; original poems, stories, plays; programmes of women's studies' courses, research findings . . . A small payment will be made to contributors.

HECATE is published twice-yearly. Third issue, January 1976. Final date for copy is 30 November, 1975. All copy should be type-written and accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Research articles should conform to the M.L.A. Style Sheet.

Subscription rates:	A\$2.50 p.a.;	A\$1.50 single copy.
	UK£1.80 p.a.;	UK£1.00 single copy.
	US\$4.00 p.a.;	US\$2.50 single copy.
	<i>Institutional rates are double in all cases.</i>	

HECATE is interested in reciprocal advertisements and subscriptions with other feminist publications. Other advertisements are by negotiation.

We acknowledge with thanks financial assistance from the Australian International Women's Year National Advisory Council; the Literature Board, Australian Council for the Arts and the Post-Graduates Association, University of Queensland.



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ISSN Number: 0311-4198.

Produced by CPL/CAT, 10 Bailey Street, West End, Brisbane. Phone 44 6021.

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EDITORIAL

At present there are two major ideological streams within the women's movement in Australia. The first places the emphasis on the individual as the impetus for change, advocates the search for new and positive lifestyles within a women's culture and stresses personal liberation and the evolution of new relationships between women culminating in the reality of sisterhood. Given that women, as individuals, must break free from the oppressive nature of the prevailing psychological, cultural and economic conditions, this ideological stream is necessary for the continuing growth and strength of the movement.

However, when this microcosmic perspective is the sole emphasis, we see the development of an analysis which cannot go beyond the transformation of the position of individual women. This kind of analysis will never be able to tackle the transformation of the material conditions of *all* women and therefore can provide only partial solutions.

By concentrating on the development of a female culture, often the underlying assumption is that anything *male* is by definition anathema to the cause of women. By dismissing *all* male theoretical writings as being inherently sexist, the implications of those writings for the women's movement can be lost. Marx and Freud have been classic casualties of this limited perspective.

The second ideological stream in the women's movement is a structural analysis of society which concentrates on the transformation of the relations of production as the impetus for change, stressing the importance of the economic factors intrinsic to women's oppression. However, when this macrocosmic perspective is the sole emphasis, we can see the development of an analysis which can easily become, or appear to be, insensitive to the *total* lives of women. Its failings are best exemplified in the traditional policies of the various communist and socialist parties in this country.

In many ways, the strength of the women's movement is obvious. It has become an important social force in our time and has succeeded in providing services and support for some of women's immediate needs. Thousands of women see themselves as part of the movement and a vaguely defined "women's consciousness" has been widely diffused through consciousness raising groups, demonstrations, action projects, counter-institutional activity and through the mass media. Women in the movement have a growing understanding of common oppression and the imperative of collective solutions.

On the other hand, the women's movement in Australia is currently divided. In most places, it has broken into small cliques which are hard to find, hard to join and hard to comprehend politically. At the same time, conservative, but organisationally clever entrepreneurs (such as the International Women's Year committees, the Council of Queensland Women and so on) are exploiting the movement and are beginning to define the problems of women in reformist terms which can never confront the basic patriarchal, capitalist, heterosexist and racist structures of society and thus offer only limited change. Their refusal to recognise the necessity for legal reform (such as the United States Equal Rights Amendment) which might well have been one of the few effective changes they could have brought about, indicates their reluctance to really confront these structures. Moreover, the ongoing capitalist and imperialist crises pose a real and direct threat to the development of the feminist movement, its ideologies and the few social and material gains that have been

won. A hostile right wing backlash to feminist thought and action is already apparent. There are demands that women workers should be thrust back into the home because they undermine the job security of male workers. There are increasing demands to cut back government spending particularly in the areas of social security, education and child-care. These demands can *and are* eroding much of the new found independence of women.

If our movement is to survive, let alone flourish, it is time we began to acknowledge the divisions within the movement, be they ones of ideology, class, race, sexuality, age or geography and make these divisions our strength. This will necessitate greater tolerance within the movement for existing tensions rather than trying to resolve these divisions into a "right line" or a "proper sphere" of activity, which can only split the movement and lead to its demise.

It is just this conflict, these divisions, these tensions which provide the impetus for the women's movement to grow. To limit divisions by proscribing a false, artificial notion of sisterhood is to lead the movement to ultimate stagnation and navel gazing. To reject the study of theory and praxis as being irrelevant or undesirable is to shy away from the central problems which beset the movement. What is feminism? Are there contradictions between our short-term and long-term goals? If so, how do we cope with these contradictions? Are there new ways to define power, authority, leadership and initiative which do not lead to a "structureless tyranny"? Where have we come from and where are we going? These questions exist and must be answered. Can we afford to limit ourselves to action without reflection guided by the acquisition of new thought and knowledge?

In this context women's studies can be seen, not as a sterile intellectualisation, but rather, as an integral part of an ongoing movement helping to explode the myths which contain and limit the scope for women to change the material and psychological basis of their existence. It does so by providing a necessary base for commitment and action.

This is the importance of the National Women's Studies Conference in June in Adelaide, where we as feminists must determine the role that women's studies should play within the wider context of the women's movement and make sure that women's studies, as it exists now, is playing that role.

It is in this light that we should see women's studies, and all other theoretical, or semi-theoretical investigations, not as abstractions, but rather as political commitment which offers viable alternatives and strategies—a new praxis.



The Great Goddess Hecate is anathema to those who worship Western father gods, governing as she does the aspects of strong women who demand the exercise of choice and individuality. Hesiod, no admirer of women, wrote that she was "almost the chief of all the gods"; typically, this statement has been either dismissed, misunderstood or regarded as an unfortunate error by male classicists. If anything, Hesiod was too cautious. Hecate is the ruler of life and death, fertility and infertility, medicine and poison, the kindly assistant of women in childbirth or the compassionate goddess who relieved the burden of unwanted pregnancies. To women she has good intent but she can be 'destructive' to men. In other words, she was the Goddess invoked by women who desired freedom from male tyranny.

Magic, inspiration and understanding are her gifts; she governs the creative, unconscious mind; she can grant women the power of awakening or dampening male desire; she has the power to curse conquerors or unjust rulers and 'Zeus himself honours Hecate so greatly that he never denies her the ancient power which she has always enjoyed; of bestowing on mortals, or withholding from them, any desired gift.' (Robert Graves.) Hecate was around long before the father gods appeared on the scene and one whose powers were so great and so basic that they could only be obscured, never eroded.

Hecate was too fearful (to men) to be allotted a spouse and so she escaped the dreary fate of most other matriarchal goddesses. She represents the cycle of the seasons; a triple goddess. Persephone is her maiden aspect, Demeter her lifegiving maternal role and as Herself she is the dark moon, the goddess of the underworld. But the seed must be buried (Hecate) before it sprouts (Persephone) and bears fruits (Demeter). Hecate is at once crone and virgin, as Persephone is virgin and mother, and Demeter is mother and post-menopausal woman, Hecate is Everywoman.

Hecate has been traduced as the goddess of evil, the queen of hell, the ruler of succubae, ghouls and vampires. Such a powerful Goddess who could not be tamed could only be vilified lest by worshipping Her, women could learn to control their fertility and invoke a power superior to that of the quarrelsome, silly, rape-prone and vainglorious 'deities' worshipped by the Hellenes, or the vindictive father god of Christianity.

Despite the arrogant sexism of the Greeks and Romans, Hecate was accorded a frightened respect. The life-denying misogyny of the Christian Church Fathers' terror of female sexuality exceeded even that of their predecessors so that Hecate became a demoness, an embodiment of everything gruesome and perverted. The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to birth control, abortion and autonomy for women is well known, but in previous centuries such forbidden practices were apt to end in one being tortured and burnt alive if one were caught or even suspected of 'witchcraft'. In the middle ages rebellious women worshipped Hecate as Diana or Aradia, the Queen of Elfin or Faerie, the Goddess of the Crossroads or the heath. She was the patroness of the midwives and the women healers whose traditional knowledge of medicine passed from woman to woman over the centuries.

Accordingly, we have named our journal 'Hecate', a symbolic gesture to all that is proud, untameable, autonomous, compassionate, angry, strong creative, intelligent and brave in women that, although repressed and denied for thousands of years has never been crushed, and now pushes towards the light like shooting blades of barley. Hecate is mythologically represented as a bitch and as the witches would have said 'So mote it be'.