

## Like sands in the hourglass . . .

by Sarah Koehl

"Like sands in the hour glass so are the days of our lives," or so I thought as I sat down to read three fictional love stories about lesbians by lesbians.

*Iris*, Janine Veto's first book is fast paced and violent. It involves two women who meet and fall in love, but find they must murder various aggressors in order to live their lives in peace. Veto devotes great time and effort into descriptive repeated rapes perpetrated upon the main character called Iris. What appears to be an escapist and romantic captivating front cover of two women kissing never is actually characterized throughout the novel. So as you cannot judge a book by its cover, *Iris*, has been placed amongst the



lesbian love story genre although carrying a distasteful homophobic and male-hating undercurrent. Veto had many opportunities to salvage her lesbian as victim theme. *Iris* is brutalized to the point of being physically disabled and has to prove her power with witchcraft over her aggressor and the violent lesbian-hating society that allowed such brutality to take place. Sadly, what one would hope to be a victory over the violence against women at the end of the book, becomes the brutal murder of an innocent male child. *Iris* has one saving grace as it serves to remind us as women that a thin line exists between our own aggressive nature as human beings and our own personal breaking points. Let us hope we can recognize this as a potential only, and not follow in our male counterparts' footsteps in believing aggression deserves aggression. I do not recommend *Iris* for the squeamish or pacifistic, but perhaps some lesbian separatists will regard it as supportive material.

*The Price of Salt*, written in 1952, by Claire Morgan, was one of the first lesbian "pulp" novels written with a realistic life quality and a happy ending. The homosexual novel thirty years ago was always tragic, male and psychologically unsupportive. The 1980s reader might find Therese, the main character, a little timid, but I'll admit her actions reminded me of shy and awakening feelings in all of us. Therese meets Carol, a stunning older wo-

man, at the clothing department store where she is a clerk. As their affection for one another grows into love, Therese realizes she must deal with more than her awakening as a lesbian, but jealousy, and her search of self. Carol in turn, is faced with a custody battle with her ex-husband over her only daughter, and must come to terms with her decision to live with Therese or face losing her child. Many will identify with Carol and Therese. They characterize the struggle for fulfillment in all of us and a search for love that we all hope to attain.

*Against the Season*, by Jane Rule, written in 1971, was finally published in the United States this spring. Rule's exquisite writing style and penetrating insight has created another winner. *Against the Season* is a consciously old fashioned, stylized novel about cycles of birth, growth and death. The majority of its characters are (refreshingly) over forty, some over sixty, and a few over eighty. Just as *Six of One*, by Rita Mae Brown, colored small town life and its inhabitants, *Against the Season* revives that same humor and small town adventure. Dina Pyros and Rosemary Hopwood, the lesbian couple in the novel are a somewhat stereotyped "butch and femme" but are wonderfully amusing as they begin to court publicly and privately. (With a twist, as it is the femme who chases and catches the butch). A particularly sentimental and meaningful part of the novel emerges when an elderly man and woman both over eighty, lonely and frightened by death, find they love each other, but were never able to make the vulnerable step towards commitment and sharing their feelings. In the face of public ridicule they make their love apparent and support one another. *Against the Season* challenges the classic lesbian love story as it incorporates heterosexual love and love between the elderly, a refreshing change. I recommend *Against the Season*. It's richness of detail and thought harmonize and create the continuity of dignity needed so desperately by all of us as we age, and makes the subtle connection between agism and respect, so often lost in our society.

## The Color Purple

by Helen Lottridge

Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Color Purple*, published by Washington Square Press, is crystal-clear sympathy that delivers such powerful messages and feelings that one is prompted to turn from the last page back to the first and re-read it immediately.

Ms. Walker draws the reader into the core of the oppression of Black people — and particularly women of color — from the perspective of the innocent Celie. In the midst of a barrage of physical and emotional violations bearing no hint of justice, we relate to Celie on a being level, and find inside her the quiet acceptance of one who has no way to know that change can come.

A survivor of incest, her children taken from her, she finds herself the last-choice bride in an arranged marriage. Celie's husband, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, appropriately named, much prefers her sister Nettie; but his affections are unrequited and Nettie is sent away to an unknown fate, leaving Celie with the loss of the only person who loved her.

A subtle but potent spirituality is evident

throughout the book as Celie's story unfolds in her letters to God, her only sustaining reality. Untainted by judgemental doctrine, she writes fervently to God of her love for the flamboyant Shug Avery. It is Shug, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s mistress, who becomes aware of Celie's plight and teaches her that life can be more than a daily struggle to survive.

Nettie's story is revealed in her letters to Celie, all of which have been intercepted by Mr. \_\_\_\_\_.

Just as Celie's life is filled with hope and love and laughter, all that is central to her seems to be stripped away. In the lonely, shocked silence, Celie learns, to her, the most important lesson.

In the calmness, the reader is lulled into expecting the last chapter to be an epilogue, but Ms. Walker skillfully raises emotions to a crescendo, the final twist, leaving no lingering questions, leaving passion at its peak.

The book is artfully written throughout. Ms. Walker's economy with words and her affluence of feeling and insight present a story that is abundant in both intellectual and emotional understanding of basic human rights, sexual preferences and what it means to be alive. All of this is presented without apology, without vengeance, couched not in politics, but in the simple, natural reality of who we are.

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