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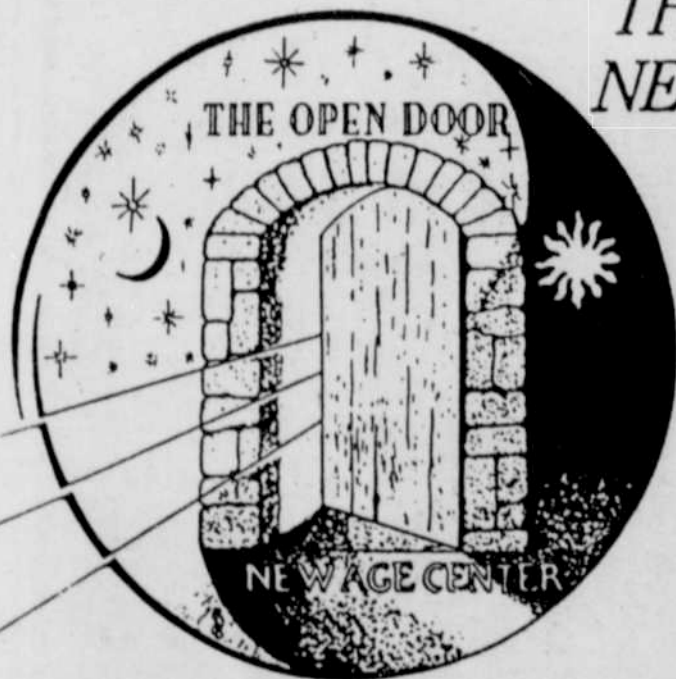
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The Isles of Lesbos

There are women everywhere writing their way out of marriages, writing about their lives, writing the love they can express in no other way. Writing on islands of their own making, in the castles of their minds.

B Y L E E L Y N C H

Jane Rule, like Sappho, lives on an island. Is this coincidence, or a signpost to success for all of us singers of lesbian tales? Is the island the perfect lesbian literary zone? A realm of seclusion, inspiration and safety?

Djuna Barnes wrote *Nightwood* in Peggy Guggenheim's castle, another sort of island. Janet Flanner wrote her New Yorker column from the top floor of a Paris hotel. Katherine Hume, author of *The Nun's Story*, lived with her lover in that same hotel. I visited the late lesbian writer, Elsa Gidlow, where she wrote on a California mountaintop.

Recently I made the acquaintance of a well-known literary agent in New York City. When in passing, so to speak, I mentioned my little domicile, she interrupted, "You live in a trailer!?" Already awed by her function in the world, I stammered out some feeble excuse for such a non-traditional dwelling. Yet I love it. And I'm not the only one. Texas writer Tony Azolakov (*Cass and the Stone Butch*) is another trailer-dweller. Surely our tin castles are the equivalent at least of the poet's garret, the artist's loft?

I don't need an island, a castle. I'm remembering Willa Cather in her brownstone on Washington Square in New York City's Greenwich Village. She had the City teeming around her, she was on the doorstep of world culture, a bohemian paradise filled the view from her windows. Ah! What a place to write, to think, to dream! Yet she's the one who tells us that the source of all our inspiration comes not from these exciting and distracting stimuli, but from the first few years of our lives.

It is amazing the worlds we fit inside our minds. And amazing that this diminutive home of mine can hold them all. Eight feet wide and, bumper to bumper, thirty-one feet long, I'm squeezed inside with New York City, New England, Chicago, San Francisco and all my other story sites. Yet there's room for the four cats and Girlfriend's dog and cat, for Girlfriend herself.

Margaret Anderson edited *The Little Review* one summer in a tent beside Lake Michigan. Carson McCullers had to leave her regular life and move periodically into writers' colonies to weave her lovingly grotesque yarns. From my chair in the front of my two rooms, I can see crisscrossing black tree trunks and branches, leaves and graceful featherings of evergreen needles swaying in the breezes against a backdrop of darkening valley sky. Thomas, my gay male cat whose lover died this time of year two summers ago, comes through the cat door with a "breep," looking appalled at the sight of me occupying His (the only) comfortable chair. He moves to his food and I watch him sing while he eats. I am content.

Monique Wittig wrote for a time on the rocky coast of California; May Sarton, on the craggy coast of Maine. I can sit on my porch to write or just gaze at the bird population, the deer, the occasional skunk or porcupine, the cows in the pasture next door. I built the porch for Sweetpea, my disabled cat. She couldn't make it down the steps to the kitty bathroom, so I brought it up to her. It only seemed logical to extend the porch for human use and it now houses my former living room furniture, has a roof to protect me somewhat from the sometimes brutal sun, and "bamboo" shades to give Girlfriend and me some privacy during daring outdoor cuddles.

Natalie Barney lived on the Rue Jacob in Paris; Marilyn Hacker in a tiny Parisian studio at the end of a flight of countless ancient tiny stairs. Did Barney hang Romaine Brooks' work



Lee Lynch
Amazon Trail

Her lesbian novels have made her name a household word from coast to coast. Lee currently lives in a trailer in the mountains of Southern Oregon.

floor to ceiling in her home? I have little wall space, but Tee Corinne covers the bulk of it. Post card art, of course, is the logical trailer decoration. I've managed a Utrillo flush against the floor under a front room window, a bulletin board of photographs on the wall into which my mini-refrigerator is set. A collage hangs over the plastic toilet, maps line my hallway of closets.

I love the uniqueness of trailer space. The necessity for creative solutions. The efficiency demanded by living in miniature. I'm seated, though, next to built-in shelving in which I've stored cannisters. They are round, with rounded tops. Into the gaps between them I've stuck a grandfather's harmonica that I've been dragging around for twenty years and never learned to play, a folded yardstick I can never find, a stack of canned veggies hoarded for the winter when snow will stop the pass or the bomb will finally fall. Terrible use of space! I need to put in another shelf, or to buy a new set of flat, close-fitting, efficient cannisters at Goodwill.

These challenges make living in a trailer like writing short stories. A novel is roomy, with castle-like spaces, mountaintops from which to view the world, whole islands upon which to set characters roaming. In a short story, Sally the Bartender, Henny the fruit-seller, sober Jefferson must pace a limited world. Every thought and word must count and help to shape the whole. My mind functions best in literature's travel trailers, in housing's short stories. I love having the options to fold my dinner table into the wall, to slide my bedroom door away like some character in a story who only appears in order to move the plot along.

Ann Bannon wrote the Beebo Brinker series partly while typing on her lap in a bathroom, married in suburbia. Valerie Taylor completed *Prism* in a second floor apartment in otherwise unromantic Trumansburg, N.Y. Emily Dickinson wrote her poetry and mooned over her sister-in-law from her bedroom. Presumably there are women everywhere writing their way out of marriage, writing about their lives, writing the love they can express in no other way. Writing on islands of their own making, in the castles of their minds.

Me, I've got this '72 Holiday Rambler named Josephine. She's what's called in the industry "self-contained," a term meant to refer to her plumbing. But self-contained she is, the stomping ground of this dyke's imagination. My rural garret is yet another solution to the poor writers' syndrome, another place a lesbian can seek inspiration, solitude, safety: a Western island in drydock.