

BOOKS

'Cunt' is not a four-letter word

Inga Muscio's *Cunt* aims to salvage a noble word from its ignoble modern associations

BY ORIANA GREEN

In the same way that lesbians have reclaimed "dyke" for friendly usage, Inga Muscio provokes readers to rescue "cunt" from the nasty pile of four-letter words flung at women in hate. As she states in her first book, *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence*, it is "very arguably the most powerful negative word in the American English language."

Perhaps it helps to know the word is derived from "Cunti," the Oriental Great Goddess, the Yoni of the Universe. In fact, "cunt" is not slang, but rather a venerable, ancient word for woman. "We're free to seize a word that was kidnapped and co-opted in a pain-filled, distant past, with a ransom that cost our grandmothers' freedom, children, traditions, pride and land," writes Muscio.

Muscio encourages women to celebrate this anatomic treasure and purge themselves of internalized hate and shame. The author, herself a lesbian, suggests that dykes—with an obvious interest in vaginas—should take the lead in redeeming "cunt" as a powerful and proud word. Muscio also proposes a campaign to invent a female-centric vocabulary for women, much like the grass-roots usage heard at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and other lesbian enclaves.

"Cunt," of course, is most often spat at women by men—men who are perhaps threatened by the supreme power contained therein, Muscio observes. After all, it is from cunts that women bleed and birth and provide sweet release for those penises so inclined. "Cunts are important to men because they generate profits and episodes of ejaculation, and represent the precise point of vulnerability for keeping women divided and thus, conquered," she explains.

Muscio also examines why so many women grow up to hate their lower regions. It starts early, with admonitions not to touch "down there." Then comes the first menstrual cycle—"the curse"—with all the cultural baggage of secrecy and shame. As girls become women and sexual beings, the cunt becomes another part of their anatomy to be compared and stamped with seals of approval, she writes.

The author is also vehement in her hatred of patriarchal medicine and the physicians who treat cunts. Muscio believes women should instead follow their own instincts and work with nature in healing themselves.

One chapter is focused on reproduction control—thankfully not a subject of much concern to lesbians. Nevertheless, the author's story of how she magicked her own miscarriage is quite illuminating for anyone who finds herself unwillingly pregnant. She also includes a chapter on the oldest professional women—prostitutes—asserting that: "I'm consistently reminded I am a potential whore whenever a man is not escorting me."

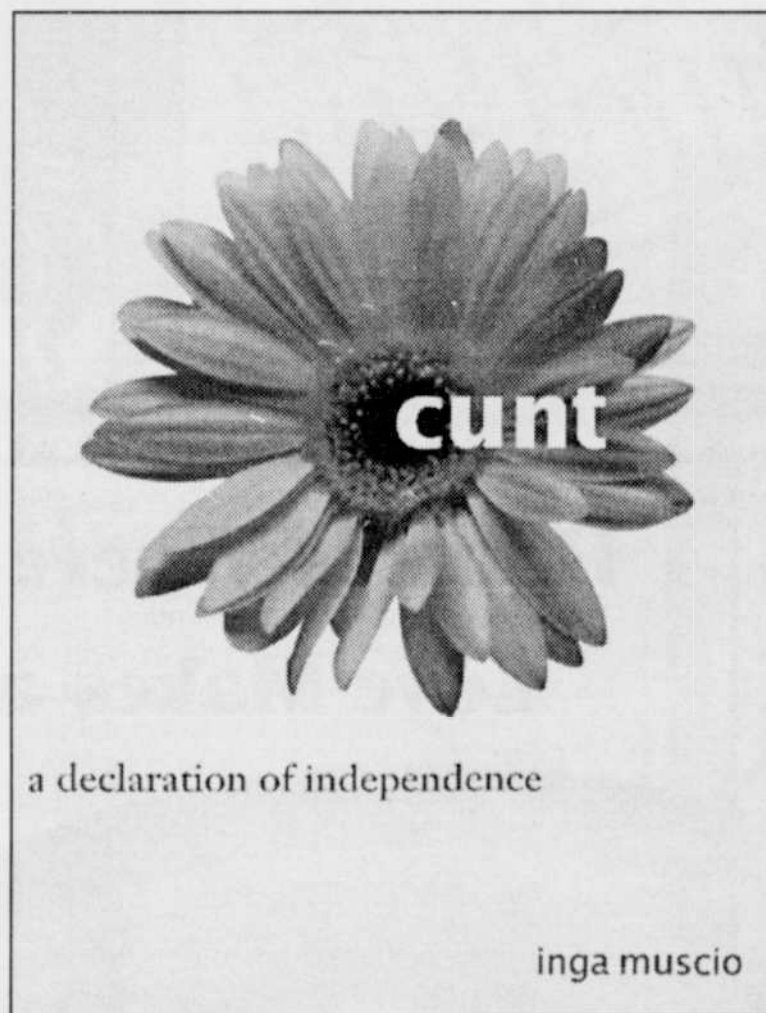
Muscio elaborates upon the sacred roles of prostitutes in other cultures and times. She sees this study as another route to claiming the full sexual power of the cunt, but her in-your-face style is sure to anger some readers: "Mary Magdalene was a Whore and Jesus dug her because

she taught him the most sacred thing a man can ever hope to learn in his lifetime: how to fuck. Stud that he was, Jesus knew to humble himself to this woman."

In a chapter on orgasms and the pleasures of "jilling off" she writes: "As a cunt is infinite—how many bloody mysteries and future generations are hiding up there, somewhere?—so too is the potential for female orgasm."

However, anyone hoping for erotica will be disappointed; this is not a sensual homage. Rather it is a political "womanifesto." Muscio devotes a large section to the ramifications of rape as well as its prevention, urging women to develop extensive self-defense strategies. She also makes readers understand viscerally how the rape of her mother 50 years ago still impacts her life to this day.

Muscio points to men in every culture who have regarded cunts as theirs for the taking as a



sobering reminder that every woman is vulnerable. She further incites her readers to activism by urging boycotts of movies with rape scenes and sounding a call to find creative nonviolent ways to publicly humiliate and punish rapists.

The book winds down with rambling, angry musings on art and economics and how repressed women have been throughout Western civilization—observations made during every prior wave of feminism. In *Cunt*, they are passionately presented again, but with concrete scenarios for chipping away at patriarchal dominance. And though Muscio's authorial voice is quirky and frequently veers into slangy street talk that may not delight all readers, her enthusiasm surely will.

"I decided to love myself," she writes. "To love my cunt. To love everything it does and represents... Cuntlove is about the power of you, your sisters, cousins, daughters and intimate friends... Cuntlove is in your head, on your heart, between your legs."

■ *CUNT: A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE* by Inga Muscio. Seal Press, 1998; \$14.95 paper.

ORIANA GREEN is the author of *Rosie O'Donnell, Her True Story*.

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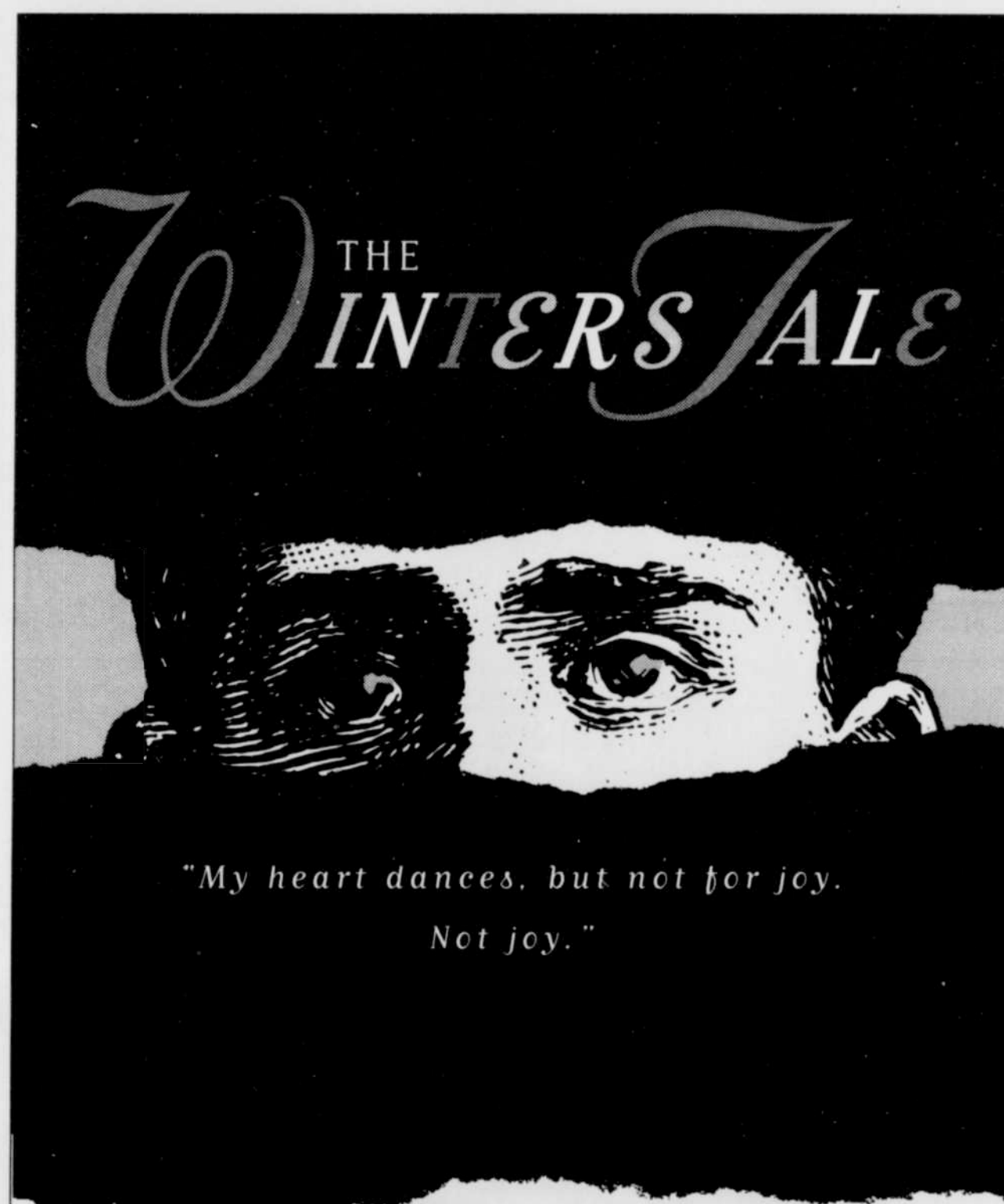


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