


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Puspa Shrestha

Reading

An Open Letter to Mary Daly

Before you read

- What do you know about these female leaders in the pictures?
- How did they establish them as a leader?



Now, read the letter of Audre Lorde and do the given tasks.

Dear Mary,

With a moment of space in this wild and bloody spring, I want to speak the words I have had in mind for you. I had hoped that our paths might cross and we could sit down together and talk, but this has not happened.

I wish you strength and satisfaction in your eventual victory over the repressive forces of the University in Boston. I am glad so many women attended the speak-out, and hope that this show of joined power will make more space for you to grow and be within.

Thank you for having *Gyn/Ecology* sent to me. So much of it is full of import, useful, generative, and provoking. As in *Beyond God The Father*, many of your analyses are strengthening and helpful to me. Therefore, it is because of what you have given to me in the past work that I write this letter to you now, hoping to share with you the benefits of my insights as you have shared the benefits of yours with me.

This letter has been delayed because of my *grave reluctance* to reach out to you, for what I want us to chew upon here is neither easy nor simple. The history of white women who are unable to hear Black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But for me to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, perhaps, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and

sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering and passing beyond, I hope.

I believe in your good faith toward all women, in your vision of a future within which we can all flourish, and in your *commitment* to the hard and often painful work. In this spirit I invite you to a joint clarification of some of the differences which lie between us as a Black and a white woman.

When I started reading *Gyn/Ecology*, I was truly excited by the vision behind your words and nodded my head as you spoke in your first passage of myth and mystification. Your words on the nature and function of the Goddess, as well as the ways in which her face has been obscured, agreed with what I myself have discovered in my searches through African myth/legend/religion for the true nature of old female power.

So I wondered, why doesn't Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western European, Judeo-Christian? Where were Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western European women.

Then I came to the first three chapters of your second passage, and it was obvious that you were dealing with non-European women, but only as victims and prayers upon each other. I began to feel my history and my mythic background distorted by the absence of any images of my foremothers in power. Your inclusion of African genital mutilation was an important and necessary piece in any consideration of female ecology, and too little has been written about it. To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other.

To dismiss our black foremothers may well be to dismiss where European women learned to love. As an African-American woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and trivialized, but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so much touches my own.

When I speak of knowledge, as you know, I am speaking of that dark and true depth which understanding serves, waits upon, and makes accessible through language to ourselves and others. It is this depth within each of us that nurtures vision.

What you excluded from *Gyn/Ecology* dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other non-European women, and denied the real connections that exist between all of us.

It is obvious that you have done a tremendous amount of work for this book. But simply because so little material on non-white female power and symbol exists in white women's words from a radical feminist perspective, to exclude this aspect of connection from even

comment in your work is to deny the fountain of non-European female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is to make a point by choice.

Then, to realize that the only quotations from Black women's words were the ones you used to introduce your chapter on African genital mutilation made me question why you needed to use them at all. For my part, I felt that you had in fact misused my words, utilized them only to testify against myself as a woman of color. For my words which you used were no more, nor less, illustrative of this chapter than "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" or any number of my other poems might have been of many other parts of *Gyn/Ecology*.

So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question.

To me, this feels like another instance of the knowledge, crone-ology and work of women of Color being ghettoized by a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western European frame of reference. Even your words on page 49 of *Gyn/Ecology*, "The strength which Self-centering women find, in finding our background, is our own strength, which we give back to ourselves," have a different ring as we remember the old traditions of power and strength and nurturance found in the female bonding of African women. It is there to be tapped by all women who do not fear the revelation of connection to themselves.

Have you read my work, and the work of other black women, for what it could give you? Or did you hunt through only to find words that would legitimize your chapter on African genital mutilation in the eyes of other Black women? And if so, then why not use our words to legitimize or illustrate the other places where we connect in our being and becoming? If, on the other hand, it was not Black women you were attempting to reach, in what way did our words illustrate your point for white women?

Mary, I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women - the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that nonwhite women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization. I ask that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of black women and other women of color, and how it devalues your own words. This dismissal does not essentially differ from the specialized devaluations that make black women prey, for instance, to the murders even now happening in your own city. When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise.

This dismissal stands as a real block to communication between us. This block makes it far easier to turn away from you completely than to attempt to understand the

thinking behind your choices. Should the next step be war between us, or separation? Assimilation within a solely western European herstory is not acceptable.

Mary, I ask that you remember what is dark and ancient and divine within yourself that aids your speaking. As outsiders, we need each other for support and connection and all the other necessities of living on the borders. But in order to come together we must recognize each other. Yet I feel that since you have so completely un-recognized me, perhaps I have been in error concerning you and no longer recognize you.

I feel you do celebrate differences between white women as a creative force toward change, rather than a reason for misunderstanding and separation. But you fail to recognize that, as women, those differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share and some of which we do not. For instance, surely you know that for nonwhite women in this country, there is an 80 percent fatality rate from breast cancer; three times the number of unnecessary eventrations, hysterectomies and sterilizations as for white women; three times as many chances of being raped, murdered, or assaulted as exist for white women. These are statistical facts, not coincidences nor paranoid fantasies.

Within the community of women, racism is a reality force in my life as it is not in yours. The white women with hoods on in Ohio handing out KKK literature on the street may not like what you have to say, but they will shoot me on sight. (If you and I were to walk into a classroom of women in Dismal Gulch, Alabama, where the only thing they knew about each of us was that we were both Lesbian/Radical/Feminist, you would see exactly what I mean.)

The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know these boundaries. To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference.

For then beyond sisterhood is still racism.

We first met at the MLA panel, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” This letter attempts to break a silence which I had imposed upon myself shortly before that date. I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and **defensiveness**, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. But I would like not to destroy you in my consciousness, not to have to. So as a sister Hag, I ask you to speak to my perceptions.

Whether or not you do, Mary, again I thank you for what I have learned from you.

This letter is in repayment.

In the hands of Afrekete,

Audre Lorde

Working with words

A. Find the words from the text for these meanings. The first letters have been given for you.

- a. r..... unwillingness or disinclination to do something
- b. r..... preventing the expression or awareness of thoughts or desires
- c. m..... the infliction of serious damage on something
- d. g..... restricted to an isolated or segregated place, group, or situation
- e. h..... history viewed from a female or specifically feminist perspective
- f. g..... relating to the human or animal reproductive organs
- g. h..... surgical operations to remove all or part of the uterus
- h. p..... obsessively anxious, suspicious, or mistrustful
- i. e..... thrusting forward of abdominal organs through the abdominal wall

B. Complete the chart.

Verb	Noun	Adjective
		committed
	nurturance	
legitimize		-----
	sterilization	
oppress		
		alluding
	defensiveness	
		victimized

C. Consult a dictionary and define these terms.

racism, lesbian, radical, feminist, patriarchy

D. Underline the consonant clusters in the following sentences.

- a. Fluffy went flip-flop all over the floor.

- b. The whites sing a song about the striking stars.
- c. Here are some flowers and a flask of tea of your favourite flavour.
- d. Smita fell ill with flu.
- e. My friend is frightened of frogs.
- f. Thumbelina stumbled out of the green bush.
- g. She heard a rumble and a cry.
- h. 'Climb up', said Tom.
- i. Freedom needs to be strived for.
- j. Children were munching crunchy French fries.

Comprehension

Answer the following questions.

- a. Why does Audre Lorde think that Mary got a sort of victory in the University of Boston?
- b. Why is Lorde thankful to Mary?
- c. What impression has the writer had about the way white women looked upon black women?
- d. Why did Mary not cast black women as goddesses in her book according to Lorde?
- e. Why did Lorde think that she misused her words?
- f. For Lorde, how were women, especially from the black community, undervalued?
- g. How does Mary take white women as? Does Lorde agree with Mary's view?
- h. What is Afrekete? How does it connect to this lesson?

Critical thinking

- a. "The oppression of women knows no ethnic or racial boundaries." Do you agree or not? Justify with your reasons.
- b. Why is it important to question our beliefs and values? How are they set up in a person's mind?

Writing

- A. Have you ever faced or witnessed cases of racial or sexual discrimination? Write a short account.
- B. Write an article for a national daily on "**The Status of Women in Nepali Society.**"

Grammar

Adjective order

A. Study the following qualifiers used with the word 'house.'

A house

A large house

A large white house

A large old white house

A beautiful large old white house A beautiful large old rectangular white house

B. Choose the correct alternative.

- a. an old foreign car/a foreign old car
- b. a beautiful white dress/ a white beautiful dress
- c. a nice tall young man/a tall nice young man
- d. a big black wooden desk/ a black wooden big desk
- e. a delicious Italian pizza/ an Italian delicious pizza
- f. a huge brown bear/a brown huge bear
- g. a purple cotton sleeping bag/ a cotton purple sleeping bag
- h. a beautiful old Indian village/an old beautiful Indian village
- i. a cute little kitten/ a little cute kitten
- j. an expensive antique /an antique expensive table

C. Put the adjectives in the following sentences in the correct order.

- a. I bought (red/ a /comfortable/new) scooter.
- b. She reached home and sat on (relaxing/old/her/wooden) chair.
- c. We ate (Chinese/delicious/some) food.
- d. I need (golden/delicious/some/round) apples.
- e. We like to live in a (calm/unmediated/remote) place for some time.
- f. She is wearing (silver/beautiful / a(n)/ old) ring.
- g. I am looking for (golden/stylish/a/Japanese) watch.
- h. She dropped (old/china/attractive/a(n)) cup and smashed it.
- i. He wants to marry (young/pretty/educated/a(n)/rustic) girl.
- j. We stayed in a (luxurious/five star/new) hotel in Dubai.

Listening

A. Look at the pictures and answer these questions.

- a. Do you know a person in the pictures?
- b. What is he famous for?



- B. Listen to the speech delivered by Lee Kuan Yew on National Day Rally and match the first halves of the sentences (a-f) with their second halves (A-F). Write the answers in the spaces provided.**

a.	The policies need to be revised	
b.	We need a government	
c.	Lee Kuan Yew suggests the citizens	
d.	The first job of a government is	
e.	The determined groups of men who contributed	
f.	Lee Kuan Yew warns the people	

A.	to equalize opportunities.
B.	to make a different Singapore.
C.	because of the changed circumstances.
D.	not to vote in jokers, cranks, weak men and charlatans.
E.	which must be bold and prudent.
F.	to avoid hypocrisy.

- C. “The government can give the expression to the will of the people, but the people must have that will. If you don’t have it, there’s nothing a government can do.” Do you agree with this Lee Kuan’s opinion? Give your reasons.**

Speaking

Denying

- A. Study the following pieces of conversation and practise how to deny in specific situations.**
- a. An old man is trying to get his heavy bag down from the rack on a train.**
- A: Would you like me to help you?
- B: Thank you for your trouble, but I can manage things.

- b. **After a meeting your boss offers you to drive home, but your friend is picking you up in about 5 minutes.**

Boss: Shall I drive you back home?

You: That's extremely kind of you, but I'm expecting Subash.

- c. **A student is talking with his teacher.**

Student: Madam, can I request you for a thing?

Teacher: Of course, what's that?

Student: Will you please come to my home on Saturday? We're having a big party.

Teacher: What a splendid idea! Thank you. But, I can't because I have to go to Pyuthan on Friday.

- B. **Study some useful expressions for denying.**

No, thank you.

No, really, I can manage. Thanks.

No, it's all alright, really.

No, don't bother, really.

Thank you for offering, but.....

Nice thought, but.....

Please don't trouble yourself about...

I'm afraid I find myself unable to accept your invitation.

- C. **Work in pairs. Have conversations in the following situations.**

- a. You are invited for dinner by your close friend, but you are very busy and cannot attend it.
- b. Somebody offers you a long trip but you are not interested in it.
- c. A friend offers to post a letter for you, but you can quite easily do it yourself.
- d. You are at a party given by an important person. Now it has become very late at night and the host offers you a bed for the night. But you feel you must go home.
- e. You and your parent are at the cinema. It is full inside except for the two seats on either side of an old lady. The lady offers to move so that you may sit together.

Project work

Organize a debate competition on **“The Greatest Power Is not Money Power, but Political Power”** in the class. Invite your English teacher as a judge.