

THE SECOND PRAYER

Glenna Holloway

"Oh, my God," said Dilly, looking at her watch,
"if I'm late again Doug will kill me!"

I took a deep breath and pounced. "So will I if you don't stop taking the Lord's name in vain." I was smiling but I meant business. Dilly was my closest friend. I felt compelled to make her do something about her profanity. I had sidled into the subject once before via discussion of several of the commandments, including the third. And Dilly had tossed her blonde hair and said, "Oh, I'm not even thinking about the real God when I say things like that."

Afterward it seemed she used His name in various forms and combinations even more. She was a professing Christian, too. She should know better. It bothered me terribly.

Another problem was that after hearing profanity and blasphemy at work, at the store, on TV, then having it reinforced on the printed page and by the friend I enjoyed most, it was grooving a track in my head like a recording. Several times it almost slipped off my own tongue before I realized it was there. No doubt it sneaked into Dilly's language the same way.

(cont.)

EXAMINING THE PALIMPSEST

In the privacy of studios, quiet corners and ateliers, women are experimenting and discovering innovative voices with new fervor. Women are nothing if not creative. If not for women's nurture of human imagination and spirit, creativity itself would have withered on the vines of any given era.

Women have always recognized that the arts afforded a door into which even the daintiest foot could be firmly planted. For centuries, music was the most used entrance. It was accessible up to a point, and generally acceptable. A proper woman could play the piano, violin and related instruments, excepting (for years) the cello. And she could sing. Her voice could rise wide-ranging and clear. She could even share in the heady experience of applause. She could do these things without encountering lifted eyebrows or too much unwanted advice. Right up to the day she said aloud

that she wanted to be a composer or conductor. Then she began to feel the back-pushing pressure of men who trained the young people who had such ambitions.

Literature was another route. It was less tainted than theater. But editors and publishers were men who carefully guarded the gates. Few women had the talent required and fewer still had the chance to develop their talent. Some who possessed the necessary ingredients resorted to male pseudonyms to be accepted by both publishers and public. In certain genres, some women still do.

Painting and sculpture of the serious kind once carried a stigma for women who dared it. Even for Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney as late as the 1920's--her social position and wealth notwithstanding, artistic critique was accompanied by criticism. Behind their hands, people whispered that she must be quite familiar with the male forms she sculpted in such detail.

Now at the doorway of the second millenium, women are flexing their artistic muscles as never before. We've had some strong precedents in our lifetime--Leontyne Price, Ayn Rand, Agatha Christie, Gwendolyn Brooks, Georgia O'Keeffe, to name a few--women who

did it their way and made it to the top. Currently, Mona Van Duyn is getting the full treatment and title that was denied Brooks and other female poets for the same duties as consultant to the Library of Congress.

But the list is comparatively short. It isn't entirely fair to blame the male establishment. A great deal of the country's wealth is in the hands of women. According to some reports, women hold the majority of it. Wealth equates with power. But by and large, women haven't risked their wealth or wielded their power on behalf of female artists. They haven't assumed drivers' seats in order to back poetry, painting, photography and other creative disciplines women are pursuing. For women to reach the same rung as men in the rarified world of fine arts, they must not only continue to express themselves on page, canvas and in bronze, they must do so to a greater degree, and they must be--not just good, they must excel.

They must also raise a strong, unified voice to demand funding, awards, foundations, fellowships, patronage and attention from women. For women.

Women of means must become more involved in

selections and committees; they must maneuver for positions on boards, and exercise not only their voices but their purchasing power in favor of their gender.

A fine young portrait artist in my town is beginning to earn her living at it--a rarity for any painter. She's had a number of important commissions from politicians and academics and they have been well-pleased. But when the wife of a prominent businessman wanted "his and hers" portraits for her formal sitting room, she insisted on a male artist and proceeded to visit the studios of several. She did not look at the work of the woman. She paid more than the woman's price for smaller paintings which, reportedly, she does not like.

Everyone knows such examples of female inclination, preference--sometimes called betrayal. Even if the quality is the same or better, some women will opt for the male artist. It's probably the result of a long inbred mindset. An old habit. Like my own aunt who patently rejects female surgeons or ministers. It's another facet of women's problems and one that only women can alleviate. If we as a group, even a partial group, don't think

we're quite up to par with men in areas where we certainly can be, we can't expect the world to think we're equal contenders. Moreover, this has an insidious demoralizing effect on the artists themselves, especially the young, developing ones. They have to find their style, their own voices and niches. They can't begin their careers utterly secure and sure of themselves; they need the encouragement and confidence of their kind.

It is only through this sort of support, the caring and sharing, the mutual generic pride and specific complements/compliments both cerebral and of substance, that women will fully succeed and reach their full potential in a man's world. It will probably always be a man's world. But in the arts, women can establish equality and expand the proof of their excellence. If that sounds sexist-- it surely is. Believe it.