FIRE-RIMMED EDEN:
selected poems by lynn lonidier

edited by julie r. enszer

A Sapphic Classic from
Sinister Wisdom
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>Po tree</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>The Female Freeway</em></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Lesbian Estate</em></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>Woman Explorer</em></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Clitoris Lost</em></td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From <em>The Rhyme Of The Ag-Ed Mariness</em></td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor Note</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Titles</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Encountering the polymorphous, poetic works of Lynn Lonidier for the first time is pleasurable, perplexing, powerful, and, at times, even preposterous. Lesbian-feminism, surrealism, dadaism, the Beats, the deconstruction and remaking of language, and fabulism all inform Lonidier’s poetics. Her poetry engages with big questions about life, myth, the nature of the brain, sex, bodies, dogs, and play, among many other subjects and philosophical musings. Lonidier imagines new formulations of sexuality and gender through feminist and lesbian lenses informed by political analyses that, in recent years, have been deemphasized in feminist theory and history. As a result, Lonidier’s work today has new valence and relevance. Rereading her work—or encountering it for the first time—reminds readers of the power of poetry, particularly when informed by feminism and lesbianism, to recreate, reformulate, deepen, challenge, and reimagine all aspects of life through language.

Lynn Lonidier wrote, edited, curated, and published five collections of poetry during her lifetime; Janine Canan, Lonidier’s friend and poetry comatriot, edited a posthumous collection of her work. *Fire-Rimmed Eden: Selected Poems of Lynn Lonidier* emphasizes her poetry published in these five collections. Lonidier was an artistic polymath, engaged not only in poetry but also music, performance art, and imaginative fiction. Lonidier left behind an extensive creative catalog, much of which is held by the San Francisco Public Library in her archival collection. Lonidier’s creative oeuvre includes a variety of performance art pieces, many documented in her archive, sound projects created with the composer and musician Pauline Oliveros, and seven unpublished novels.

Discovering the poetry of Lynn Lonidier invites readers into the vibrant poetic world of the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.
A variety of poetic movements flourished there, overlapping, nurturing, and amplifying one another. From the Beat poets working out of City Lights bookstore; to feminist poets nurtured by Alta’s Shameless Hussy Press and the Women’s Press Collective among other feminist publishers; from Objectivist- and Black Mountain College-influenced poets to L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets; from radical gay male poets including those centered around Manroot Press (the publisher of two of Lonidier’s books) to the ethnopoetics and performance poetry of Bay Area poets like Jerome Rothenberg and Pat Parker; Lynn Lonidier breathed it all in. A diversity of style, sensibilities, and poetics influenced her work.

Born on April 22, 1937, in Lakeview, Oregon, Lynn Lonidier was the first child of Sampson Bill Lonidier, who was born in Louisiana in 1895 and moved to Oregon to work as a sawyer in sawmills, and Sigrid Francis Brodine, born in 1906 in Spokane, Washington. Sam and Sigrid married in September of 1934, three years before Lynn’s birth. Five years after Lynn’s birth, Sigrid and Sam had a second child, Lynn’s brother, Fred. When Lynn was nine years old, the Lonidiers left Oregon and moved to Oroville, California. Lynn’s earliest artistic expression was music. She played the clarinet in the school marching band and took piano lessons, but she pursued the cello most seriously. A gifted cellist, Lynn often performed with her mother who played both the violin and viola and taught music. Together, Sigrid and Lynn played in the Chico State College Community Symphony Orchestra. Lynn’s teenage years included a variety of musical performances, solo and with her mother, in the Oroville area.

Upon high school graduation, Lynn went first to Chico State College then transferred to San Francisco State which had a renowned writing program. She continued to play cello but increased her pursuit of literary study as well. During her senior year of college, she informed her parents that she was dropping cello in favor of writing poetry; a decision that “broke her father’s heart.” Lonidier graduated with her Bachelor of Arts degree with a teaching credential in June 1960. After graduation, she secured a teaching job in Oroville and moved into “a cheap duplex across the Feather
from

THE FEMALE FREEWAY
The order of some of these poems has been modified from the original book.
ODE TO MISTER MANN

Phaedra & Stepson

Her eyes wet so wonderful had love been Now a hint of the return
While the other’s head is turned as if it will continue there Eyes move in
a atmosphere disturbed

Sound of strata tearing

Sound of strata tearing Rocks breaking apart Phenomena moving upon
stones that lain about the hills make dismantling music Women draw close
their shawls Birds break open the air Unnatural that rocks would
open apart To be dormant is to moan The rocks withdraw from their places
pummel the air Son Orestes daughter Electra plot the thing vengeance
does to itself

All’s a motioning

When woman holds the expression to speak the overhead goes dowsing
It isn’t inability that rubs a finger through her clayness until she’s
slurry in the passages Her voice as not in her face
Her existence depends on your drumming Something you know but feel
restless from Neither love nor the sound of the bed But
the forever reiterating of the proof of the sticks That tapping
louder than fear Rapping on metal is rapping on hand And damage
Amongst the sound of hit silence appears Silence taken for Awe
Sight of you trying to remove that you dwell in the soft of hard
And Been in tears as well
LYNN SIGRID LONIDIER*

Women who include their middle names in the signing of their poems—or a maiden name and husband’s name separated by a dash and a rose brigade await a young bard in the garden to demurely finger with donut-coiled fifth finger the conversation reminiscent of Snow White and the chipmonks SHE: the One-Who-Understands her teacup raised to the sun Bluing toilet bowls while mouthing gods Keeping genius from committing suicide by promising to publish during her menopause a poetry magazine named Twigs Sparrows or Rocks devoted to his work and “any subject but Death and Obscenities” I was seduced by a woman who didn’t want anything but my beating heart upon her sunrise I the swan flapping forth from Leda ‘til Imagery mired in her running lipstick ‘til I swore I’d remain a virgin with a headache

* In the original printing of this poem, the title is handwritten as a signature by the author in both the presentation of the poem on the page and in the table of contents.
THE FLICKERING MOVIE SAID

Women are easy lovers there’s so many of us

Wars have altered men to coffins And so in this parched city Woman has to put up with a lot Not with a lot of men One And she’s lucky to have him divided three ways w/three women until from lack of him he begins to look pathetically more appealing But not in such duress as to lose place as the swift runner through the forest

Sightless of men

Sightless of men Women waits in the dark of the door Basking in the pungency of an evaporated night ‘til next man comes looking like the sun

Reel

Woman Receive this Lot His cuff this slap Anyone would if there were less of them and more of Thee I don’t believe in fate A woman is good because she has to be Times are Spartan Women devoured of substance can’t cry nor peel their sight on the Klondike a hundred years ago 90 men to one woman Or concoct nowadays statistics to ease awareness that desirability is eligibility That far-down list where one begins to know the plight of the perennially hungry The personal poem
MENSTRUAL

A week before the flow houses continually adjust in my eyes to the rain Hills are light enough so I can see the blood up me Windows have lights on and are at yesterday Two people in a room One pushes up against a window one whose eys* go ardent on the wall Actors act at me In slowing notion of blood and body I wearily know you from my jargon of glands your feet stuffed into your socks

NEW DESCENDING

Do not celebrate the floating form Woman Pliancy in the black waters’ wars We don’t belong We are the display thrown above the noise Meant for stairs to descend beautifully Anemonously With breasts floating the nipple end of ourselves extended toward opening Unfurling a July 4 Men fear us Our forms Keep us subterrestrially peeking out from houses We lend ourselves to air Are the silent part of fireworks While Death goes on over heads Men indulge in each other lie Women survive sorely Midst doors

* This error is in the original text.
River in the unincorporated area, Thermalet." She taught there for three years then moved to San Francisco to immerse herself in the poetry, music, and art scene. During the early 1960s, Lonidier published her poetry in a variety of journals including *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Husk*, *Stolen Paper Review*, *Fiddlehead*, *Evergreen*, *San Francisco Review*, *Signet*, and *The Galley Sail Review*. In addition to publication, Lonidier also won a few literary awards.

While living in the Bay Area, Lonidier met Pauline Oliveros, a composer of electronic music and a professor at Mills College. The two became lovers and together performed Oliveros’s music, often with Lonidier playing the cello or performing poetry and sound scapes in conjunction with Oliveros’s original compositions. Oliveros bought Lonidier a Super 8 Beaulieu camera that she used frequently. During this period, Lonidier also created a multimedia film, video, and sound piece, *Owed to Oakland*. In 1967, Oliveros accepted a job at the University of California, San Diego and bought a house in Leucadia. Lonidier moved there with Oliveros. During this period, Lonidier and Oliveros performed music with the Wong sisters, Betty and Shirley, and the Wongs provided the illustrations for Lonidier’s first poetry collection, *Po Tree*. While Oliveros was out as a lesbian later when Lonidier was corresponding with Barbara Grier in the 1960s, she did not want Grier to mention anything about the fact that the two lived together. Oliveros and Lonidier broke up in the early part of 1970; Oliveros fell in love with a student in the MA program, also a cellist, Lin Baron. Baron and Oliveros wed on July 4, 1970, in a seaside event orchestrated by Lonidier and covered by Jill Johnston for the *Village Voice*. Amid these activities, Lonidier performed as a “light-optics artist” at the Electric Circus in New York City, 1969, and the World’s Fair in Japan in 1970. Shortly after the Oliveros-Baron wedding, Lonidier moved back to the Bay Area, then to Seattle, Washington, to pursue an audio-visual MA at the University of Washington.

After completing her master’s degree, Lonidier returned to San Francisco. When her mother decided to move into a subsidized senior housing complex in Seattle and sold her home, she gave the proceeds of her house to Lynn and her brother Fred; Fred, in turn, gave his share of the proceeds to Lynn in thanks for the times that Lynn provided him with housing and food while he attended college. With that money, Lonidier
bought a home at 76 Gladys Street in San Francisco. This move began a fertile period for her. She read and performed her poetry using slide, opaque, and overhead projections. Lonidier became involved with the founding of the San Francisco Women's Building; a project she worked on for two years. She performed with a group of women artists call “Avant Garden” and received a California Arts Council grant to teach performance at The Women’s Building. She also began publishing her work actively with the feminist press. Barbara Grier accepted a selection of twelve poems from Lonidier for *The Ladder* in 1970; some of these poems were reprinted in the Diana Press anthologies. She published work in *Manroot* magazine in 1971 as well as *Women in Revolution* and *Tres Femmes*, two other independent journals. During the 1970s, she published two broadsided, “A Jellyfish Swim” with Tenth Muse in 1972 and “For Sale Girl Poet Cheap” in 1977 with Manroot. In the mid-1970s, Lonidier traveled to Mexico; that trip provided the foundation for her collection *Woman Explorer*. In total during the 1970s, Lonidier published three poetry collections, *The Female Freeway*, *A Lesbian Estate*, and *Woman Explorer*.

Lonidier also found reliable work in the California Poets in the Schools program visiting schools throughout the Bay Area. Eventually, she found a teaching job at an elementary school in San Francisco’s multicultural Mission District, where she also was a member of the Mission Alliance for Popular Culture. Throughout the 1980s, Lonidier worked as an elementary school teacher. Her brother Fred noted her commitment to working with young children who “in her view, had not yet been squeezed into conformity by the adult world and still had the creativity with which she enjoyed working.”

While conditions for lesbians and gay men teaching in elementary and secondary schools were better in the San Francisco area than in other parts of the United States, concerns about being out or being discovered to be queer were uppermost in people’s minds. Although the Briggs Amendment failed in 1978, its effort to prevent lesbians and gay men from teaching in California public schools cast a pall on teachers and educators, especially combined with the rampant homophobia that characterized the 1980s as the community responded to the AIDS crisis and the homophobia of the Reagan and Bush administrations. Consequently, Lynn Lonidier, who was out as a lesbian, used the name Lynn Sommers as a teacher. In addition to
this material reality, fiscal crises in the state of California and nation-wide affected California teachers. Lonidier writes about the material realities of teaching in some of her poems, particularly, “Teaching the 5 Sentences” and “Mountain Sickness” in Clitoris Lost. The extensive archives on teaching in her collection at the San Francisco Public Library demonstrate the seriousness with which Lonidier approached her job in education and her effectiveness as a teacher. In spite of her professionalism, she encountered problems at work; some issues are illuminated in poems from Clitoris Lost such as “Exercise for English Teachers,” “Owed to Joy,” and “Anarchist Working Dream.” In 1990, Lynn received a pink slip from the San Francisco school district; the pink slip was a part of the theatrics of the school district in an effort to reverse funding cuts. Lynn was rehired, but the pink slip, in combination with Ilse Kornreich’s rejection of her romantic advances, prompted despair for Lynn and her first suicide attempt. She drove to south to Santa Cruz and jumped off a cliff above the shore.

She was hospitalized after this suicide attempt and released, but her brother Fred notes that she “was a very changed person.” She returned to teaching but had “a very stiff personality in contrast with the very outgoing and warm person [she had been] before.” In addition, she “became less social and could not write at all for quite a while.” Lynn never recovered from depression. In May of 1993, she attempted suicide again by taking sleeping pills while lying out on the beach. Bystanders noticed something was wrong and called 911; she was taken to the hospital. A day later, she discharged herself, took a taxi back to the beach, and jumped off a cliff in San Francisco to her death on May 18, 1993. She was fifty-six years old.

A memorial service was held on Sunday, September 12, 1993, at The Women’s Building in San Francisco. It featured music performed by Astor Piazzolla, Peter Frantzel, Betty and Shirley Wong, and the Japanese Temple Gongs; Adelle and Jack Foley, Noni Howard, Allie Light, Judy Grahn, Beverly Dahlen, Mary Mackey, Mary Norbert Korte, Clive Matson, and Paul Mariah made remarks at the service celebrating the life of the poet and ancient mariness.

In the years since her death, Lonidier’s work has slipped into obscurity. She published exclusively with alternative presses in the Bay Area which unfortunately meant that her work eventually fell out of print and out of
Fire-Rimmed Eden includes the full reproduction of two books which might be regarded as Lonidier's master works: *A Lesbian Estate* and *Clitoris Lost*. The other collections, *Po Tree*, Lonidier's first book, published in 1967; *The Female Freeway*, published in 1970; *Woman Explorer*, published in 1979; and the post-humous collection, *The Rhyme of the Ag-ed Mariness*, are represented with selections. The selected poems demonstrate the ways that Lonidier interrogated gender and sexuality as well as present the breadth of her work.

This selection of Lonidier's poetry for *Fire-Rimmed Eden* reflects a variety of goals. First, it profiles Lonidier's eclectic engagements. Lonidier as a figure invites new readings of a variety of poetic movements inflected by gender and sexuality. New engagements are particularly important where the histories of different poetic movements has been denuded of sex and gender analyses. Second, the volume is accessible and manageable for readers. While my desire is always for comprehensive collections of poet's work in order to trace their many paths of intellectual and poetic engagement, readers value a carefully curated selection enabling them to enter the work and guiding them through it. Third, *Fire-Rimmed Eden* highlights questions of sexuality and gender in Lonidier's work. Attention to gender and sexuality is one of the crucial foundations of Lonidier's work, and it informs new understandings of other poetic movements. At the same time, Lonidier's work also invites new readings of feminist and lesbian poets, particularly how their work engaged with other avant-garde movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Lonidier's poetry offers new
Cover of *A Lesbian Estate* by Lynn Lonidier. The cover is a collage mural designed by Jess that wraps around the front and back of the book.
The order of some of these poems has been modified from the original book.
I HEAR YOU GUARDED TWO-SEX
SAY MY NAME

A-frame

It is a mistake these varicose veins and fat tempting to
pinch off the backs of the legs fat/as on a chicken cooking
The same legs that fit like a wishbone over the pinto pony the man
led around to take children’s pictures TinT job of The War years:
Hair yellow eyes hazel lips red complexion pink Say “CHEESE”
Summers’s and winters’s lost count held by Kodak Company’s XX border
with fold-back tab A triangle the mother placed on the mauve
buffet A 30 years’ body of exposure to hair and skin and emotions
unknown to itself The cardboard learning of the alphabet The feeling
of a great hulk of pointed head Legs set at weird angles to the
earth Sex obliterated by a straight line
The little girl who got a gold star
for letting the red-haired Sunday School
teacher with pince-nez look pave
the flames of Hell in her three Sundays
in a row is the same little angel face reading about
hermaphrodites Sunday morning January 18 1970

* In the original printing of the book, this page contains the dedication “For Merrille”
and a line drawing representative of flowers and snail shells.
There is god there is man and there are monsters

When my hermaphrodite meets your hermaphrodite the 3rd hermaphrodite
the one with two arms two legs and two heads erupting salamanders out
its sex lets all creatures under earth and a kettle of fish
up under hags’ skirts

When my hermaphrodite meets your hermaphrodite the sun and moon
play tricks on a toad: A rock is a cone A dove is a bone
A thorn is a pope blood is the road a rose is a
robe is a stone

Where witches walk beasts and bad smells are let out the shadows
of their centipede rags hoop snakes tails in mouths jump out
of their skirts roll uphill scarin’ the slithers out of villagers
The villagers scatter like stars

When my hermaphrodite meets your hermaphrodite hermaphrodite will
turn from hermaphrodite (body kiss of body) Heaven turn around
and song stand still when Hermaphrodite Your meets Hermaphrodite
My

Uroboros*

Your hermaphrodite is a breastplate with nine big tits down the side
of Zeus Carl Jung in armor The shining might of the Myth of the
ani-Ma and ani-Moose

My hermaphrodite is a young boy initiated into manhood by taking
a woman’s dress off him
Your hermaphrodite is the same boyhood finalized by putting on male
attire never before touched by woman
My hermaphrodite was a disease lowered by umbilicus into

* This word, an ancient symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail, is surrounded
by a hand-drawn serpent eating its own tail.
the sea the boat maneuvered to deep waters where the cord was cut
so the blood of a hermaphrodite wouldn’t pollute shore
Your hermaphrodite is the head removed from an Greek hermaphrodite
the sex of whose head is impossible to tell as were thousands of
such heads of statues

My hermaphrodite was an abandoned baby found by a shepherd and raised
as a boy until he started menstruating and his chest grew moons
The shepherd took the boy to the village Ropes were slipped over
the confused youth Wood and leaves were heaped upon him And set
afire
Your hermaphrodite women bring flowers to men erect temples for
Men and women exchanging clothing in the shadow of the phallic
altar erected by men brought flowers to by women

My hermaphrodite will bleed to death in a ward full of tangled organs
if (an half)a man(half a) woman isn’t/ separated/ by/ the/ sterile/
implements of Man
Your hermaphrodite has a woman’s breasts and a man’s penis covered
by The Lady Museum’s Restoration League and uncovered by The Museum
Friends’ Society That the school teacher in quest of Art hurries
her tittering charges out of the room of

My hermaphrodite is half Don Quixote half windmill I a woman
attending a Women’s Liberation meeting wearing a man’s mask flying
a witches’ flag over my crotch The women wouldn’t let me in
the door I a member of W.I.T.C.H. The Women’s International
Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell*

* W.I.T.C.H was a name adopted by a variety of independent, feminist, direct action
groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of these groups made public dem-
onstrations to raise awareness about sexism. As was the tradition for many feminist
formations at that time, membership was by declaration and affiliation. For more in-
formation about W.I.T.C.H., see Jo Freeman’s article, photographs, and graphics about
W.I.T.C.H. (available at JoFreeman.com) and Alice Echols’s book, *Daring to Be Bad Rad-
A case

Leave the hermaphrodite where one of the few authentic maidenheads left on reserve won't let you at the hermaphrodites in l. c. meaning “locked case” unless you are an doctor an psychologist or charmed to pass through glass and wood How I got in

Leave the snakeous unction of organs vulgarized in an surgical diagram like an stomach speaking in an dream Leave the sacred sack all of nature folded and tucked like His/Her lingerie into so little space compounded in an suitcase bobbing along an terminal conveyor of lost revolving and unclaimed tenderness

Leave the hermaphrodite to suffer severe abdominal pains from a undescended testicle Probe the one gonad which on microscopic examination proves to be an testis Dissect labial folds fused posteriously concealing between them anteriorly an phallus five centimeters long Apply scalpel and scribble in the unknown: Urethra complete patient married coitus normal

Leave the hermaphrodite without clothes on her shoulder blades hooked over the height chart Tell her to look straight into an camera so large it is an room full of negative pronouncements: An female with receding hairline increase of muscle deepening voice and no breast development I say female because prior to operation she stole lowcut sweaters from I. Magnin's*

The wish to be both sexes

The mythological figure Tiresias came upon two snakes copulating He hence turned into Joan of Arc who wore men’s clothing against judges When ordered burned Tiresias again saw two snakes

* I. Magnin & Company was a west-coast luxury department store.