

## In Memory of Lila Karp, 1933-2008

**" . . . that your stern death broke in upon us, darkly,  
wrenching the till-then from the ever-since—  
this concerns us: setting it all in order  
is the task we have continually before us. . . ."  
Rilke, from "Requiem for a Friend"**

The announcement has gone out. Many of you have read about it on our web site or heard from friends that our beloved B.A. teacher Lila Karp died on Monday, September 15, of cancer. Lila had a wide and passionate following among our students and alumni as well as faculty and staff. And for all of us who are left grieving this loss, may it be known that one of the most radiant lights in the B.A. orbit has gone out, though her sparks remain in the many students and friends she inspired with her brilliance and in the works that endure.

One of those works is her novel, *The Queen is in the Garbage*, originally published in 1969 and reissued last year by The Feminist Press in their Classic Feminist Writers Series. Despite the struggle with her illness, Lila gave readings in New York and Los Angeles, including a book party the B.A. Program hosted at Antioch in August 2007. Scores of Lila's long-time friends and admirers attending this event were treated to a sampling of Lila's gifts as a creative writer in a type of fiction that she pioneered, a woman's autobiographical story of coming to awareness of her marginalized status in the world and courageous struggle to throw off the shackles. The 1970s saw a floodtide of such stories, but Lila's novel was among the first that hit a nerve for its firebrand challenge to the sexist status quo.

Lila wrote this book while living in London in the 1960s where she teamed up with avant-garde artists and intellectuals and plunged into a life-long engagement with the works of Simone de Beauvoir, in particular *The Second Sex*. When she returned to New York in 1969, it was Beauvoir's prescient statement of the social construction of gender – "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" – that drew Lila into the early cadre of feminist theoreticians and activists who called themselves The Feminists: Kate Millet, Flo Kennedy, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Margo Jefferson, Lila Karp. A documentary film *SOME AMERICAN FEMINISTS*, made in 1977 for the National Canadian Film Board, captures Lila and her fellow revolutionaries delivering speeches and manifestoes during those heady years when overthrowing the patriarchy seemed within our grasp. In 2006 a profile of Lila appeared in the book *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*.

During the 1970s, Lila turned her pioneering energy on the field of women's studies, which was then in its infancy. Armed with an M.S. degree in Education from Syracuse and rich practitioner experience, she received an appointment as visiting professor in 1971 at Bryn Mawr College where she taught their first women's literature course at a time when such courses were first being introduced into college curricula. At the State University of New York at New Paltz, she offered a course on the sociology of women's literature. At SUNY and at Princeton, where she served as director of the University Women's Center, Lila fought against entrenched interests to advocate for programs in Women's Studies, as she describes in her paper, "Women's Studies: Fear and Loathing in the Ivy League," delivered at the National Women's Studies Association meeting in 1979.

Transplanted to southern California in the 1980s, Lila continued to teach in Women's Studies Programs at California State University at Northridge and at the University of Southern California. In 1991 she was appointed co-director of The Institute for the Study of Women and Men at U.S.C. The courses and workshops Lila taught in the B.A. Program dating back to Spring 1988 included, among others, Transforming Literature into Film: Women Novelists and the Male Cinematic Gaze; Simone de Beauvoir: Life and Works; Psychology of Women in Literature and Film; Feminism and Existentialism. After earning her M.A. in Clinical Psychology at Antioch in 1996 and beginning her private practice as a feminist psychotherapist, Lila began teaching Existentialism, Psychotherapy, and Irvin Yalom; Bibliotherapy; The Psychology of Aging as Viewed Through a Literary Lens; and other psychology courses. Lila's students invariably responded to her teaching and her courses with superlatives because she challenged and

stretched them in ways that left them transformed. That Lila could be ferocious in demanding that students think for themselves was part of her legend and her allure.

When we decided to offer a set of courses in Summer 2008 commemorating the 40th anniversary of the summer of 1968, there was no question, but that Lila would be invited to teach a workshop on the History of the American Feminist Movement that she herself embodied. This workshop, which took place on July 19, turned out to be Lila's farewell appearance at Antioch, for which she rallied herself brilliantly by all accounts. It now seems sadly perfect that Lila completed her teaching career at Antioch by sharing her story of a movement that forged her identity and the activism for which she will long be remembered.

There will be an official event to celebrate the life of Lila Karp, but we don't yet know exactly when it will take place as those closest to Lila are still processing the shock and grief. As details emerge, an announcement will be posted on campus and on our web site. In the meantime, our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Renos Mandis, Lila's longtime companion with whom she shared a beautiful and enduring bond. And finally to our cherished Lila, who loved literature as I do, here are the words Prospero spoke to the sprite Ariel in the moment of his release from earthly bondage: "Then to the elements be free, and fare thou well."

In sadness and mourning,  
Kirsten Grimstad  
Chair, B.A. in Liberal Studies