

ISSUE 7

Natural Selection

ISSUE 7

Natural Selection

Guest Editors:

Judy Darragh
judydarragh@xtra.co.nz
Fiona Gillmore
fionagillmore@yahoo.co.nz
Louise Menzies
louisemenzies@gmail.com

Editors

Gwynneth Porter
Dan Arps
editors@naturalselection.org.nz

Proof readers

Debra Orum
Hanna Scott
Victoria Passau

Guest Designer

Fiona Gillmore

Designer

Warren Olds
warren@naturalselection.org.nz

Subscribe for free at

www.naturalselection.org.nz

Many thanks

Gwyn, Dan and Warren for letting us do this!
All our contributors for making such a hot issue,
S/F, and our amazing proof readers who gave up
a whole heap of their time and eyesight for us.

ISSN 1176-6808

Fiona Gillmore: While I was in my final year of Masters, in 2008, I went through a semi-obnoxious period (I was obviously single at the time), where I felt really annoyed at certain differences between what women and men can get away with, and I remember having a conversation about the word 'rogue' – the fact that there was this word for a loveable arrogant guy who could be off doing whatever, being with lots of different people... acting badly, but getting away with it, but that the equivalent idea didn't exist for a woman.

Louise Menzies: Is a rogue like a cad?

FG: Yeah but I see a rogue as a type of good naughty.

LM: A womanizer who gets away with it?

FG: Ha, ha, no. He's not necessarily a womaniser. He could be, but I kind of see it more as this allowance to be cheeky and arrogant, and get away with it.

LM: Is XXXXXXXX a rogue?

FG: No XXXXXXXX isn't a rogue... Um let me think of a rogue.

LM: ZZZZZZZZ?

(laughter)

FG: No he's not a rogue. He's quite cheeky, though, and he's reasonably arrogant, but he's a gentleman at the same time.

LM: A rogue isn't a gentleman?

FG: Uhhh... God... I'm trying to think of a good one....

LM: YYYYYYYYY?

FG: No, he's not smart enough to be a rogue! But you're right, he's close.

(laughter)

FG: VVVVVVVV's a good rogue actually. He's very smart and he seems to get away with being quite arrogant.

LM: So it's about it being confident and arrogant and charming.

Judy Darragh: Charming. Very important.

FG: But someone who also does some pretty shitty stuff and gets away with it cause he is confident and arrogant and charming.

FG: Um, I wish I could think of someone famous that we could actually use or someone that everyone knows. Oh, I know, HHHHHHHH is kind of like a rogue. So, you know, he does bad shit but people still love him.

JD: They're always loveable too, aren't they?

FG: And he does kind of do the dirty on people or whatever, but it's allowable somehow. And somehow he gets the ladies as well. So maybe he's a good example. Well, sort of. I mean, he's not attractive to me, but anyway. So I got really annoyed, about this situation... and at one

point, I ended up in Allan Smith's office one day being pissed off about the fact that I couldn't think of any female equivalent for a rogue.

If you start with the sexual comparison there's the 'wanton woman' or words like 'slut' or 'whore'... 'hussy'... 'slag', 'trollop'. But there isn't actually anything that even comes close to an approximation for 'rogue'.

LM: That also includes a being self-assured, charming, arrogant, confident, and what was the other word?

JD: Cheeky.

LM: Let's not forget smart.

FG: Yeah, so, I'm still looking for it, a word for a woman that's like these things.

I thought that this would all be a really great kind of idea for an article and so when we came to think about people that we wanted to be involved, that was my first thought and (as is my sense of humour) I thought that he could write under the name of Ellen, with an E rather than an A. Part of it was that I thought let's not be precious about the discussion of what it meant to be a woman, or you know just a slightness rather than a heavy handedness.

For me, and this is how I think about it, how can you have an interesting conversation, when maybe the opposite spectrum of the same idea isn't it the same room? To me it would just make it so much more interesting and I think that was where I was coming from with having Allan in there...I guess it's more of an open question mark but for me it was really important to have that open question mark because that seemed to be missing from the previous conversation of Feminism. Either that or some sense of friction, or just the ability to open the conversation up a bit more...

Once we started to talk about him contributing to the magazine though, the discussion moved on from that initial enquiry, and he became interested in writing something different, and, for me, I'd moved on from the fact that he was male and that might have qualified his article somewhat. So, it was through the course of conversation, that his piece turned into what it was. It wasn't a direct discussion on the gender of language anymore.

LM: Is this idea still unresolved for you? Obviously all of us are capable of being a bit like a rogue and it's fine, but there's still a lack of that word. What do you think about that now? I still love the idea of that article, Allan writing about rogues.

FG: Yeah I think it constantly bugs me. Especially when I'm around some of my quite strongly opinionated male friends....

JD: I know what the word is.

FG: What?

JD: It's Fiona.

(a lot of laughter)

JD: This talks about a lot of other things as well. I think the fact we are looking for a word to describe this person that we haven't got in our language is a lot of what the text and images that we've got in this magazine is... I think there's a lot of searching going on, in what we're trying to do, or describe, or discover, through words and labels and images and descriptions....

FG: And so it's bringing to mind, how do you keep a conversation going when you don't necessarily just want to have it happening in the black and white? You know, like I don't necessarily want to have a conversation about, say, my situation at work, specifically being a woman at work, because that already divides me, but I still want change to happen.

LM: Yeah, it's hard to get somewhere, just by saying this shit sucks.

JD: So why all these women?

LM: We'd been talking for a while about possible projects, hadn't we? There was an interest to work together, to find an outlet for some of the things we were all interested in...things which focused, in a way, around representation.

JD: It all started with conversation didn't it? It's an ongoing need really isn't it? To talk about where women sit, where women's work or women's voices sit generally in a lots of things; in the arts and beyond. It's often something that comes up when I get together with other women. It's always something you end up talking about. I think the point was to naturalise something, wasn't it? Not necessarily to make a direct point.... We talked a lot about feminism and where that exists now and how that performs.....Is it still a dirty word?

FG: One of my problems with the first wave of Feminism, was that it didn't seem critical in terms of the work ... and I didn't like 'feminist' the word, because it seemed really exclusive and not in a good way. I mean this is speaking in total broad strokes, but it just seemed like if you were a woman making art then that was great. I think Feminism needed to happen the way it did, but we need to rethink it now. It needs to be in context..and I think conversation is a good way to do it. A dialogue, rather than a monologue, around women making work.

LM: So how do you find a culture around what making work as a woman might be? How do you find a way to express that or talk about it? I think my sense of what would happen if you made an issue expressly with women was a way to keep thinking about these kinds of questions. Would there be a quality that doesn't come through in other contexts or under other conditions? I can't say I was sure what to expect.

LM: What's it like if you don't have to focus on the difference? What's it like if you just make a project that is just trying to express something, in a less conscious way? I remember thinking that the magazine could be like making a group show, that it might be just about getting people to make work, and so our approach was to ask people to either respond to the invitation directly or to share what they were working on at the moment. I guess from my perspective I just wanted to see what was going to come out of that and for it not to have any polemic to it.

JD: I think the conversation has to continue because that's how you change things. If you don't talk, then nothing happens, but if you talk about things, if you keep talking, that's how things change.

LM: Community.

JD: Yeah! That dirty word. That used to be a dirty word in the eighties. Community.

FG: I'm not very good at community though.

(laughter)

LM: Why aren't you good? Don't you stay in touch with your friends?

FG: Ha ha, no. I totally stay in touch. I just don't network very well whatsoever. I work very well in terms of close connections, you know, like on this kind of project, but I'm not a net worker. I'm definitely not as good at networking as lots of people that I know.

JD: But this a tradition of sorts, isn't it? Of women supporting communities with unpaid labour, and all that kind of thing, like, I don't know, I find myself at the school all the time helping out, doing lots of stuff which is mostly done by women. All the mums are there helping out, you know, 'cause in part that's our position.

What I'd just like to think is that we've contributed something further with this, that we've continued the conversation. We need to keep very aware all the time of our position and what is changing around us, economically, politically. I think you always have to be aware of your position, if you like, and to speak from it.