

FD, Coletta 1, 1
March 18, 1978

Sisters:

The following is an account of my relationship with Diana Press, Inc., both before and during the time I was under contract with them for the publication of my first novel, Seed of a Woman. I reconstruct this history from my file of letters, and notes on phone calls.

In July, 1973, Coletta Reid first contacted me regarding Diana Press' publishing my novel. When the novel was completed I sent it to them, and in August, 1976, Coletta wrote to me accepting my manuscript, stating the basic points of the contract: the copyright would be in my name, and I would receive 50% of a profit-sharing arrangement. In order for the publication date to be April, 1977, they told me they had to receive the rewritten manuscript by December 1st; and all that fall I rewrote, working according to their criticisms, and without a formal contract.

The months went by and I received no contract. When I questioned Coletta, she explained that the delay was because they were writing a special contract for me, one avoiding legalistic terms the average woman could not understand. I was concerned about maintaining control over subsidiary rights (i.e.: possible future adaptations) and when I questioned her, she responded that the copyright would be in my name. What I did not know then was that this was irrelevant: the copyright can be in your name and you can have no control over subsidiary rights. She said that the contract would be a simple one, and I need not hire an attorney.

The contract arrived in mid-November. It was a legalistic form contract, and did not conform to the agreed upon points, for example: the share of proceeds would be divided 50% to publisher, 40% to author, and 10% to cover illustrator, presumably an in-house artist. The subsidiary clause read in part: "The publisher shall maintain responsibility for the disposition of all subsidiary rights... In the event of a sale, the publisher will submit copies of the contract to the author for approval and such approval shall not be unreasonably withheld or delayed..." (italics mine). This would have given them virtual control to the future rights of the book. In addition, subsidiary proceeds were to be divided 40/60, the larger share going to the publisher. Another clause read: "The Author agrees to give the Publisher the first option of her next fiction manuscript. The Author shall not withhold her signature from any reasonable contract." (italics mine) This would have locked me into a future relationship with Diana Press in which I had little, if any, negotiating control.

At that point I hired an attorney. She reviewed the contract, not only confirming my fears about what I was able to understand, but pointing out the extremely unfavorable terms in other clauses. My attorney suggested I renegotiate the contract, and I instructed her to base this renegotiation on my verbal agreement with Coletta Reid. For example, I had agreed to pay 100% of all fees for copyrighted music performances for the four songs quoted in the novel, and I did not want this renegotiated, desiring to indicate to Diana Press that I was acting in good faith, and would not back down on my word.

The new contract was signed, and I complied with my responsibility, which was to deliver to them the completed manuscript. The book was originally due to be published in April, 1977. The winter months wore on, and I heard nothing from them. I called numerous times, either connecting with a recording machine, or a human being who had never heard of either me or my novel. Before and after sending me the galleys, they responded to none of my messages. On March 3, 1977, I got a recording giving me their new phone number, area code 415. That was how I learned they had moved from Maryland to California. April passed, and my book was not published.

Finally, on July 18, 1977, I sent a registered letter expressing my deep frustration at their irresponsibility in communication, and disregard of contract (i.e.: according to contract, they were to have sent me cover suggestions by January 1. As of July, I had received nothing). I demanded to be informed about publication date, cover, verification of galley corrections and publicity.

On August 10, Elizabeth D'Alessio signed for my letter. I received a letter from her postmarked August 11, but dated July 26. It accompanied a brochure of Diana Press' Fall 1977 publications, in which my novel was advertised. Her letter neither referred to mine, nor answered one point I had raised. It ended: "Is a visit west in your plans? We'd love for you to see the shop. It is beautiful. Everyone here is doing well. I hope it's the same with you."

Next, I received a letter postmarked August 25 but dated August 15. It began: "We just received your letter." It was from Laura Kay Brown, who was henceforth to be my contact with Diana Press. Our relationship appeared to improve temporarily. She wrote that the publication date would be "a date no later than October 31, 1977."

At the end of September, 1977, I received a bound copy of Seed of a Woman. Copies, Laura told me, had been sent to paperback houses for reprint considerations, and to reviewers. When my attorney saw the book, she pointed out that the copyright was in the name of R.S. Geller and Diana Press, which was a direct contradiction to the terms of the written agreement. When I pointed this out to Laura Brown, she gave no satisfactory explanation as to why copyright had been jointly placed. Given the situation, I requested that Diana Press send a final copy of the book prior to publication. She refused.

At the end of October, Laura Brown went to New York City, as she stated, to do publicity for my novel. She was then to come to Buffalo so that we could hopefully clear up some of the problems. On October 26, 1977, five days before the publication date, she called from New York and told me of the attack on Diana Press. On October 28, she called again to inform me that the destruction was quite extensive, and my type-setting plates had been destroyed. She said that although Diana Press was insured, they were unsure as to when they could reschedule my novel for publication. At one point in the conversation, she suggested I might look for another publisher. When I expressed anger at her offhand manner, she replied: "I don't like your attitude." She reassured me that she would definitely come to Buffalo.

I was distraught. I was desperate for more information, but assumed that Diana's phones had been destroyed. Not knowing who else to call, I phoned the Oakland police. After speaking to the investigating officer, I realized that the destruction was selective, and their phones might in fact be working.

I phoned Diana Press, and spoke to a woman who identified herself as Ann Bernard. She said that while the destruction was quite bad, the loss would be covered by insurance money. She said that they had already begun type-setting anew, and there would probably be only a three week delay on my novel. The conversation was very amiable, and I was greatly encouraged that Diana Press and I would resolve any existing problems. I offered my sympathy and support, and asked her to convey this to the rest of the women at Diana Press.

That was the last personal contact I had with anyone from Diana Press. Laura Brown never came to Buffalo, and in mid-November, Diana Press sent back my manuscript along with a letter from Laura Brown that stated they could not publish my novel at this time due to the vandalism of the press. The letter ended: "...I know that we would have difficulty making the situation of working with you possible in the future based on our knowledge of your total and complete lack of trust for the women of Diana Press. When a woman feels it is necessary to verify the information she received from a representative of a feminist institution with the police department, the situation is beyond repair."

(Diana Press' letter continued)

"At this moment, when the women of Diana Press needed more than ever the support of not only the women's movement at large but those women we directly dealt with, and we found that we not only did not have that support, but were thought to be so untrustworthy that we could not even assess the wreckage of our lives, ourselves than I can not wish you well in the future. Perhaps after our recovery, women will feel more solicitous and kind, but at the moment, I am unable to wish you well or good luck of any kind."

That was the last I heard from Diana Press.

* * *

I write this letter neither to cause division in the women's movement nor to engage in public debate with Diana Press, but to caution women writers and inform women in general. I most definitely deplore the vandalism of Diana Press; I, too, am its victim. But the vandalism does not excuse their behavior toward me.

The relationship between publisher and author is traditionally an adverse one, similar to that of management and labor. The publisher (management) has the advantage in terms of power, money and control. I was aware of this, and hoped that a feminist press would deal with these things in a more forthright manner. This was not the case. In fact, Diana Press exerted a double control over me: they could break a legal contract with little fear of legal reprisal because if I attempted to receive compensation from a feminist press, especially after the vandalism, I might be branded as a traitor to feminism.

I don't think that I could ever convey the anguish I felt when I thought that my seven years of committed labor on Seed of a Woman had culminated in that last letter from Diana Press. There is no question that my relationship with them was emotionally destructive to me, and caused a tremendous set-back in my work. But my personal feelings and work are only part of my concern here.

As a member of the women's movement, I see it as my responsibility to offer criticism of a feminist business. It is difficult to know exactly what the nature of a feminist business should be, but one thing seems sure: since a feminist business owes its survival to the support of the women's movement, then it must be responsible to us, all of us, the women's movement as a whole, as well as individual women with whom it does business.

Finally, I am determined that Diana Press compensate me for my losses. My attorney has requested that they contact her, but they have not even given us the courtesy of a response. I urge them to contact my attorney within a reasonable amount of time so that I have an alternative in resolving this situation, and am not forced to resort to the legal system.

In Sisterhood and Struggle,

Ruth Geller

March 16, 1978

Sisters:

The feminist community of Buffalo, New York protests Diana Press' treatment of our sister, Ruth Geller. (This letter accompanies her more detailed summary of her relationship with Diana Press.) Diana Press was to publish Ruth's book, Seed of a Woman, but one year after signing a contract, shortly after they had been vandalized, they breached that contract and sent her a letter of ill will. Although we share most feminists anger and dismay at the vandalizing of Diana Press, we do not think that it excuses their treatment of Ruth Geller, both before and since. As feminists, we insist that a feminist press be responsible to the Women's Movement, including the individual women within it.

Ruth has been a member of the Buffalo women's community since 1969 when she became part of the university-based Buffalo Women's Liberation group. At the end of that year, she began writing Seed of a Woman, a book that fictionally portrays some historical developments in 1969 and 1970: the resurgence of the modern-day women's movement, the anti-war, anti-imperialist movement, and the beginnings of a lesbian-feminism that was emerging from the women's movement. She depicted significant east-coast political demonstrations: the 1969 anti-war march on Washington, D.C., and the protest march of the Panther 13 trial in New Haven. She also conveyed the excitement of the early forms of women's solidarity, such as consciousness-raising.

The book is not one woman's individualistic reflections on her own experience, but rather a political novel whose plot develops from historical events. What makes this book important, different from a fact sheet, is that it explores people's personal contradictions based upon their developing consciousness. We feel that it is necessary to be able to read the history of a part of the women's movement as presented by a feminist; no doubt Diana Press felt this way too, since prior to the break-in they expressed confidence in the women's movement's enthusiastic reception of Ruth's book.

Diana Press' decision to breach their publishing contract deeply upset Ruth, as did the hostile tone of their letter. Her initial reaction was to isolate herself. Gradually, the Buffalo community learned of the breach, and several women met to be further informed. We decided that representatives from Buffalo women's groups should meet together to discuss the situation, as it might have implications for the entire women's movement. At this meeting, Buffalo women learned for the first time the facts of Ruth's extended experience with Diana Press, and we were outraged at the evidence of consistently careless, unprincipled and manipulative behavior by a feminist press.

After returning to our various organizations to confirm support, we decided that Ruth should confront Diana Press publicly in the women's media. We recognize that it is difficult--if not impossible--for a business to be feminist in its practice, in a capitalist and male supremacist economic system. In order to accomplish this, any feminist organization must be in constant struggle, and must be open to criticism from the women's movement.

We in Buffalo strongly disagree with Diana Press' decision to break their contract with Ruth Geller, especially when they had already published a bound reviewer's copy and advertised the book as a part of their Fall '77 publications. Breaking the contract after more than a year's legal relationship was cruel and destructive. It has set back her writing, requiring her to neglect a short story collection and second novel while she retypes and recirculates the manuscript of Seed of a Woman. It is also duplicitous, because ostensibly Diana Press has been raising money nationally so that all of its books could be published. But the money raised will not go to publishing this unknown author's first novel. At any time, but particularly when Diana Press is asking

women all over the country to support them, it is essential for a feminist press to treat women fairly, supportively, and in a feminist manner.

In their letter of ill will, Diana Press indicated that they were breaking their contract with Ruth not simply due to the destruction caused by the break-in, but due to Ruth's lack of support of them as a feminist institution. This challenge to her intentions is ridiculous to us who have worked with her. Before a feminist press, which holds the aspirations of a woman in its hands, casts her out on the basis of her commitment to feminism, they should check with the community in which she works to make sure they are correct. The letter from Diana Press is one that brings shame to feminism, as can be seen in its closing words: "...I can not wish you well in the future. Perhaps after our recovery, women will feel more solicitous and kind, but at the moment, I am unable to wish you well or good luck of any kind."

Our purpose here is to inform women, lest Ruth's experience be repeated. We also want to have public discussion that will hopefully lead to changing the more negative aspects of Diana Press' behavior. And finally, we want to publicly pressure Diana Press to compensate Ruth for her losses. Because of the way many of us feel about the oppressive legal system, it would seem a tragedy to have to invoke this system against an outgrowth of the women's movement. An out-of-court settlement would avoid the complexities of a draining legal suit, and partially compensate Ruth's losses. (Normally, we would request that Diana Press publish Seed of a Woman, but given their letter of ill will, that is an impossibility.) We therefore recommend that they contact her attorney within a reasonable amount of time to settle this matter.

It is easy for our movement to become divided by in-fighting given the conditions under which we work, and the conscious efforts of the state to disrupt that work. The only method of countering this is by building a strong movement, which requires the fair and principled treatment of all women at all times. Feminist presses must take leadership in this because they have the power to shape the voice of our movement.

Any responses to this letter should be addressed to the R. S. Geller Support Committee, c/o Women's Studies College, 108 Winspear Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14214.

- In sisterhood and struggle,
- Buffalo Women's Liberation Union
- Earth Daughters
- Emma The Buffalo Women's Bookstore
- G.R.O.W. (Gay Rights for Older Women)
- S.O.S. (Sisters of Sappho)
- Women's Studies College Governance Assembly
- Woman's Space and
- alot of unaffiliated women

N.Y. WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK COMMITTEE
P.O. BOX 326
BROOKLYN, NY, 11215
(212) 499-5266

To the R. S. Geller Support Committee
c/o Women's Studies College
108 Winspear Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14214

May 23, 1978

Dear Sisters,

I am writing on my behalf and on behalf of the N.Y. Wages For Housework Committee to express our committment to help Ruth Geller to obtain what is due to her by Diana Press.

We agree that the treatment Ruth has received by these "sisters" is unacceptable and affects all of us. When a woman who is helping to further our struggle is undermined, it is our struggle that is undermined. This is particularly true when the attack comes not from the State but from women who are supposedly our sisters. We are in complete agreement, then, that this is not a private matter between Ruth and Diana Press, but it is a political and organisational matter that has to be dealt with by all of us.

As Ruth points out in her statement, the relation between a publisher and a writer is always a power relation. That in this case the publishers are "feminists" only indicates that divisions of power between women do not cease to exist because "we are all women" and "we are all in the same struggle". Clearly, our strategy must lead to the overcoming of these divisions, but the first step in this direction is to recognise them as such so that we can deal with them.

This is the opposite course from the one taken by Diana Press, who has used the blackmail of "feminism" to ignore the power relation between them and Ruth and thus to exert their power over her work. Not only have they proceeded in the typical capitalist fashion ("get as much as you can while giving as little as possible"), they have also made it difficult for Ruth to protect herself from their disloyalty and to take those steps that in a different situation would have been a matter of course.

In saying this we want to make it clear that we don't look down on women who manage to get access to certain resources (printing presses, money to publish, etc.) We all depend on these resources to be able to move and it is a real victory when some sisters can make them available to us. But in no way can any women's organisation be allowed to use their resources at the expense of other women. In no way can we allow this power to be turned against us and our struggle.

This means that the first responsibility of a press that claims to be feminist is to make clear what are their organisational criteria and to prove by their practice their feminism. For those of us who are dependent on them, our first responsibility is not to shut up when we are being undermined for fear of "breaking up sisterhood". Sisterhood lives only in the facts. Otherwise it becomes a dangerous weapon to be used against us: women controlling other women more effectively by relying on the assumption that they will not fight against "their sisters".

We are glad, then, that Ruth Geller and her Support Committee have decided to make the behavior of Diana Press known to us all and have put pressure on this organisation to live up to its responsibilities to women, if they want to have any credibility and support from us.

Finally, I want to speak about Ruth Geller, who she is and what she has meant to our struggle.

I remember how excited I was when years ago I read the first draft of Seed of a Woman and how many times I have lucked in the bookstores to see if it was finally out. But there is much more than that. I met Ruth in Buffalo in 1969 when the women's movement was beginning to emerge through the initiative of a small number of women acting on the power they knew was in all of us. Ruth was one of the first who moved despite the fact that at that time to present yourself as a feminist meant to confront the entire male movement, and not from the position of power we later achieved because we were thousands in the streets. It meant taking alot of risks and hostility in your day-to-day life, from the threatening phone calls every time you put out a leaflet to the anger of your "brothers" both at home and in political meetings. It meant the frustration of watching all those women, like myself at the time, who said they wanted to change the world but could not break with the men because they did not trust their own power enough. Ruth and women like her made the first step for all of us and the seeds they planted did not get lost. For their moving no matter what, their organising always starting from women, gave all of us a new strength and ultimately the power to move.

Ruth was the first woman who spoke to the struggle that was inside me. But this is not an expression of personal gratitude. It is the recognition of a political debt we have towards women who when many of us were in pain but mute, deaf and blind as to what to do about it, showed us the way.

We hope that the women's groups and individuals to whom we are sending this statement will show their support to Ruth and put pressure on Diana Press to clarify where they stand and hopefully change their position.

In sisterhood,

Silvia Federici

Silvia Federici

on behalf of N.Y. Wages For Housework
Committee