

A Lesbian Shaggy Dog Story

The Sophie Horowitz Story

by Sarah Schulman (Naiad Press, 1984, \$7.95)

Somewhere there ought to be someone who protects unsuspecting authors from the misguided efforts of their publishers. Naiad Press has just published a first novel by Sarah Schulman, The Sophie Horowitz Story. Maybe you'll get past the tarted up cover and the misleading jacket prose and treat yourself to a good read. But I doubt if you'll find it much like the hype. Its only resemblance to Fran Lebowitz, who's suggested on the cover, is that both seem to write about New York. Schulman writes New York, the New York we really live in. And if you have a passing acquaintance with left and feminist politics, you'll find it very familiar.

The Sophie Horowitz Story reads like a lesbian shaggy dog story (if that's a category yet) with a self-humor that reminds you more of Lenny Bruce or Woody Allen than Fran Lebowitz. There's a thread of a plot running through that neither matters very much or needs to make a whole lot of sense. Schulman writes 80's realism--"the powers that be" pull strings, making plots tangle or unravel. When the FBI, grand juries and crooked DA's are cutting deals with each other, we can't expect our heroine to be able to change the course of history anymore.

But Sophie's no leftist clone either. Schulman's caricatures of the various "revolutionary" types of the far-out left are downright wicked (she's especially down on "educational leafletting"). Sophie's our hard-boiled dyke, our post-modern Marlowe sleuthing her news story deep in the heart of the counter-culture. But unlike the traditional detective and unlike many ex-leftists, she doesn't

see it as a "me against the world" situation. As cynical as she is about the Organized Left, she's idealistic about "community." Community is the junkies and the old ungentrified residents of her lower East Side heroine's neighborhood; it's Jewish culture, especially of the anarchist variety; it's the lesbian community. Community is Schulman's conceptual touchstone (as "cadre" is the organizing principle of her far-left characters). It's always a struggle though: communities are not found, they're made.

But make no mistake--this book is no political manifesto. In fact, if you're not familiar with late 60's politics, or part of the New York scene, you may not even notice Schulman's politics. So maybe from the book cover you expected sex. OK, it's there. But it isn't some great cure-all for the small and large frustrations of life. It isn't the solution to any of Sophie's problems. For that, try food. When Sophie's in a tough spot, she falls back on fried sauerkraut pirogis or the three varieties of herring. With sex, it's cheesecake or cherry babka--sweeter stuff. Sophie's scorn for pseudo-food (quiches and sprouts) is as much a political position against the gentrifiers who destroy a community's indigenous cuisine, as a jab against the diet mafia, that denies women the pleasure of fattening food. Maybe these days it takes more nerve to write about food than to write about sex anyway. Whatever, this book might not make you horny, but it will make you hungry.

Hungry, perhaps, for another installment of the Sophie Horowitz story. It's like salted nuts...

End to Negri

Methinks perhaps friend Bartleby exaggerates the "dwelling on defeat" of Midnight Notes. Yet, the issue is important. Has there been a defeat of the U.S. (last Notes' discussion) or Italian working class? generally speaking, I think so. How do we deal with it? Ignore it? Dwell on it? Try to understand it? I suggest the latter, in the hopes of avoiding another. We've enough farces already.

If I understand Guido (who is unavailable to respond to Bartelby), the point is this: Negri's ignoring slaves (third world) and women, his narrow definition of self-valorization, refusal to discuss the divisions in the class and his refusal to acknowledge defeat are all of a piece. If defeat in Italy was based on class divisions, and Negri

will only treat of those class sections in touch with the "highest levels of capital, then in fact Negri cannot understand the defeat. The obverse makes this more clear: to assess the defeat means to understand the hierarchical divisions in the class, and to do this means one cannot ignore slaves and women, cannot conceptualize self-valorization only for a few sectors, and therefore must throw into crisis Negri's political structure. Capital is not only the "heights", for capital simultaneously 'underdevelops' as it 'develops'!

Negri's challenge was to understand 'his' political project and why it was defeated. Instead he retreats a century, rehashes Marx without necessarily shedding Marx's limits, and does not come to grips with what he must in order to help us move beyond abstract belief in our victories to a new 'what to do?'