tion would be, 'We simply don't need it. We were the first to get the vote and we have an equal rights law.'

The Women's Union, though, bears the ideological struggle of feminism, and has an impact far beyond its membership count. Many members of the Union are themselves active in trade unions and party politics and are thus able to represent and articulate feminist concerns and issues.

These two groups give clear evidence that women's collective activities fall into the public sphere. Any consideration of women's power in Finland must take into account these organizations, regardless of whether the group's focus is traditional or feminist.

Ellen Marakowitz is a Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology at Columbia University in New York. She is currently in Finland conducting an 18 month dissertation fieldwork project on Finnish women's associations.

NORA E. McCARDELL

Life's Work

I'd love to read my poetry to you,
The way I used to read you assignments
from school
And show you reports from college.
You were always so pleased and proud.

Before the doctorate, I knew you'd
stopped
Following the content, concentrating
instead
On the weight and feel, the covers of the
journals.
I left a copy of my thesis on the coffee
table —
So you'd have it —
Not so you'd understand.

Your appreciation of my work was
important.
Like a kitten, seeking approval,
Carrying a conquered mouse to the front
step,
I'd bring each new piece home to you.

And now, the best, the most meaningful
to me,
We can't share.
I couldn't bear you to know how sad I am
You're not there to open the door
And praise my trophy.

Shepherding the Self: Love in the Autobiography of Gudny Jónsdóttir

by Kristjana Gunnars

A Canadian observer once remarked: "Icelandic women belong to a class to themselves; a class that bears no relation to any other class." This comment seemed worth noting because it came from an outsider and it corroborated an impression I had long since formed as an insider. By class he probably meant a society or culture that is distinct in itself, a group that lives by its own rules and sets its own principles. In all the talk about Icelandic culture over the years — the Sagas, the Eddas, the Reformation, Romantic Nationalism, Icelandic Bolshevism, and so on — there always seemed to be something essential missing. A world I myself knew, whose life was never adequately described.

In order to discover something about the validity of the observation that Icelandic women constitute a separate *class* within the larger cultural spectrum, I searched out the most artless and authentic work of recent literature I could find.[1] This work is the autobiography of Gudny Jónsdóttir, published in 1973 when the author was ninety-five years of age, under the title *Bernskudagar* (Childhood Days).[2] Gudny Jónsdóttir was born and raised on a traditional Icelandic farm, the kind of sod farm that has existed in that country from the ninth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Her father was reasonably prosperous and employed a good many farmhands and servants. The home was also frequently visited by travellers and was the scene of district social events. The life there described by the author is traditional: people go about the centuries-old chores of shepherding, milking, spinning, knitting, haying and round-upping, and in the evenings they all gather for housereadings of the Scriptures or Sagas.

Bernskudagar covers only the author's childhood years, from as early as she can remember to the time of her confirmation in her mid-teens. The book is composed of very short chapters, each broken into subject matter and all mostly confined to description: the progress of the text is therefore not entirely chronological. Within each chapter, a certain theme is followed on its own and examples are given from various times in the author's life. One chapter will describe the farm; another, the toys the siblings played with; another, the individuals on the farm; or certain events that illustrate a point; or the children's education, and so on. There is no attempt at being entertaining or interesting. The author seems to assume that her readers will quite naturally be interested, regardless of what she says. She is out to cause no harm or wreak no vengeance. She has no axes to grind and tells her little episodes with an air of reassurance. The voice is very much the grandmother's voice: distant but warm, and entirely sympathetic and forgiving. Perhaps the most striking feature of this book is the love with which it seems to be written — a love for everything she touches on — but it is always a love for something that seems to be very far away.

When this autobiography was published, it was thought to be significant for its descriptions of a now-vanished lifestyle. With the advent of farm machinery, automobiles, television, and public schools, people no longer do their work by hand and on foot in quite the same way, and there are no housereadings. In an era of the urbanization of the farm itself, *Bernskudagar* reminded people of the rural life they still cherished. But a careful reader will soon be alerted to a deeper significance to Gudny Jónsdóttir's narrative — which was read initially as "typically Icelandic." That stronger importance lies in the quality of love that is conveyed by the narrative voice. The more specific questions I intend to ask are: What kind of love is exhibited here? What makes this feature so distinctly Icelandic when it