

Celeste Newbrough, Biographical Note

Celeste Newbrough is the author of seven books including four works of fiction: *The Angel of Polk Street*, *Unspent Motion*, *Child with Pierrot*, and *The Zanscripts*; and two books of poetry: *The Archetype Strikes Back* and *Pagan Psalms*. She also co-edited (with Stan Rice) a Bay Area based poetry anthology, *The New I^{ve}*, and published a biography of her mother entitled *The Norita Book*.



Unspent Motion (2013) is a collection of short stories focusing on older women. Each story relates a turning point such as a chance encounter, crime or illness, driving the protagonist toward transformation. *KIRKUS Reviews* described the book as: “A quietly compelling and intimate portrayal of lives whose final chapters often go largely unobserved... the prose of this collection is intelligent and evocative.”

Regarding the novella, *Child with Pierrot* (2013, 2107), *KIRKUS* contends: “[the story] fully realizes the theme of transformation. Here, where life and death are both metaphor and fact, Newbrough’s narrative carries significant weight. She makes clear how intellectual and emotional lives can transcend generations and how losses can be both permanent and permeable.”

In reviewing *The Archetype Strikes Back* (2010), *The Muse (Human Rights Quarterly)* observes: “Newbrough exercises her right to explore spiritual matters from a number of perspectives... Reading this book leads one to consider the boundaries of what a human rights aesthetic might be.”

Pagan Psalms (1982) was internationally reviewed and translated. In *Atërtagandet*¹ (1976), author Britta Stövling of Stockholm said of the book, “What [Newbrough] tries to say is beyond the resources of language, thus she recreates the spoken

¹ Meaning “women’s liberation”.

word." Priscilla Alexander noted, "The poet, writing of her own mother's death reaches from the literal to the metaphoric, the Goddess taken from us so long ago, the Mother of Knowledge."

Celeste Newbrough was born in 1939 and raised in New Orleans. She is the daughter of Norita Massicott Newbrough (1910-1971), a French Quarter representational painter and an early exhibitor for the New Orleans Arts and Sciences Association Group (ASAG). Joseph Newbrough (1908-2003) was an electrical engineer and ship radio officer. Celeste was the fourth of five children (Norita, Andrew, Elaine, Celeste, and Diane.) Births were widely spaced in her family and she coveted having her mother to herself during her childhood before she entered kindergarten, as her older siblings were in school and her younger sister was not yet born. Celeste became a bookworm from the age of 4.

Celeste left college to live in New York City in 1959-1961. She wrote and directed a Village café production, *The Walt Whitman Debates*. She became close to other young writers including Fran Ross, author of *Oreo*. Celeste and Fran were enthusiastic followers of James Baldwin, Djuna Barnes, and Andre Gide. Celeste, Fran and artist Ann Grifalconi demonstrated in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral on the morning of the National Women's March (1970).

Celeste left New York to attend LSU, receiving a BA in English in 1963. While in Baton Rouge, she chaired an interdenominational gathering on race relations entitled "The Long Hot Summer", which was disrupted by a non-lethal bomb.

Returning to New Orleans, Celeste became the Director of Planning for the City's Office of Economic Opportunity. She was active in civil rights (chairing the Human Rights Association) and in the feminist movement. She chaired the Southern Regional Conference for women in 1971, and was the founding President of New Orleans N.O.W. Celeste co-edited *DISTAFF: A Southern Women's Journal* from 1971-74. She co-wrote a popular feminist comedy, *Eve's Epilogue*, which was performed before the New Orleans Press Club and televised over WDSU-TV. She spoke before the City Council after the Upstairs Lounge Fire in 1973 as spokesperson for the lesbian/gay movement in New Orleans.

While studying in Vermont and Hanover, NH, (1974-

1977), Celeste help found the Upper Valley Feminist Witches Coven. The coven produced *Transformations*, a 45-minute film that was widely distributed in the underground film circuit in 1976-1978. She and other members of the Coven (notably Claudia Lamperti and Beth Dingham) founded the New Victoria Press, one of the first feminist presses in the country. The Coven also led the movement against the nuclear facility at Seabrook, New Hampshire. Celeste composed the song, "No-Nuke Woman", which she widely performed with Julie Haines throughout New England. The song and several of her poems and artwork were featured in *Tilt: An Anthology of New England Women's Writing and Art*.

Moving to California in 1977, Celeste resides in Berkeley with her wife, Dr. Ilona L. Pivar. She has been an activist in the feminist, lesbian/gay, movements. In 1977, she chaired the founding meeting of The Coalition for Human Rights. She served as co-chair and first salaried director of Gay Freedom Day (Gay Pride Day) in San Francisco. Nineteen-seventy-eight (1978) was the year of the Briggs Initiative, and Celeste worked with many gay leaders to produce many firsts, including the Gay Flags, the Gay Men's Chorus, the Goddess Float, and the March Against the Briggs Initiative. The parade and celebration received major international coverage. In 1981 working with San Francisco N.O.W., Celeste played a key role in organizing two demonstrations in response to the imminent death of the ERA; first, at the Pacific Stock Exchange and second, at the Mormon Temple.

With Carolyn Merchant, Celeste organized the 1989 March Against Exxon at UC Berkeley in response to the oil spill and pollution of Prince William Sound. She was featured speaker at the Women in Ecology Conference held at UC Berkeley.

During the 1980's Celeste produced women's programs for KALX radio, including a widely-distributed program on birth mother and adoption, *Cry Not My Baby. Cry* (1984). She is currently editor of the *Journal of Evolutionary Feminism*, an online journal featuring scholarly articles by women on evolutionary theory, and co-editor of *Nightwood Journal*, an LGBT literary magazine. Her essay on women's reproductive rights, *Bab, Bab, Black Sheep: Cloning, Reproductive Rights and the Gender Revolution*, was featured by CNN and widely used by women's studies

programs especially during the period of 1998-2004. Her activist work has been documented in several projects of the GLBT Historical Society including a documentary film of the flags produced by Glenne McIlhenny, in *Atörtagandet*² (1976) by Britta Stövling, in the book *Remapping Second-Wave Feminism* (2017) by Janet Allured, and other works.

As the Director of Academic Indexing Service, Celeste composed over 300 scholarly indexes for Harvard University Press, The MIT Press, UC Press, Smithsonian Institution, the World Bank, and other universities and institutions. Celeste taught women's studies at City College of San Francisco and is retired from the University of California.

Full credits of Celeste Newbrough's writing are found at:
http://celestenewbrough.net/assets/Writing_Credits_Celeste_Newbrough.pdf

² Meaning “women’s liberation”.