



FEMINIST  
TASK FORCE

# Women in Libraries

Volume 26, Number 1

*The Feminist Task Force—25 Years*

Fall 1996

## Authors' Breakfast a Rousing Success

*Poets speak on activist anti-racism*

Poets Cheryl Clarke and Minnie Bruce Pratt spoke to an audience of about 40 librarians at the annual Sunday breakfast program in New York. The theme was "Feminist Perspectives on Racism."

Pratt, known for several books of poetry and a volume of essays, grew up in the South and had a first-hand view of the "explosive intersections of race and sex," she said. As a white woman, she viewed the injustice from outside but felt an urge to take a more active role. She recalled how SNCC, or Student National Coordination Committee, excluded whites in the early days of the Civil Rights Movement. But at 17, she "began to understand the power of words," and began to write on the topic, and, later, to speak to activist groups.

"What does it mean to think about things being different?" Pratt asked. She drew parallels between events today and in the 1950s. Today, she said, librarians are "doing hand to hand combat with the right," naming attacks on women, the torching of abortion clinics, and censorship of information on sexual practices and disease.

The Comstock Act of 1872, she said, was written to keep abortion and sex information from women. She described the burning of black churches in the 1870's and their counterparts today. Churches, she said, were centers of literacy and political resistance where people became "new citizens" following emancipation. She said, similarly, church burning today is an act of political repression. The repression of the '50s must make way for political organizing now, she said, and "gay and lesbian organizing has carried the liberation



*Minnie Bruce Pratt, left, and Cheryl Clarke spoke at the Feminist Authors' Breakfast July 7, 1996, where they urged listeners to take more active roles in opposing homophobia, racism, and sexism. Story and related conference news continue on page 2.*

movement forward" into the '90s.

She urged audience members to activism and courage. Pratt said, "whenever I made a break for freedom, people said I wasn't being nice," however, "we can't be nice if we're going to be fighters." Not enough of us are active in our places of oppression, she said; "you have to engage in a true voyage of change, profound and fundamental," and it is "a life-long process." There is "no way to deal with womanhood in this country without dealing with race." We must free ourselves, she said, from the belief that "things are always this way and can't be changed." She urged listeners not to accept slavery, rape, and poverty as unchangeable. "It's just not true," she said.

*Continued on page 2.*

### **Special Book Review Issue:**

• Essays and Stories on Women's Lives • History • Women's Studies • Art

*Beginning on page 4*

## Breakfast, continued from page 1.

Cheryl Clarke, author of several books of poetry, also works to educate people on discrimination issues. She said "the privilege of one race over another" is built into us "in attitude and in structure." She pointed to social "structural barriers to certain races" [...] being able to achieve fruits and benefits that are supposed to be available to all." We cannot segregate ourselves but must work together, she said, for "exposure has got to be the key factor."

Clarke also read from her poetry and from the work of other poets.

In the question and answer session that followed, Pratt reiterated that "soul searching does have to be constant," if we are to make a difference.



## Call for writers

Jennifer Scanlon, editor of a work in progress, *Significant Contemporary Feminists: A Biocritical Sourcebook*, seeks contributors to write biographical/bibliographical essays on significant contemporary feminists. She plans to explore the lives and work of a diverse group of women involved with feminist movements during and since the Second Wave in the book, to be a collection of fifty essays. Contributors receive a copy of the text as payment. If you are interested, send a vita to Jennifer Scanlon, Director of Women's Studies, State University of New York, Plattsburgh, NY 12901, or e-mail her at scanlojr@splava.cc.plattsburgh.edu.

## Women's Studies journal seeks contributors

*The European Journal of Women's Studies*, edited by Mary Evans and Magda Michielsens, is published with the support of WISE (The European Women's Studies Association) and members of WISE receive the journal as part of their membership.

Launched two years ago to explore the meaning and impact of gender within the changing concept of 'Europe', The journal provides an international forum for articles at the cutting edge of women's studies research and theory.

A multidisciplinary academic, feminist journal, its main focus is on the nature of the complex relationship between women and the diverse regions and meanings of Europe.

If you are interested in contributing to the journal, write to Margit van der Steen, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands; for information about subscribing, Jane Makoff, SAGE Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU.



## Walter Mosley signs books

Mystery lovers were able to meet Walter Mosley and have books autographed. We learned to love Mosley's writing when the first of his series of detective novels based in old LA, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, was made into a movie starring Denzel Washington. Mosley appears to have some feeling for librarians' work, too, as evidenced by this exchange between two characters in the second book in the series, *A Red Death*:

"So how do you know, if they don't teach it?"  
"Lib'ary got its do' open, man. Ain't nobody tellin' you not to go."



## Women in Libraries

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~holman/FTF/>

*Women in Libraries*, the Newsletter of the American Library Association's Feminist Task Force, is published four times a year. To subscribe, inquire about your subscription, or to change your address, write to Diedre Conkling, Publisher, Women in Libraries, c/o ALA, SRRT, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Subscriptions are \$5 for individuals, \$8 for institutions (prepaid), or \$10 for invoiced subscriptions.

Madeleine Tainton, Editor  
West Texas A&M University

Diedre Conkling, Publisher  
Lincoln County, Oregon, Library District

Theresa Tobin, Listserv Administrator  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

To subscribe to the Feminist List, send this e-mail message to [listserv@mitvma.mit.edu](mailto:listserv@mitvma.mit.edu):

**subscribe feminist firstname lastname.**

Send articles, comments, or materials for review, but not subscription questions, to: Madeleine Tainton, Media Services Librarian, West Texas A&M University, WTAMU Box 736, Canyon, TX 79016-0736. Phone: 806-656-2407; Fax 806-656-2213; e-mail: [mtainton@wtamu.edu](mailto:mtainton@wtamu.edu).

Contributors: Melinda Brown, University of North Carolina; Philip Cohen, University of Maryland, College Park; Pamela Crossland, West Texas A&M University; Melodie Frances, University of San Francisco; Stacie J. Koochek; Cher Krause, WTAMU; Hope Olson, University of Alberta; Bernice Redfern, San Jose State University; Sally Willson Weimer, University of California, Santa Barbara; Madeleine Tainton, WTAMU; Konny Thompson, Gonzaga University; Stacy L. Voeller, Moorhead State University; Ruth Wallach, University of Southern California.

*Women in Libraries*

## Midwinter plans take shape

At the annual conference, it was proposed and accepted that one of Action Council's meetings include not only action council but all the task forces. The intent is that the subgroups will be better able to coordinate schedules and cosponsor programs. This new meeting structure will be tried for the first time at ALA's Midwinter Conference in February, 1997. A tentative schedule follows; the one in the next issue of WIL will be more complete. Dates are Friday, February 14, through Wednesday, February 19.

### SRRT Action Council meetings:

- 9:30 am—12:30 pm, Saturday  
All Task Force, 9:30—11;  
Action Council I, 11—12:30.  
The following Task Forces have scheduled one of their meetings during this slot:  
Poverty Task Force, International Relations Task Force, Feminist Task Force, Alternatives in Print, Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force, and the Task Force on the Environment.
- 2:00—4:00 pm, Monday, Action Council II

### FTF midwinter meeting schedule:

- 9:30—11:00 am, Saturday
- 8:00—9:30 am, Monday

### ALA Council meetings:

- 9:00—10:15 am, Monday
- 9:00—11:30 am, Tuesday
- 9:00 am—12:00 pm, Wednesday

### Women's Studies Section meetings:

- 9:30 a.m.—12:30 p.m., Sunday. All Committee
- 4:30—5:30 p.m., Sunday. General Membership
- 9:30—11:00 a.m., Monday. Discussion
- 2:00—4:00 p.m., Monday. Executive Committee

## Internet miscellany

### Library posts *Guide to Hate Groups*

The Harvard Law Library has a World Wide Web guide to hate groups. "A Guide to Hate Groups on the Internet—<http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/guides/hateweb/hate.html>. This guide links to the home pages of groups who spread hate propaganda on the net, their listservs and usenet groups, links to watchdog groups, and a bibliography of related articles. The page's editors welcome you to link this to your own page, but, if you do, ask that you notify them by email.

### New list for lesbian, bi library workers

Lezbrian is an e-mail list for lesbian and bisexual women library workers. The main focus will be on professional issues of interest to lesbians and bisexual women, other topics may include related fields of queer, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered/transsexual librarianship. Notices about conferences, publications, and job opportunities, and calls for papers are also welcome, though only subscribers may post to the list. A web page is also planned.

To subscribe, send the following message to [listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu](mailto:listserv@listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu):

**subscribe lezbrian firstname lastname**

The list owners are Ellen Greenblatt, [ulcreg@acsu.buffalo.edu](mailto:ulcreg@acsu.buffalo.edu); and Jerilyn Veldof, [jveldof@bird.library.arizona.edu](mailto:jveldof@bird.library.arizona.edu).

## FTF officers elected

New co-coordinators were elected at the Annual Conference. Kristin Carlson and Veronda Pitchford, both of the University of Illinois at Chicago, will share the duties of coordinator for the coming year. Their e-mail addresses are:

Pitchford: [vjpitch@uic.edu](mailto:vjpitch@uic.edu) and  
Carlson: [u21788@uicvm.uic.edu](mailto:u21788@uicvm.uic.edu).

## ALA board supports Nebraska library workers

The ALA Executive Board voted unanimously July 31, 1996, to join the Davey v. City of Omaha, Nebraska, Amicus Curiae brief filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of the Omaha library workers, who have sued the city because of alleged inequity in promotions and salary when the city instituted a new position classification system.

At the annual conference, ALA Council had considered a resolution in support of Omaha library workers and referred it to the Executive Board to determine how ALA should offer support. The OLPR Advisory Committee also considered this issue at the conference in New York City, expressed support, and recommended seeking legal advice. The Board's action was taken in consultation with ALA's legal counsel and staff.

During Council discussion, members noted the need to consider financial implications. Signing onto the ACLU brief substantially reduces the cost to ALA. In addition, courts encourage groups to file together to reduce the number of redundant briefs. Other organizations signing onto the Amicus Curiae brief include American Association for Affirmative Action, The National Women's Law Center, 9 to 5 National Association of Working Women, Women Employed, The Women's Law Project, the Women's Legal Defense Fund, and Equal Rights Advocates, Inc.

## Book Review Section

### Are women out of control? .. YES!

First independence, and now this . . .

Pharr, Suzanne. *Homophobia: a weapon of sexism*. Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1988. Paper, ISBN 0-9620222-1-7, \$9.95.

—. *In the time of the right: reflections on liberation*. Berkeley: Chardon Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-9620222-8-4, \$10.95.

"Any woman who steps out of role risks being called a lesbian. There is no real way to credential one's sexuality." Suzanne Pharr quietly and emphatically underscores the reality that homophobia is every woman's problem, not exclusive to lesbians or bisexuals. She explains why the presence of gay men and lesbians is so threatening to our patriarchal society and how this leaves this population vulnerable. Misogyny is the real root of the hatred of gay men, she posits, because they have betrayed their own and gone over to the other side. One of the worst expletives one can throw against a male of any age but especially at puberty is "faggot" or "fairy." Homophobia, especially when backed by the theocratic right, contributes to the occurrence of and leads to the desensitization of violence against homosexuals. This was sadly made all too clear by the murders of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill in Oregon in December 1995; their crime, according to the alleged killer, was that they were publicly lesbian. In Texas a month later Fred Mangione was stabbed 35 times for his sexual orientation.

Pharr is very persuasive in her theory of the commonality of all oppressions. Certainly the elements of control and domination found in homophobia can be found in racism, battering, and child sexual abuse as well as other oppressions. Her chapter, "Women in exile," thoughtfully examines the consequences that moral superiority and isolation have on relations of lesbians with each other as well as family and community.

The author justly criticizes the women's movement for excluding lesbian concerns and knuckling under to lesbian baiting by other organizations. Lesbians are subtly reprimanded and urged to put the movement's goals ahead of any of their own aims.

The author's chapter on strategies for eliminating homophobia is a good starting place; a phobia this deeply entrenched, however, may require more stringent measures than she offers. Another limitation is that the language and tone of the book are couched in lesbian terms—lesbophobia is its main concern. One wonders if gay men's experiences are somewhat different and if the methods of combatting them should be tailored differently. Despite this, this is an admirable primer on where to begin to eliminate one of our nation's dirtiest pieces of laundry.

In the time of the right, Pharr's latest book,

takes the same elements of oppression and applies them to broader societal ills. She compares and contrasts the strategies, issues, motivation, and goals of three major movements: Liberation Movements (Civil Rights, Women's, Gay/Lesbian, etc.), Globalization of the Economy, and Religious Right-Wing Fundamentalists. Her timing couldn't be more sound; the issues, particularly those centered on the economy, are endlessly demonstrated in this election year. The goals of the theocratic right and those who globalized the economy complement each other in using domination politics and severing civil rights for those who are not part of the controlling class. This book is not a mere re-hashing of her first book; in the years between them it is clear that Pharr has done much research and soul searching to come to the conclusions set forth in this latest publication. In her opening statement to the last chapter, "Reflections on Liberation," she defines liberation politics as "seeking social and economic justice for all people; supporting inclusion, autonomy, choice, wholeness; building and honoring relationships; developing individual and institutional integrity, responsibility and accountability; redefining and sharing power."

Had both of the major candidates for president read this book before the debates and centered on the issues within, it would have made for a much more interesting and relevant discussion than the last polemic. In a time of what seems to be very petty bipartisan bickering, sharing power for the good of all their constituency is a concept that both parties should consider.

—P. Crossland

#### Women in prison

Adelberg, Ellen and Claudia Currie, eds. *In Conflict with the Law: Women and the Canadian Justice System*. Vancouver, B.C.: Press Gang Publishers, 1993. Paper, ISBN 0-88974-054-2, \$18.95 US, \$21.95 Canada.

Faith, Karlene. *Unruly Women: the Politics of Confinement and Resistance*. Vancouver, B.C.: Press Gang Publishers, 1993. Paper, ISBN 0-88974-050-X, \$21.95 Canada.

Due to the comparatively small number of women who are sent to prison, and a societal preoccupation with men as criminals, the subject of women criminals is largely ignored. Both of these books point out the tendency of criminal justice professionals and literature to consider female crime and criminals as just a subgroup of male crime and criminals, with the same sources and possible remedies. They chart how this attitude has been employed historically to deal with female offenders, and deal with the inaccuracies of the concept as it is

*Women in Libraries*

## Book Review Section

employed in the present day.

*In Conflict with the Law* is an updated edition of *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*, 1987. Sections cover the history of women's prisons in Canada, the image of incarcerated women, and why women do and do not commit crimes. About half of the present edition was published in the earlier volume, and is presented here with some updating. The bibliography offers citations for works published up to 1992, but the majority of the works referenced were published between the late 1970's to mid-1980's. Despite the age of many of the essays, and of the book itself, much of the information is relevant and almost unique for those interested specifically in Canadian female offenders. The chapters on penal history of women in Canada and those dealing with aboriginal women are most worthwhile. Most of the chapters would have profited from greater length and depth, but the bibliographies are extensive, and many of the contributors have written on the subject since this publication. The book is a good starting point for research and a useful addition for any sociology collection, and a must for criminal justice and women's studies collections.

Karlene Faith was one of the contributors to *In*

### Little Sister fights big brother

*Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada*. Introductions by Pat Califia and Janine Fuller. Pittsburgh, PA: Cleis Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-57344-019-1, \$14.95 US, \$20.95 Canada.

This morning, 28 May 1996, I heard on the news a story about a Canadian photographer who was en route to China via the United States. She was carrying photographs of her adopted Chinese daughter. In these photographs the young girl was naked. The photographer was going to China to research her daughter's culture and to research Chinese perceptions of the body; the photographs were seized by U.S. Customs. Borders are obviously dangerous places for the unconventional.

*Forbidden Passages* arises from a series of incidents involving crossing the same border in the other direction. The collection is at least two things: It is a commemorative volume representing commitment and generosity, and it is an anthology juxtaposing and overlapping fiction, personal narrative, humour, and theory. As a commemorative volume it is composed of works deemed obscene by Canadian

### "Borders are obviously dangerous places for the unconventional"

*Conflict with the Law*, and her chapter on media representation of women in prison is expanded in her own book, *Unruly women*. While she comes dangerously close to mythologizing all women offenders as a group of freedom fighters for the rights of women, she does restrain the tendency, except perhaps in the history section. Much of this volume draws on her experiences working with inmates in California prisons, so the book does not have the purely Canadian focus of *In Conflict*. She examines different aspects of women's experiences in prison, such as motherhood, lesbianism, women guards, and self-inflicted injury, and therefore presents some of the depth that *In Conflict* lacks. Although her conclusions may at times be contested, the book is useful in its treatment of a subject which is too little studied.

Both books are written at a reading level of undergraduate and above. They are extensively researched and thoughtfully composed without being filled with academic jargon and polysyllabic incoherence. Although some newer books on the subject of female offenders have appeared since these books were published, the number is small. Both these volumes are rather exceptional in that they do not deal exclusively or even primarily with female murderers, and they offer a Canadian perspective. They would be useful additions to either academic or public libraries who serve patrons with an interest in the areas of criminal justice, women's studies or sociology.

—K. Thompson

law and seized by Canada Customs enroute to Little Sister's Book and Art Emporium, a lesbian and gay bookstore in Vancouver. The introductory essays tell the story of the legalized harassment of Little Sister's and put it into a broader context. Nineteen authors of seized works and several of their publishers contributed to *Forbidden Passages* to raise money for Little Sister's legal expenses and to raise awareness about the levels of censorship in North America.

The resulting anthology was conceived as a sort of object lesson, a task it performs effectively. However, it also brings together writings addressing an array of intolerances, particularly sexism, homophobia, and racism. Many of the writings are sexually explicit, and some will discomfort most readers—particularly the sado-masochism. All of them are either emotionally or intellectually provocative in questioning received theories and/or practices. The result is a diverse collection with fascinating complementarity in a wide emotional range from sorrow to celebration, hard-nosed theory to sentiment to ecstasy. Buy it, support Little Sister's, and find out where the theory and practice of intellectual freedom meet in this startling array of work from Jane Rule, Marguerite Duras, bell hooks, Joseph Beam, Richard Mohr, Susie Bright, Tom of Finland, and others.

*Forbidden Passages* is published in the United States and printed in Canada.

—H. Olson

## Book Review Section

### Measuring women, here and abroad

By the numbers . . .

Taeuber, Cynthia M., ed. *Statistical handbook on women in America*, second edition. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, April 1996. Cloth, ISBN 1-57356-005-7, \$54.50.

This statistical handbook presents an emerging picture of women today: their social, political, economic, and domestic characteristics. It brings together in one large volume diverse statistical data from government and other sources. The intent is to give a snapshot of women in the United States to help us know who we are, where we have been, and perhaps indicate trends to suggest where we are going. The scope of this handbook covers nearly everything from birth to occupations of Hispanic women to persons living alone by age and sex, and more, and covers all ages of women and girls.

The more comprehensive and expansive overview of issues and concerns described at the beginning of each chapter is impressive. For example, "Employment and economic status," Chapter B, and "Social characteristics," Chapter D, provide more analyses and statistical examples than did those chapters of the first edition. Although the first edition was published in 1991, Taeuber has taken full advantage of the more recent publications and data sources available to improve and fully update this second edition. The list of sources consulted was very up-to-date and especially helpful, though it could have been listed in the table of contents for fuller visibility.

Arranged in four major sections, the handbook covers demographic events and characteristics, employment and economic status, health characteristics, and social characteristics. Both the table of contents and the index provide ready access to the myriad sets of facts and statistics.

Many sources listed were produced and compiled by government agencies; other sources included journal sources, such as *Family Planning Perspectives*. Some federal government information and publications may more frequently be published principally in electronic form and thus may be less accessible to students and researchers without access to those electronic sources.

Among the sources listed are web addresses to direct students and researchers with web browsers to additional valuable and possibly more current statistics and information sources.

The statistics and tables contained in this handbook are worthwhile to students and researchers; the book would be a valuable acquisition for medium-sized public libraries and college libraries.

—S. W. Welmer

And by our stories . . .

Putnam, Dana, Dorothy Kidd, Elaine Dornan, and Patty Moore, eds. *The journal project: dialogues and conversations inside women's studies*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-929005-69-4, \$12.95.

The contributors present this collection of excerpts from journals kept during a women's studies class as an example of the power of journal writing both inside and outside the classroom. These pages took such forms as letters, poetry, and short stories, as well as the more traditional monologues. The authors considered journal keeping for this class as an extension of the diaries of their youth, evolving from recording the day's events into a dialogue with the inner self, sorting through conflicting issues, and goal setting. All these exercises led the group members toward a greater understanding not only of themselves but other people significant in their lives.

Each chapter contains writing pertaining to particular themes: initially the first impressions of Women's Studies. From this point the assignments branch out to reflections on the uses women make of their writing, themes of personal identity, sexuality, and violence against women, among others. Later chapters recount how women integrate their new learning to their lives outside the classroom.

One concern presented itself over and over: the trust implicit between the instructor reading the journal and the writer. Many women had experienced a betrayal with earlier writings/diaries, their privacy betrayed by parents, siblings, or lovers.

Though undertaken in Canada, the concerns of the group were similar to what might be found in the United States: work related issues, single parenting difficulties, racial tension, lesbianism, and the unique experiences of women of color.

—P. Crossland

### Who is really the crazy one?

Grobe, Jeanine, ed. *Beyond Bedlam: contemporary women psychiatric survivors speak out*. Chicago: Third Side Press, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 1-879427-23-0, \$30.95; paper, ISBN 1-879427-22-2, \$15.96.

"This book is a collection of writing by women who have suffered the stigma and treatment of 'mental illness.'" Grobe sums up this book in a nutshell, but the meat inside is often an account of brutal torture concealed within the good intentions of others. Experiences of women from Canada, England, Mexico, and the United States bear a

# Book Review Section

common thread of over-medication, shock treatments, sexual abuse, isolation, and alienation. The experience of these women was not one of healing but of oppression.

Betty Blaska chronicles the progression of initial diagnosis to CMI—chronically mentally ill—suggesting mental health authorities be referred to as MHPs. “If we must be relegated to a three letter acronym—and basically stripped of our identity and individuality—then they too can be lumped into one pot.” Judi Chamberlin, a former patient, testifies that in her experiences the most visually appealing institutions often use the most brutal methods of control: “The carpeted floors and pastel walls showed me one of my choices; the vacant stares and shuffling gaits of the other patients returning each morning from the shock room showed the other. Again the lesson: conformity or punishment!”

Janet Foner, in her essay “Sexism, mentalism, and what we can do about it,” expresses the sentiment shared by many survivors that the personal, once told publicly, becomes the political. “Mental patients are the butt end of classism, ‘defectives’ who are the most OK to be those people. . . . If people cannot function in the ways they are supposed to, hold down a job, or behave in socially acceptable ways . . . we don’t have to look at racism, classism, and sexism.” She shares the belief with other victims that the people labeled as insane are often used as distractions from the causes of mental illness.

Reporting abuse was all too often interpreted as noncompliance or as an attempt to split staff members. Concerns over the side effects of medications were routinely dismissed without discussion, and the right to refuse medication violated by consequence of forcible injection or “four-point restraint.” Most patients submitted to their medication after spending time restrained in the quiet room.

Sexual abuse was ignored or not believed, similar to Freud’s disbelief of his patients’ reports of incest. Not one of the survivors in this book had recourse to a patients’ advocacy system.

These are sobering accounts mental health professionals and the families of survivors would do well to read. While not every patient has been abused by the mental health system, society often

gives carte blanche to the professionals they have assigned the messy problem of insanity. This is done without so much as a backward glance let alone a critical eye.

—P. Crossland



## Lesbian sisters share their wisdom

Fleming, Lee, ed. *To Sappho, my sister: lesbian sisters write about their lives*. Charlottetown, P.E.I: gynergy books, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-921881-36-3, \$16.95.

For sisters of all sexual identities, it would be difficult to read *To Sappho, my sister* and not come away with new perspectives on the sister relationship. The stories included provide the viewpoints of sets of twins, pairs and triples of lesbian sisters, “well-known and less famous,” in the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Switzerland. Each family story is shared by one or more members of 18 sets of sisters in the form of poetry, essays, interviews, and e-mail correspondence.

The editor of this anthology, Lee Fleming, found upon starting her work that there were “precious few models or archetypes of sisters from which to draw,” and indeed, there is no one model of sisterhood presented here. The stories range from sisters who are intertwined in one another’s lives and communities to those who have, in typical sibling fashion, struggled to maintain their separate identities. The diversity of family styles is very present in these heart-felt tales of childhood, coming of age and triumphs over adversity.

Some contributors examined the specific intersection of sister and lesbian. Anne-Marie Pedler writes:

Having a sister who shares the same mother, who shares the landscape of my childhood, who has her own distinct stories about our shared reality, gives me my benchmark. It says that, as a lesbian, I’m merely one among many; it says that I, as a lesbian, am a story derived from within my family and their stories. It says that my lesbianism is a part of the whole story and that, when lesbianism is left out of anything, the story is either incomplete or a lie.

As these sisters struggled with questions about how their relationships would be different if one hadn’t been lesbian, how things were different from childhood to adulthood and how they interacted with the rest of their families, I found myself contemplating the relationships I have with my sisters and the rest of my family. If you are interested in family histories, sister stories, lesbian family ties, have a sister or simply wish you did, this anthology is definitely a must read.

—M. Brown



# Book Review Section

## The scholarly view: women's studies

### Women's rights in history

Lunardini, Christine A. *Women's rights: social issues in American history series*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1996. Cloth, ISBN 0-89774-872-7, \$29.95.

This book reflects the few advantages and many weaknesses inherent in attempts to tell "women's" history in the United States as one unified story. Running from the first European settlements in the sixteenth century to Anita Hill's challenge of Clarence Thomas, Lunardini inevitably sacrifices detail to sweep. Beyond that, however, in making "women's" history one story, Lunardini also almost completely denies the existence of conflicting interests between women.

Throughout the book, there are "women," and then there are subcategories of women. The former refers to the experience of the dominant group, white women, and the latter to "other" women whose different experiences are noted without allowing them to alter the "general" story.

For example, the chapter on colonial America features a section, "The value of women in society," in which "women" are white women and "society" is settler society. The same desire to impose unity on women's experiences leads to some absolute mythology, as when Lunardini writes that the National American Woman Suffrage Association, as it got "more conservative" in the 1890s, had "resolutions that encouraged toning down civil rights to cultivate southern membership . . ." In fact, as has been well documented (See Paula Giddings, *When and where I enter: the impact of black women on race and sex in America*. New York: Bantam, 1984), the NAWSA actively opposed civil rights for black men and women, and promised the white men and women of the south that "women's" suffrage would strengthen rather than weaken white supremacy.

In a profile of Margaret Sanger, the birth control advocate, Lunardini concludes, "although Sanger herself got sidetracked into the eugenics movement in the 1920s, which proposed that genetic defects could be bred out of the human race, she nevertheless did a tremendous service to women in particular and to society in general with her groundbreaking work in birth control and family planning." Such a description of eugenics, without mention of its racist implications or uses, allows Sanger to emerge as an advocate for "women," even though she used eugenics to gain popularity for the movement, at the direct expense of non-white women and men.

The book contains valuable information that is accurate and easily accessible. However, as these and other examples show, students of United States gender history would be better served by reading the diverse accounts of different groups of women and

considering them in relation to each other, rather than forcing a history of conflict—dotted with occasional unity—into a single essentialized story.

—P. Cohen

### An early feminist remembers

Jacobs, Aletta. *Memories: my life as an international leader in health, suffrage, and peace*. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996. Cloth, ISBN 1-55861-137-1, \$45; paper, ISBN 1-55861-138-X, \$18.95.

Originally written in Dutch, the autobiography of this remarkable woman is now available for the first time in English. In her mid-twenties, Aletta Jacobs became the first woman in the Netherlands to earn a medical degree, battling a sex-segregated education system to do so. Her medical work led directly to her involvement in the health care of reformed prostitutes and saleswomen. She also made reliable birth control available despite a great deal of opposition. A tireless activist in the international women's suffrage and peace movements, Jacobs traveled extensively on behalf of these causes. This is an absorbing account, which can be recommended for most women's studies collections.

—B. Redfern

### Doctoral literary study

Shugar, Dana R. *Separatism and Women's Community*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 0-8032-4244-1, \$30.

Dana R. Shugar's *Separatism and Women's Community* demonstrates the vitality of separatism as an important issue. Excited by the notion that changes in their personal lives could reverberate throughout the nation, many women have organized rural communes and metropolitan business collectives, putting ideas into practice.

Shugar's argument is fairly straightforward, and she opens with a study of separatist theory of the late 1960's through the 1970's. She discusses texts by radical-feminist authors such as Shulamith Firestone, Robin Morgan, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and the Redstockings, along with those of self-identified separatist authors such as Julia Penelope, Anna Lee, Sidney Spinster, and the Gutter Dyke Collective. Such a lengthy examination demonstrates movement of the 1960's may have been the beginning of modern feminist-separatist politics, separatist practice existed long before the advent of contemporary feminism in this country.

Next, with careful attention to historical detail, Shugar analyzes Joyce Cheney's *Lesbian Land* and Michal Brady's *Are We There Yet?* These two anthologies work well for two reasons: first, read together they provide examples of residential and

*Women in Libraries*



## Book Review Section

business, urban and rural collectives; second, they are dedicated to the exploration of both the positive and negative aspects of the collective experience. While, I believe, the intent of these narratives was to illustrate the exhilarating possibilities of living out separatist politics, in reality the texts worked more within their communities to discourage future attempts to create collectives.

Lastly, Shugar provides a detailed analysis of two separatist utopian novels: Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (Persephone Press, 1978), a text written, in part, from authorial experiences with rural lesbian-separatist collectives, and Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (Berkley-Putnam, 1978), a book written by a heterosexual, nonseparatist feminist. I believe these two utopian novels are excellent choices because at a specific historical moment they provided their readers with a means both to envision and to attain goals defined by the community from which the texts came.

Shugar's study is necessary, ground-breaking, and detailed analysis of women's separatism. Highly recommended for those who wish to explore the positive and negative aspects of the separatist movement.

—S. Koochek

### The original women in libraries

Hildenbrand, Suzanne, editor. *Reclaiming the American library past: writing the women in.* Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company, 1996. Cloth, ISBN 1-56750-233-4, \$59.50; paper, ISBN 1-56750-234-2, \$24.50.

The dozen essays included in this estimable volume vary in their subject matter but not in their quality. Significant research pieces which are intellectually accessible can be unearthed in many collections but are rarely the norm for a volume. Suzanne Hildenbrand's editorial hand encourages the individual's voice; each chapter engages the reader in a lively dialog with an often unheralded woman of a lost era.

Hildenbrand's opening essay on politics in library history is both well documented and well reasoned. For those unacquainted with concepts such as "herstory," the elements of historical analysis woven through the text are most useful.

The next segment, "Personalities and programs," includes seven essays. Glendora Johnson-Cooper's rich discussion of Jean Blackwell Hutson's exemplary work on the famous Schomburg collection goes well beyond the textbook highlights without assuming too much background from the reader, providing a detailed context for critical issues. Georgia Higley's exploration of women librarians at western land-grant colleges reveals their chronic financial woes, many service innovations, and vital role in rural communities. Adelaide Hasse's professional accomplishments (e.g. the development of the SuDoc

classification system) as well as her experiences with sex discrimination are well documented by Clare Beck. The New Mexico libraries who benefited from the creative vision of Julia Brown Asplund are vividly reflected in Linda K. Lewis' essay. The famous Rare Books Collection of the University of Texas burgeoned under the competent, scholarly hands of Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford. Clara Sitter's thoughtful portrait of this assertive woman echoes many modern issues. Dorothy Porter Wesley's numerous honorary doctorates are a small indication of her substantial work on behalf of the faculty and students of Howard University, and, as Helen H. Britton explains, her remarkable accomplishments have and will continue to serve generations. Finally, Anne Lundin explores Anne Carroll Moore's contributions to children's services and public librarianship. Each essay examines the accomplishments and values of these exceptional women; the power of each portrait, however, comes in the frank explication of the challenges they faced.

Part two, "Professional issues," comprises four chapters. Joanne E. Passet examines the complexities of status and salaries in the early twentieth century. Although little extensive data is available, she makes good use of primary resources to explore the reasons for low salaries and the motivations of those joining the profession. Christine Jenkins ably replies to Bill Katz' 1971 speech to ALA in which he "expressed several stereotypes regarding women and censorship." Reviewing the roles that women have played in the realm of intellectual freedom from 1890 to 1990, Jenkins delineates the social and cultural issues which framed so much solid work. The Pratt Institute Library School, particularly as exemplified in the work of Mary Wright Plummer and Josephine Rathbone, provides Barbara Brand with meaty material for her look at library education. Pratt's economic pressures, curricular debates, and status issues remain all too familiar. Finally, Cheryl Knott Malone's study of women's volunteer work in libraries takes a frank look at the historical development of the volunteer movement and the implications of its gendered nature.

Overall, the volume is a remarkably solid piece of scholarship on an underserved topic. As the well-researched essays illustrate, many small segments have been studied in isolation, but this is a particularly valuable work as it is so broad in scope. Moving from New York to New Mexico and from Schomburg to Pratt, the varied topics in this collection begin to give some sense of the enormous contributions our foremothers made to librarianship. The author and subject indexes are adequate, the illustrations useful, and the quality of the paperback edition acceptable. Librarians of either sex exploring their professional roots, educators searching for energetic readings, and historians seeking to deepen their knowledge of librarianship will mine this book repeatedly.

—L. Westbrook  
9

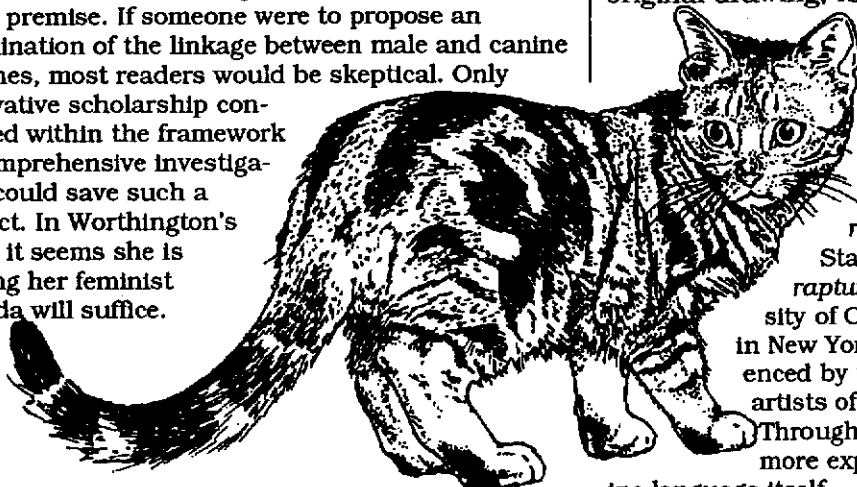
# Book Review Section

## Women in experimental fiction and art

### Artistic connections: women and cats

Worthington, Nancy. *Femalines: Phases of Female-Feline Phenomena*. Sebastopol, CA: Torrance, 1994. Paper, ISBN 0-929523-11-3, \$17.95.

Nancy Worthington's *Femalines: Phases of Female-Feline Phenomena* attempts to make psychological, spiritual and artistic connections between women and cats. These connections are tenuous at best; much of the book's problem lies in its rather weak premise. If someone were to propose an examination of the linkage between male and canine psyches, most readers would be skeptical. Only innovative scholarship conducted within the framework of comprehensive investigation could save such a project. In Worthington's case, it seems she is hoping her feminist agenda will suffice.



It is difficult to review Worthington's writing because she has done so little here. Rather than strengthening her makeshift thesis with solid research and critical thinking, she chooses to string together quotation after quotation from a relatively limited number of sources, producing an extremely choppy read. For every paragraph in her scant text, only one or two sentences are written by the author herself. This lack of original thought is punctuated by a profusion of grammatical errors. When Worthington does make an observation of her own, it is often disconcerting. She informs the reader: "Girls are *sugar and spice and everything nice*, and we all know that cats are noted for all the grooming they do."

Worthington's art reproduced here, a series of twelve collage-like pieces entitled *Femalines*, is even more troubling. These images, which border on soft porn, are as exploitative as those produced by the patriarchal society she protests. Women dressed in cheap lingerie, many adorned with whiskers, are merged visually—and often erotically—with cats.

Despite its strained premise, suspect research, poor writing, and insubstantial art, what bothers me most about Worthington's book is its narrow-minded feminism. Her disdain for men is made abundantly clear in repeated accounts of male dominance and

female submission. In its reverse discrimination, the feminism proffered here is as confining as chauvinism.

—C. Krause

### Exploring the nature of language

Guest, Barbara. *Stripped tales*. With artist Anne Dunn. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-932716-36-9, \$14; special edition of 50, signed by the artists with an original drawing, ISBN 0-932716-38-5, \$50.

In her recent collection of poems, *Stripped tales*, Barbara Guest collaborates with artist Anne Dunn on a work that explores the nature of language itself. Guest, a winner of the Lawrence J. Lipton Prize (*Fair realism*) and the San Francisco State Poetry Award (*Defensive rapture*), graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and settled in New York City where she was influenced by the New York Poets and the artists of Abstract-Expressionism. Throughout the '70's her poetry became more experimental and began to examine language itself.

*Stripped tales*, as the title implies, reduces language to a bareness where the words are self-consciously evaluating themselves:

. . . lines from favorite books words marched in  
unison in her head,  
but when she wrote them down they did not read  
consecutively  
or crisscross: verbs remained solitary with no  
subjects  
on certain vowels a color like calico was pasted.

The poet has taken a magnifying glass to language and found that when words stand on their own, out of context, they take on new meaning.

Juxtaposed to Guest's prose are the mixed media paintings of Anne Dunn. Dunn uses a mix of ink and water color to create visions that are both linear and organic to compliment the shift in focus of Guest's poems.

*Stripped tales* is a limited edition of 1250 copies and is dedicated to the friendship between Guest and Dunn. Guest is an important poet, and her work frequently resonates with concise imagery. This collection, however, is so pared down that it becomes almost completely abstract. I recommend this book for libraries that are collecting her work or word poetry.

—M. Frances  
*Women in Libraries*

## A series of moments

Dienstfrey, Patricia. *The woman without experiences*. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-932716-37-7, \$12.

This is book about a woman who traces her life through layers, as if in a nest of Russian folk dolls. The narrative is in short paragraphs, not continuous, and alternates between the mundane and the spiritual, between memories of events and explorations of sexuality. The book allows us a glimpse of the relationships between Nina and her parents, Nina and her best friend, Nina and her husband, Nina and her children, Nina and her brother. It is told in third person singular (female), but for one chapter, "Albums of the girlhood of Nina Mansfield-Schorr and Simone Weil". This is the most personal and spiritual chapter. The story is that of a search for light, for an opening; it is a story of a profound disappointment. As Nina thinks about her life towards the end of the book (she is 33 years old), she says to herself that really, nothing has happened. Unfortunately, this book makes nothing happen for this reader as well. While I found references to Robert Musil, Maurice Blanchot and Simone Weil interesting, the book did not translate itself into an experience to remember.

—R. Wallach

## From a hard life, a great novel

Vice, Lisa. *Reckless driver*. New York: Plume/Penguin, 1996. Paper, 0-452-27261-0, \$10.95. Earlier edition, New York: Dutton, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 0-525-93863-X, \$21.95.

Six-year-old Lana Franklin, the smart, spunky narrator of Lisa Vice's brilliant first novel, lives in rural Indiana, circa 1960's, with her older sister Abbie and their pathetic, unstable parents. Mother Ruth is selfish and cruel: "Mommy. Mommy. Mommy. Miss Whiny Butt. Have whatever you damn please just stop calling me Mommy like you're two years old. And keep your trap shut for once," and more involved with boy-crazy Abbie. That leaves Lana to her father Floyd, a World War II vet, who obsesses over the house catching on fire, accuses Ruth of seeing other men, and sexually abuses Lana. As Floyd becomes increasingly unstable, Lana and Abbie imagine ways their father might die by inventing a game they call "The Old Man's Gone for Good":

Every night before we go to sleep, me and Abbie play The Old Man's Gone for Good. The way we like the old man to die the best is when he gets killed in a wreck on his way home from work. The old man

can't get out of the reckless driver's way in time.

The driving theme recurs five years later at the novel's end. Vice writes with breath-taking honesty, and her ability to pop us smack dab in the middle of the Franklin family in the process of self destructing is superb. Lana's confusion and struggle to make sense of the chaos of her world is heart breaking and real. No one who reads *Reckless driver* will ever forget Lana Franklin.

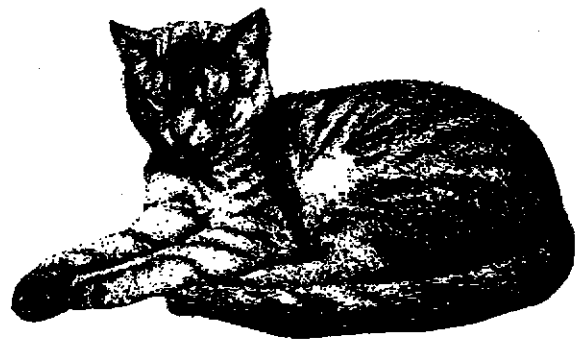
—S. Koochek

## Fiction as poem

Einzig, Barbara. *Distance without distance*. Berkeley, CA: Kelsey St. Press, 1994. Paper, ISBN 0-932716-34-2, \$10.

Barbara Einzig allows the reader to accompany her on the journey which tells itself in *Distance without distance*. While not a stream-of-consciousness novel, *Distance* still follows the path of thoughts wafting through Einzig's mind by "wait[ing] for the events to arrange themselves easily, to communicate their nature to one another and, as a body, to find their natural conclusion." *Distance* encompasses the birth of a child, a seemingly emotionless relationship, and the travels and movements of various animals. All the separate instances provide the reader one viewpoint while further coaxing the formation of personal visions and insights. The intricacies of each story are hidden beneath the surface to force the reader to discover an individual path on this reading odyssey. Einzig not only explores spatial images in the novel, but goes so far as to provide that same feeling through the physical layout of her pages. This imagery works to further demonstrate the distances that can come between people and between feelings or ideas long forgotten yet still attainable in distant memory. Einzig's writing is a bit choppy and difficult to get used to at first, but her work gains momentum as the book progresses. Unfortunately, just as that momentum is reached, Einzig's book ends. This book would be appropriate for libraries serving an educated public, upper undergraduate levels and above.

—S. Voeller



**Women in Libraries**  
 American Library Association  
 Office for Literacy and Outreach Services  
 50 East Huron Street  
 Chicago, IL 60611



***It may be that time again!***

If it's time for you to renew your subscription, we'd like to hear from you.

Consider donating a subscription to your library school. That way, you show your support for both the Feminist Task Force and new librarians.

Clip the subscription coupon and send it to American Library Association, Office for Library Outreach Services, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. Enclose your check payable to ALA/SRRT/FTF, and note on the check, "For Women in Libraries."

Check one.

( ) Enclosed is my check for a one-year subscription to Women in Libraries, \$5 for an individual, \$8 for an institution.

( ) I wish to be billed, for \$2 additional.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_