



FEMINIST  
TASK FORCE

# Women in Libraries

Volume 27, Number 4

*The Feminist Task Force—25 Years*

Fall 1998

## ***Feminist Press continues to keep good books in print***

Two American Book Award winning novels and two others have been reissued this year by Feminist Press.

*Mulberry and Peach: Two Women of China*, 1990's winner by Hualing Nieh, is the story of a woman who flees post-war China and settles in the United States. Because of her experiences as an immigrant and conflicts between her new life and her old, she develops a split personality. The book is banned in China, likely because of its revealing account of China's recent history.

Winning the American Book Award in 1987, Dorothy Bryant's *Confessions of Madame Psyche* has also been rereleased, along with two other novels by the same author, *Miss Giardino* and *Ella Price's Journal*. Bryant is an extremely talented writer who creates fictional but utterly believable narrators in her novels.

All four novels are valuable depictions of women's experiences and deserve to be kept in print. Kudos to Feminist Press!

## ***New Journal founded for 2000 Call for Papers for Feminist Theory***

SAGE Publications is set to launch *Feminist Theory*, a new international interdisciplinary journal, in April 2000. The journal's aim is to provide a forum for critical analysis and constructive debate within feminist theory.

Gabriele Griffin, Rosemary Hennessy, Stevi Jackson, and Sasha Roseneil have signed on as editors; associate editors include Sarah Franklin, Sneja Gunew, Trinh T Minh-Ha, Veronique Mottler and Alison Young. The journal also has an International Advisory Board.

Scheduled to be published three times a year, *Feminist Theory* is to be genuinely interdisciplinary and to reflect the diversity of feminism, incorporating perspectives from across the broad spectrum of the humanities and social sciences and the full range of feminist political and theoretical stances.

The journal's mission is to promote debate among theorists from diverse perspectives, to challenge existing theoretical orthodoxies, to explore links between theory and practice, and to promote politically engaged writing and innovative theories.

To submit an article, write The Editors, *Feminist Theory*, Centre for Women's Studies, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD, UK, or email: [sfj@york.ac.uk](mailto:sfj@york.ac.uk).

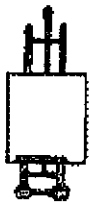
### ***In this issue:***

- Book reviews  
*Art and Memoir*,  
beginning on page 2

### ***Next issue:***

- Philadelphia*
- Midwinter Calendar  
and Map

# Book Review Section



## Art and Memoir—

### Women's experience of the World

#### Artists in Asia

Dysart, Dinah, and Hannah Fink, editors. *Asian Women Artists*. North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Craftsman House, 1996. Cloth, 976-6410-10-0, \$29.95 US, £18 UK.

"Just as Asia is a term of convenience used to embrace many vastly different countries and cultures, so too are concepts such as feminism and women's art when applied to artforms and practice by women of very different nationalities and religious backgrounds," say the editors in their introduction to *Asian Women Artists*. Undaunted, however, by the difficulty of the task they have set before them, Dysart and Fink set about collecting essays on women artists, art galleries, and women's art in particular countries.

Singapore, Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, and China are among the countries represented here. Profusely and exquisitely illustrated, the essays are pithy and incisive. Jane Chia points out, "The sex of an artist matters. It conditions the way art is seen and discussed. But precisely how and why does it matter?" In her essay "Trouble at Hand," she follows her question with a discussion of the difference between arts and crafts, and the hierarchy of the arts and gender. It is evident in the works illustrated that gender fundamentally influences the art these women make.

Representations of "women's tools," including ironing boards, mops, and sinks, are juxtaposed with symbols of women's sexuality, an abdomen swollen with pregnancy, a bed, lace and sequins. The paintings often show the influence of traditional national styles, but also display an international appeal and universal meaning.

*Asian Women Artists* gives American readers a rare opportunity to see what women in the rest of the world are doing, and as a physical object in its own right, the book maintains the standards of art publishing Craftsman House has shown in other publications. —M. Tainton

#### The artist spoofs her trade

Anderson, Anne. *Heads of the Masters*. Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache, 1998. Paper, ISBN 1-57601-054-6, \$6.95.

This is a great little joke/art book, both to art historians and those of a more scatological bent. Anderson has made paintings in the style of a range of modern painters on a common subject—common

in more ways than one. The subject is toilets and begs the question, why has none of these artists painted this commonplace, ubiquitous subject before? Anderson has made up for this oversight by giving us the toilet as it might have been painted by Picasso, Dali, O'Keeffe, and 22 others. Each painting is accompanied by a brief biographical sketch of the painter, and we get to test our knowledge of modern art by trying to guess which artist's style is represented (answers in the back). This book is full of fun, and should be on the back of—dare I say it?—the head of every art student or teacher.

—M. Tainton



## 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. Personnel: 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, HELC, West Texas A&M University, WTAMU Box 60811, Canyon, TX 79016. Phone: 806-651-7917; Fax 806-651-7907; e-mail: [mtainton@mail.wtamu.edu](mailto:mtainton@mail.wtamu.edu).

Contributors: Pamela Crossland, West Texas A&M University; Beth Jedlicka, University of Georgia; Necia Parker-Gibson, University of Arkansas; Rose Schlegl, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; Madeleine Tainton, WTAMU; Konny Thompson, Gonzaga University; Deborah Turner, University of California, Santa Cruz.

# Book Review Section

## Three on Australian art

Kirby, Sandy. *Sight Lines: Women's Art and Feminist Perspectives in Australia*. Cloth, ISBN 976-8097-26-4, \$70 US.

Cree, Laura Murray. *Wendy Stavrianos*. Cloth, ISBN 90-5703-21-12, \$80 US.

Voigt, Anna. *New Visions, New Perspectives: Voices of Contemporary Australian Women Artists*. Cloth, ISBN 976-8097-92-2, \$65 US, £39 UK. All three books published in North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Craftsman House, 1996.

Craftsman House is an Australian publisher with worldwide distribution; most notably, this art

In *New Visions*, 34 artists are interviewed and give us their personal perspectives on their art. Each chapter deals with the work of one artist, opening with a biographical paragraph. Several representative works are reproduced within the chapter. The book is particularly well made, the colors magnificent and the binding sturdy. Including a bibliography and index, it functions well as a primary source on women artists not covered well in other print sources.

These books are indeed beautifully and lovingly made; they fill a niche that has long been neglected. Any women's studies or art collection should make every effort to acquire at least *New Visions*, and, better yet, all three.

—M. Tainton

*"One of the main strengths of the social and political radicalism of feminism derived from its legitimisation of individual experience."*

press is evidently making an effort to address a need for publications about women artists, particularly women artists outside of North America. These three fine books are among the materials on this subject. Because of Craftsman's experience in art publishing, the books are exquisitely made, with high production values evident in the color reproductions and paper quality.

*Sight lines*, the most general of the three books, looks at a range of women's art, both as it sprang from women's movement issues or found a voice because of the greater freedom some women have felt in recent times. In the chapter, "The Subject of Art and Craft," Kirby writes, "One of the main strengths of the social and political radicalism of feminism derived from its legitimisation of individual experience." Women's experience was no longer unworthy, but instead "the source of inspiration and creativity." Fifty-five color and 37 black-and-white plates show examples of the works of relatively unknown but excellent women artists in a full range of media.

*Wendy Stavrianos* is one of the most truly imaginative and creative artists covered in these books, and fortunately the publisher decided she deserved a book of her own. Her work truly mixes media; she combines two-dimensional painting with sculpture, fabric, and collage. Many of her later works are installations and powerful. In "Bridal Landscape," for example, a triptych painting spills onto the floor as a veil might trail behind a bride; the fabric overflow is studded with objects representing vulvas, emerging like shark fins from water. The book consists mainly of reproductions and photographs of her work, with some critical and biographical material in its opening pages.

## Haig-Brown, a memoir

Haig-Brown, Valerie. *Deep Currents: Roderick and Ann Haig-Brown*. Victoria, Canada: Orca, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 1-55143-108-4, \$32.95 (Canada), \$26.95 (US).

In an era of petty, tell-all tomes, Valerie Haig-Brown's work stands as an example of fine writing and sincere respect for the subject of her book: her parents, renowned fisherman, conservationist, judge, and author Roderick Haig-Brown, and Ann Haig-Brown, homemaker, librarian, and devotee of Italian music and culture. Without a drop of sticky sentimentality, Haig-Brown shares her parents' lives using personal correspondence and the memories of their friends, extended family, and children.

From the time of their courtship to their deaths, Roddy in 1976 and Ann in 1990, the couple were devoted to each other. They used the time of their engagement to know each other in a manner almost unheard of in today's society: they wrote long, intimate, revealing letters to each other. This pattern continued throughout their married life and was part of the foundation that supported them through hard times.

It is no coincidence that three of the couple's four children became successful authors; Ann, who typed her husband's manuscripts, kept a carbon copy of most of their letters as well as Roddy's original work. This in addition to the large collection of books the couple collected over the years must have instilled awe for the written word in all of their children. This book is a wonderful tribute to two talented, hard working, thoroughly decent people whose strength of character touched the lives of the many people who knew them.

—P. Crossland

# Book Review Section

## Immigrating from Chile

Rodriguez, Carmen. *And a Body to Remember With*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-55-152-044-3, \$15.95 (Canada), \$12.95 (US).

In fifteen slices of her life, Carmen Rodriguez demonstrates the horror, the joy, and the interminable weariness of life as a political exile from Chile. She spares neither herself nor her readers as she describes the life she refers to as "a hyphenated existence," caught between two worlds, two languages, two cultures, and two realities. She wrote these stories in Spanish, but when she began translating them into English, they became something different. Back and forth between languages the author worked until, she says, "I felt that both tips of my tongue and my two sets of ears were satisfied with the final product."

that even if I wanted to forget, I can't. I have a mind and a body to remember with. Forgetting is not an option." Forgetting will not be an option of those who thoughtfully partake of her work. —P. Crossland

## Discovering our power

Martz, Sandra Haldeman. *At Our Core: Women Writing About Power*. Paper-Mache Press, Watsonville, 1998. ISBN 1-57601-007-4, \$11.00

"Raised in rural Texas, I grew up surrounded by strong, dependable, solid women, my mother and grandmothers, other farm wives, teachers. In their lives, power was a silent adjective, known but never talked about," Martz writes. Women who contribute to her anthology not only acknowledge their power but skillfully flaunt it using poetry, photographs and

*"I have come to terms with the fact that even if I wanted to forget, I can't. I have a mind and a body to remember with. Forgetting is not an option."*

Rodriguez illustrates the confusion that results when a family, uprooted overnight from their home, is forced to migrate to an unknown land. In "Black Hole," Estela de Ramirez holds the family together, clinging to a fuzzy memory of a country that could be Canada taken from the pages of the National Geographic. The subsequent effect on her family of changing culture and nationalities is poignantly brought to light with calls home to the family and difficult decisions about a possible return to Chile years later.

Dislocation results in a myriad of problems; survivors of revolutionary skirmishes suffer guilt for their existence; immigrants experience feelings of disloyalty when their roots become strange and a new culture becomes the known and familiar. In "The Mirror," the narrator perceives a larger reflection of her own spirit in a political refugee to whom she reluctantly provides a haven:

They said you were dying. Everything imaginable had been done to you, as well as everything unimaginable. It never occurred to me that there would be doctors right there, during the sessions themselves, to stop the torturer at the crucial instant, that fragile line that separates life from death.

Above all else is the driving need to communicate these experiences, to define for an audience the shards of broken reality that connect those who left their homelands with those who were unable or unwilling to leave. Rodriguez opens her heart and the stories that are released from that floodgate are authentic, moving, and terrifying. Straddling two worlds gives her a unique voice, one that demands to be heard. "...I have come to terms with the fact

prose. Many of the examples of women's power are subtle and often underestimated or ignored by the popular press; here we have an answer.

One of our strengths is friendship. Mary Kelly's poem, "The Long Night," describes a friendship that continues beyond death:

They had seen one another through heartbreaks and triumphs, mind-numbing jobs, loves, and everyday calls to strength and humor. Sandra's only child had been as near a daughter as Sally was ever to have. One had finished sentences for the other and understood things that couldn't be framed in words. They had reveled in the richness of being and the gift of their womanhood.

Women's stories handed down from their elders and up from their children connect in a circle, each generation giving and drawing strength from the others, though the lessons are often painful. Deborah Shouse probes connection of pain and healing between mother and daughter when childhood sexual abuse is revealed. Hilee uses self-inflicted scars and tattoos, "symbols that she was strong enough to stay alive," to teach her mother about spiritual branding. Brujas and a gypsy fortune teller teach young women valuable lessons about who really holds power. Power expresses itself in everyday events, and these writers make a wonderful collage of the impact these triumphs have had in their lives.

Read this book, share it with family, with friends. Such richness defies the conventional wisdom that "you can't have your cake and eat it too." It is like the lives of its writers: funny, tragic, inspiring, and uplifting. —P. Crossland

## Feminism's many voices

Brown, Brenda Lea, editor. *Bringing It Home*. Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp, 1996. ISBN 1-55152-034-6, \$16.95.

Brenda Lea Brown describes herself in the introduction to this book as "not an activist, not a woman of colour, not a lesbian, not a survivor of incest or abuse, not poor or a single parent..." and wonders what she has to contribute to the women's movement. *Bringing it home* is a worthy offering. She knows instinctively that there are invaluable lessons to be learned at the knees of those we think to be least like ourselves. Her blueprint for contributors became "the woman whose ideas have progressed to the point where she confidently identifies herself as feminist and expresses her feminist values and beliefs in her work, at home, and in the larger community." The 24 authors who met her criteria reveal their struggles from backgrounds simultaneously diverse and similar.

The women come from India, Guyana, Michigan, Japan, China, and Canada. Included are a carpenter, a socialist/aging hippie, a mother-and-daughter team, a woman who chooses to not bear a child, a wheel-chair-bound activist who writes to her terminally ill sister, and a First Nations woman's escape from hell. Feminism has enriched their lives and made it endlessly more complicated. Their stories are wonderful to hear, rich in knowledge, and speak to an audience of women eager to hear them. Brown comments, "It is exactly the book I wanted, and needed, to read—a composition for women in all their roles, through which we can discover interconnectedness, revel in it, grow from it, flaunt and celebrate it, and even call it feminism."

—P. Crossland

## Return to the homeland

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

The sub-title of Suleiman's book comes from a translation of the Hungarian term for copies of official documents, such as birth or marriage certificates. Literally, they are "excerpts from the motherbook," and the poetic term evokes the author's memories of her parents and her childhood in Budapest during the latter half of the 1940s. Suleiman also imagines the term "as an actual book, a great blank ledger in which we inscribe our lives—either literally ... or metaphorically through the accumulation of choices, losses, and recoveries that constitute a life story, at once unique and part of a larger history."

Readers looking for the "unique"—the personal search for recovery of childhood memories and family history—may be disappointed with Suleiman's diary. A greater part of the diary is

devoted to contemporary views of post-1956 Hungary, particularly its political landscapes, as seen through the eyes of its academics and artists. In part, the author's focus is dictated by the difficulty of locating the historical records and landmarks of Jewish families in post-World War II Eastern Europe. Suleiman, a Harvard professor, wrote while on a fellowship at the Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study in 1993. The contributions of colleagues and associates necessarily become part of Suleiman's inscription of, and connection to, the city that was once her home.

Suleiman's diary highlights a number of issues receiving attention in feminist literary criticism regarding biography and autobiography. Among these are issues which are dictated by the "larger history" surrounding an author at any given moment or place in time: issues of language, translation, oral/written history, personal/political history, ethnic origin, and the meaning and nature of home. All of these become part of the histories we create. *Budapest diary* pertains to history, literature, political science, and women's studies, and is highly recommended.

—R. Schlegl

## Musical women

Post, Laura. *Backstage Pass: Interviews with Women in Music*. Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 1997. Paper, ISBN 0-934678-84-7, \$16.95.

This rich collection of women musicians comprises comedy, folk, punk, jazz, blues—and that's without referring back to the table of contents. Recognized names like Sweet Honey in the Rock, Janis Ian, and Joan Osborne are covered as well as less famous artists such as Moe Tucker and Deborah Henson-Conant. For sheer breadth of styles Post must be commended.

Perhaps because of its wide scope, the focus of the book is a little hard to pin down. Post says she has included performers whose work has soothed and inspired her, and that may be as much of a point of reference as the collection needs.

Though titled as a book of interviews, the style is an amalgamation of interview and essay, with the essay portion often predominant. Post is enthusiastic about her subjects to the point that she often speaks for them; two sections contain almost no words from the interviewees.

Some books have to be recommended because they break new ground. Women in music is an area which has been severely and rather inexplicably overlooked by authors, and this volume helps to fill the gap. A discography at the end of each article is a particularly laudable inclusion. The articles are very short, mostly about three pages, giving it the feel of a smorgasbord consisting only of succulent hors d'oeuvres. It is recommended for any collection, but with the hope that a main course may appear in the future.

—K. Thompson

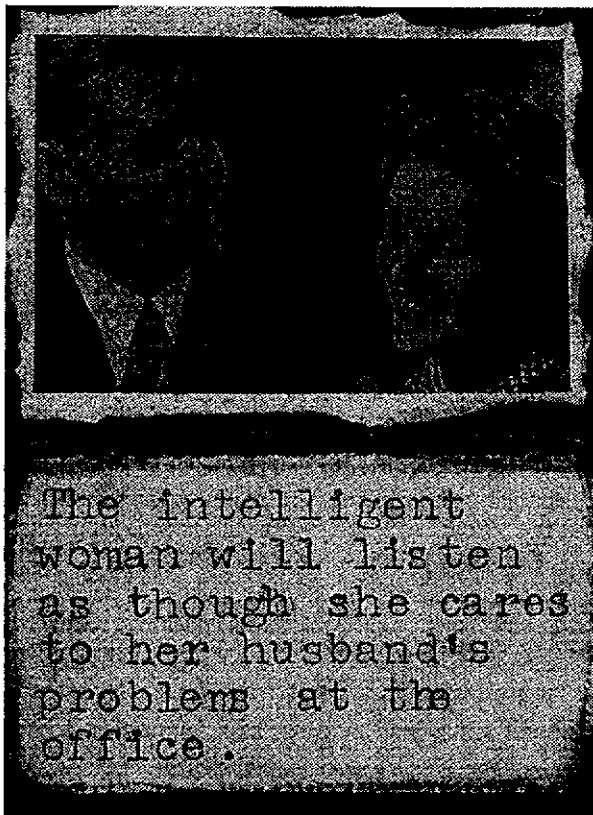
# Book Review Section

## Tell him he's wonderful

Norgate, Sheila. *Storm Clouds Over Party Shoes: Etiquette Problems for the Ill-Bred Woman*.

Vancouver, Canada: Press Gang, 1997. Paper, ISBN 0-88974-080-1, \$18.95 (Canada), \$13.95 (US).

Norgate's political, feminist art is a combination of printmaking and collage. Using images from 1950s advertisements and text from old etiquette books, she sends up the condescending advice on



"Tell me every little thing" from Norgate's *Storm Clouds*. Having trouble on your dates? If you don't know what to do, just tell him he's wonderful.

"self-improvement" for girls, sometimes angrily, always wittily.

Current books like *The Rules* remind us that advice that seems outdated is still being repeated, like, "Girls with brains are all right but the brains musn't [sic] be too evident."

*Storm Clouds* intersperses Norgate's collages with quotes from a selection of books dating from 1923 to 1965; material from these books also appears in the works.

In "A Woman Uses Her Head," the text advises us that to maintain perfect posture, the head should be balanced so perfectly "that you could at any moment balance a saucer on it." The image is of a woman dressed formally; Norgate has added a large cutout of a saucer and placed it over the woman's

head and pokes fun at the whole idea by including on the dish a fork and a big piece of cake. "The Greatest Pride of the American Hostess..." shows formally arranged platters of food while the text describes how the hostess, because of her formal dinners, can "hold her own against the most aristocratic families of Europe." The food on the platters? Vienna sausages, cottage cheese, hamburgers, and something that looks like Spam.

You have to laugh, even though the "advice" is hateful and grotesque.

Norgate's experience with etiquette books was a kind of epiphany; while reading one from 1934, she realized that much of society's control over women has changed only in vocabulary or mode of expression. The anger she felt comes through in her art—while the images she juxtaposes make a funny whole, the underlying meaning is not one you can laugh off.

—M. Tainton

## Introspection from an actress

Dennis, Sandy, edited by Louise Ladd and Doug Taylor. *Sandy Dennis: A Personal Memoir*. Watsonville, CA: Papier-Mache, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 1-57601-001-5, \$14.95.

My knowledge of my body is a bit like my knowledge of geography. Surprisingly minimal. I was fairly aware of the position of my heart and brain, but never considered the ovaries. I had not thought with them, or said the pledge of allegiance with my hand over them. Nevertheless, one ovary had a life of its own. I think it foolish for having drawn such attention to itself.

Sandy Dennis sums up her battle with ovarian cancer with gentle rancor. This slim, unpretentious volume of work is at once revealing and secretive. The Oscar and Tony Award winner allows the reader to gaze narrowly into her soul, sharing the simplest of memories about her life. From the suicide victim she discovered in the candy store at the age of three to the acceptance of her own death 51 years later, she paints simple events in oil with a watercolor technique. She shares those things memorable to her, not at all what the public has come to expect of Hollywood memoirs. Her keen sense of simple details makes common experiences most uncommon.

Dennis considered herself primarily an observer. "I carry images stored in dusty places, not properly catalogued, hidden in corners, with a shaft of light from the window filled with dust and cat hairs...I rarely recall emotions. I recall images." She does this so well throughout this short work, making mundane experiences take on shapes and textures we might otherwise overlook. Despite fine performances on film and onstage, this is perhaps her greatest work.

—P. Crossland

# Book Review Section

## Railroad woman

Niemann, Linda. *On the Rails: A Memoir*. Pittsburgh: Cleis, 1997. Paper, 1-57344-064-7, \$14.95.

*On the rails* is absorbing non-fiction, a memoir of a vanishing way of life, working for the railroads. (How is it that women finally get to do something right before it disappears—only when it is obsolete?) We learn all kinds of railroad slang—and a new way of looking at trains—and along the way see Niemann coming to terms with herself, dealing with sexism and incredible levels of harassment, her own bisexuality, and alcohol. Niemann's is a unique story, probably; she has a Ph. D. already and is having trouble finding work when she decides to get out of the unemployment doldrums by taking on the railroads. Given her difficult apprenticeship, the isolation and hard work, and the late and long hours, it is little wonder there is a tendency to overindulge in alcohol and other recreation. Somehow, Niemann pulls herself out of the morass; she turns to writing to recover her dignity.

She describes the dilemmas women face trying to fit in to a world so exclusively dominated by men for so long:

It was a tricky give-and-take situation. All of the women had to deal with this problem—to be thought competent or to be thought feminine. How to get a balance? My tendency was to erase what would trigger a standard sexual response and to blend in as "one of the guys." I figured I could reclaim my sense of sexuality later, when I could survive out here. Other women made other choices.

Originally published in 1990, this new edition has an introduction by Leslie Marmon Silko and a glossary of railroad terms. —M. Tainton

## The comical side of life...

Harper, Jorjet. *Tales from the Dyke Side*. Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-934678-71-5, \$10.95.

Jorjet Harper reminds us that the world is sometimes a delightfully funny, obtuse place to be



From *The Indelible Alison Bechdel*, 1998. If you already know the characters, you'll love the book. If you're new to them, it's a great introduction, complete with a timeline of their lives and plenty of samples of Bechdel's wild wit.

in, provided we can look at its absurdities from various angles including the "dyke side." Dating, marriage, and even Disney's hallowed Cinderella come under her scrutiny, unraveled like a worn-out afghan and crocheted back together with humor and a slightly bent hook. She is both clear and entertaining, falling short in only one essay, "The Road Trip." The chapters that surround it, however, more than make up for this small shortcoming.

*Dyke side* is full of imagination and speculation, from the sex life of the Loch Ness monster to lesbian lizards and gay fruit flies. A trip in these moccasins will never be dull. —P. Crossland

## ...And life in the comics

Bechdel, Alison. *The Indelible Alison Bechdel: Confessions, Comix, and Miscellaneous Dykes to Watch Out For*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1998. Cloth, ISBN 1-56341-097-4, \$26.95; paper, ISBN 1-56341-096-6, \$16.95.

Alison Bechdel is well known to us feminists for her "Dykes to Watch Out For" comics. In this memoir we are treated to her reminiscences about her coming of age as a political artist as well as about her development of the characters in the "Dykes" family (see below). The book begins with an essay about her earliest cartoon drawings, starting at age three, including thoughts about female characters as commonly depicted in popular cartoons. In the next chapter, she presents a cartoon timeline, illustrating the lives of the characters in her series. From there, she allows us to feast on a wealth of examples from her popular "Dyke" books and calendars, sharing a little of her thinking as she made each one. For those of us who missed the calendars, these are truly funny and wonderful (see page 12); unfortunately, Bechdel found making these calendars so draining she quit making them after the 1997 issue.

Besides giving Bechdel's current fans interesting insights into her thinking and her life, *The Indelible Alison Bechdel* is a great introduction to her work for new soon-to-be fans. —M. Tainton

# Book Review Section

## Canada's crazy women

Shimrat, Irit. *Call Me Crazy: Stories from the Mad Movement*. Vancouver, Canada: Press Gang, 1997. Paper, ISBN 0-88974-070-4, \$18.95 (Canada), \$14.95 (US).

Irit Shimrat presents the reader with a portrait of the mad movement in Canada, which she defines in this way:

Many of us believe that there's no such thing as mental illness; that what goes wrong when people go crazy or become unbearably unhappy has to do with how people live and what happens to them, rather than chemical imbalances in their brains.

In the first of the book's four parts, Shimrat, who has been a mental patient, tells, with honesty and humor, how she became a patient, what went on during her episodes and treatments, and how she became an activist.

*"... what goes wrong when people go crazy or become unbearably unhappy has to do with how people live and what happens to them..."*

In part two, Shimrat describes the Ontario Psychiatric Survivors' Alliance (OPSA). Shimrat, as coordinator, and others traveled around the country to promote activism and advocacy. Though OPSA eventually fell apart, she indicates the group made a difference for many people.

"Mighty Madwomen," the third part, comprises the stories of five women who talk about what it means to be crazy, how it feels to bear such a label, and their roles in and thoughts about the mad movement. These powerful stories alone make the book worth reading. The concluding section discusses other groups within the movement, things to consider when you are in crisis, and ways to help someone else in crises.

This book is like a quilt, at times difficult to read because of the different writing styles involved and the way they are interspersed, and sometimes the reader must backtrack to remember who is writing. Yet this patchwork has value in showing different sides of issues that have divided the movement. The writers mention other publications and, with the bibliography at the end, give good direction for further reading. Shimrat concludes:

Mad movement activists in this country have started self-help, political and creative groups that have made a real difference... Looking at all this, I've come to the conclusion that the mad movement in this country, though not united, is present and powerful.

*Call me crazy* can be disconcerting, especially for those who disagree with the views expressed in it (or don't quite know how to feel about them). The book makes us aware not only of the mad movement but also the need for alternative mental health care and current developments to fill this need. It also tells of people who have had bad experiences and have organized, worked for change, and made a difference. No matter what the issue, that is hopeful.

—B. Jedlicka

## Biography from Nigeria

Johnson-Odim, Cheryl, and Nina Emma Mba. *For Women and Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria*. Champaign, ILL: University of Illinois, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 0-252-02313-7, \$36.95; paper, ISBN 0-252-06613-8, \$19.95.

For more than three decades beginning in the 1940s, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's (FRK) leadership savvy and feminist philosophy pushed and at times pulled Nigeria into embracing women as full citizens and government leaders.

In *For Women and Nation*, Johnson-Odim and Mba tend FRK's driven life like thoughtful gardeners. They note everything from her bicultural (West African and Western) beginnings in a rich environment of community activism and political involvement to the fructified legacy she set in the landscape of future generations. Remarking on what FRK finds significant, they write:

[She] was deeply attached to her hometown...

Even later when she was a participant in national and international politics and the acknowledged leader of women throughout Nigeria, [the town of] Abeokuta remained her springboard and her inspiration.

Each of *For Women and Nation's* seven chapters could stand alone as an essay; together they provide both a broad overview and a detailed picture of African feminism, the anti-colonial movement, and Nigerian history. The index and bibliography would also prove useful for researchers.

Yet, to read *For Women and Nation* in its entirety is to begin to understand how FRK wove her steadfast political and personal ideals into a brave public life and a rich, though at times neglected, private one. FRK's vision, however, didn't easily translate into the everyday. She had to wait thirteen years to marry her fiancé because her father wanted her to have a British education and because she so strongly felt the call to leadership—she worked with and spoke out against the Nigerian government, organized women and protests, opened schools, taught children, and so much more.

Books about pre-1960s African feminists don't come our way regularly. This one, with its wealth of information and fascinating story of a dedicated heroine, thankfully has.

—D. Turner



# Book Review Section

## Fueled on sardines and tea

Bradbury, Elspeth and Judy Maddocks. *The Real Garden Road Trip*. Victoria, Canada: Polestar, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-896095-35-6, \$24.95 (Canada), \$19.95 (US).

Wanted: "real gardens and gardeners." With this thought in mind, two enthusiastic friends who collaborated on a previous book, *The Garden Letters*, trek across Canada in search of fellow gardening devotees. Every garden has a story to tell about its keeper; Bradbury and Maddocks sympathetically and faithfully record their stories, fueled only on sardines, tea, and their love of flora. More than eighty gardeners welcome them into their sanctuaries, often in unique settings: a boat, a balcony, a forest, a small island.

The duo have a knack for seeing beyond fruitful vegetable and flower gardens to the heart in each space, and they take us on a wonderful tour of Canada via gardens and their guardians. Color and black-and-white photos punctuate the stories; unfortunately, they are only of middling quality. Still, "Judy's Journal," interspersed with "Elspeth's Travelogue," more than make up for their lack of camera skills. Gardening enthusiasts will naturally appreciate this book; however, those readers with only a mild interest in gardening will be drawn to the stories behind the foliage. —P. Crossland

## How do we survive?

McFarlane, Donna. *Division of Surgery*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press, 1995. Large Print edition, paper, ISBN 0-8896-220-X, \$16.95.

*Division of Surgery* began as a series of half-hour broadcasts on a Canadian story radio show. This autobiographical story depicts the experiences of Robin Carr, a 29-year old woman who has Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), beginning six weeks after her first surgery. Her bowel has been cut out and she is left with an ileostomy, which she describes as "a plastic bag full of warm shit hanging from my side..." Robin undergoes related surgery a dozen times. Told from her own point of view, *Division* is about how her life changes and how she lives with her disease. If the reader is tempted to pity this woman, the temptation does not linger. Robin is an honest, likable woman; she is young and has a lot of spirit. She suffers pain from her disease and the many operations and disappointments with treatments. Her husband finds himself unable to cope with her disease and abandons her. Nevertheless, this book is ultimately about survival and finding happiness, and the writing is wonderful. In one particularly poignant passage, Robin finds pleasure swimming in a lake:

Water, air, mountain, arm, water, air, mountain, arm, joy. Joy, as I lifted my face higher from the water to see the clouds over the mountains. Joy, as my abdomen muscles pulled taut with every kick. I felt joy in my toes so far away...Drifting and hearing myself breathe. I touched my head, my heart and my ileostomy. I've got all this, I thought.

Donna McFarlane herself became ill with IBD in 1984 and, like Robin, has had twelve abdominal surgeries. In the back of the book there are some facts about IBD from the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada. The book is a quick read, and well worth the time. —B. Jedlicka

## Raising sons in feminist times

Smith, Babette. *Mothers and Sons*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1995. Paper, ISBN 2-86448-222-2, no price listed.

Adult women (ages 23-83), 153 of them, and 129 men and boys (ages 10-72) contributed opinions and anecdotes to this interesting book. The participants, all from Australia and England, reflect views from 1945 to the 1990s. Smith contends that feminism affected how boys were raised during that period, but fell short of causing men to become healthy, self-assured individuals who treat women as equals. The weakness of her study, the small pool of participants, is somewhat balanced by the interesting questions she raises. For example, have women treated draft age sons differently from their daughters not only because of cultural expectations but because of the fear of losing their sons to war? In addition, she contends that, despite much popular press to the contrary, "few mothers understand how the demands of being masculine in Western society steadily closes down the boys' capacity for empathy...[T]hey accept men's romantic presentation of masculinity as the accurate version."

Smith does a good job of exploring the too-narrow definition of masculinity in Western culture but falls into the trap of leaving it to women to "hold their sons accountable for their actions." It is never enough for one half of the parenting team (in traditional father-mother households at least) to hold a child responsible: both must do so. At the end of this book, she gives a nod to the notion that men have to redefine masculinity for themselves, but its effect is marginal since she has placed sole responsibility on the primary caregivers, usually the mothers. Ultimately, each man has to assume responsibility for his own actions and emotions whether his mother forced him to or not. Smith would likely agree but still maintain that feminists (and, by definition, mothers) have fallen short of the expectations society has foisted on them. —P. Crossland

# Book Review Section

## Incest and recovery

Alleyne, Vanessa. *There Were Times I Thought I Was Crazy: A Black Woman's Story of Incest*. Toronto, Canada: Sister Vision, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-896705-08-01, \$16.95 (Canada), \$13.95 (US).

In this book, Vanessa Alleyne pieces together a quilt of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse based on the recollections of family, friends, and social workers, and her own memories of her childhood. Her story begins with her mother's pregnancy at the age of 17 while living on the island of Trinidad. June Alleyne had her baby in disgrace, ignored by her father when she was in labor despite his training as a nurse. June's mother had long since learned not to cross her husband, noting it was not uncommon for husbands to beat their wives into submission. This perhaps contributed to June's

*"... I'd found out where my baby was buried. I was now free to move out of the past."*

refusal to believe Vanessa when told of the abuse heaped on her by her stepfather:

Striding towards the door, [my mother] stopped and turned back to me. "How many men do you think would marry a woman with four kids and treat them like his own? You don't know how lucky you are." "I don't see what makes me so lucky when my stepfather wants to have sex with me all the time. He's married to my mother, not to me," I said.

The story that follows is too sadly familiar yet uniquely experienced as this young woman's journey through rape, pregnancy, and the loss of her infant son. Drawing on inner resources that were more abundant than she could have known, Alleyne gives voice to a shame that her mother and stepfather would much rather have had kept silent. Despite losing both the initial court battle as an adolescent and her trial against her stepfather as an adult, she counts herself the victor. "I had something to celebrate. I had accomplished what I set out to do: I'd forced my parents to face what they had done. I'd found out where my baby was buried. I was now free to move out of the past."

—P. Crossland

## Little in common but writing

Heller, Caroline E. *Until We Are Strong Together: Women Writers in the Tenderloin*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 0-8077-3647-3, no price listed; paper, ISBN 0-8077-3646-5, \$19.95.

Imagine a diverse group of women, mostly below the poverty line, but with many varied experiences and lots of stories to tell. Now, think of a forum, a writing group designed for them, in hopes of "liberation education" and increasing self-esteem, with space and facilitation provided by local community centers. Caroline Heller's book chronicles the process, and includes commentary about the workings of the group, as each writer's work affects another's, and in the end, how these writers, given permission by the circumstances to be open and support each other.

Writing is usually thought of as a solitary form of expression. The women in this group, on the fringes of society because of race, age, gender, or poverty, found a communal expression of their hopes and experiences by joining together in criticism, appreciation, and presentation of the main thing they had in common, their writing. The members included Mary TallMountain, an Athabaskan woman in her seventies, Salima Rashida, a Black Muslim woman in her forties, Leona Walker, a white woman in her seventies, and Nikki DeBella, a white woman in her thirties; the membership varied over time, as members moved in and out of the neighborhood. The writing group members listened with care, and for the most part honored each other's work, while helping each other to hone their skills. The object was not to make the works marketable, or to make members employable, but to give each member a place to present her work to a small, sympathetic community, to let each member be heard. Eventually, the group did presentations of poetry, short stories, and a one-act play for the local community, in support of various causes and as fund-raisers for the centers.

Well-written, informative, and moving, the book presents a charming glimpse of women managing a very difficult feat, working together for the common purpose with little argument, despite their different origins. The most important product of the group was not words on paper, but the pride the women developed in themselves and their accomplishments.

—N. Parker-Gibson

## On the Net: Feminist women's bibliography

A 1,000-title Feminist and Women's Bibliography may be seen at: [http://members.aol.com/PinteaReed/fem\\_books.html](http://members.aol.com/PinteaReed/fem_books.html), or at its mirror site, <http://www.feminista.com>. The bibliography was assembled by Lili Pintea-Reed, a family therapist and senior contributing editor of *Feminista Magazine* (email [pinteareed@aol.com](mailto:pinteareed@aol.com)).



## Clothing in the immigrant experience

Schreier, Barbara A. *Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880-1920*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1994. Paper, ISBN 0-913820-19-9, no price listed.

Barbara Schreier, curator of costumes for the Chicago Historical Society, provides an absorbing, thought provoking catalogue to accompany a historical clothing exhibit. Schreier contends "that clothing and choices about it particularly reveal the complexity of the acculturation process..." She supports this with beautiful, revealing photographs of families, individuals, factory workers, and street scenes. She punctuates her text with the voices of the immigrants themselves. Here, one notices a child wearing shoes: "Imagine, he's (her father) lived in this country two years now and he doesn't know that it must be a holiday because how else would the children be allowed to wear shoes and stockings? If it weren't a holiday, they would be barefoot."

Immigrants became aware of the importance of proper clothing sometimes before they even arrived on American soil. Their first concern was to deck themselves out in clothing that would not only make them more acceptable to their neighbors but enable them to get work. Men shaved their sidelocks in order to find work, women agonized over their wigs and durable clothing. Young women spent various percentages of their meager salaries on new clothing, often gathering scraps of ribbon and fabric off factory floors to spruce up their wardrobes. Then, if they tried too hard, social reformers looked at them askance for dressing above their station.

New World styles also affected the religious symbolism connected with clothing. One young woman boldly refused to allow the rabbi to tear her clothing after the loss of a loved one. The need for intact work clothing won out over her sense of religious duty.

Though unable to see the exhibit, we will be richer for reading Schreier's catalogue. It is also provides an interesting framework to apply to immigrants, our poor, and low income workers today who strive to assimilate upwards in a society that demands designer labels as admission tickets.

—P. Crossland

## Poetry from Jamaica

Ford-Smith, Honor. *My Mother's Last Dance*. Toronto, Canada: Sister Vision, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-896705-12-X, \$14.95 (Canada), \$11.95 (US).

Ford-Smith reminds us that the clearest eyes of history are found not in textbooks but in the poet's memory, heart, and soul. She depicts a period in Jamaican history, gathering the voices of mothers

and children from the cliffs and countryside to murmur and hum and sing their lives to the generations after them. The poems represent no one person's history but belong to the island, to history. Times are hard and seldom kind to the women and children who flourish in spirit if not in body. From "Grandma Ames Prays for Her Children":

I sounding constant warning;  
Any minute disaster can strike  
Be on your guard.  
For living is like house cleaning  
As fast as you clean out the place,  
Somebody nasty it up again.  
And so they take care.

In the poem "Amputation," a mother and daughter speak of the chasms that separate them—time, class, skin color. All the things the mother fought so hard to give her daughter are the things that keep them apart.

MotherDaughter  
Cold, whiteWrong colour too.  
invulnerable as alabasterBut she would never say  
that out loud  
patronizing the impoverishedAnd she's the one who  
said she couldn't go  
with visions of upliftmentto the U.S. with me when I  
was little  
handing down writs of judgmentSaid they'd put me in  
the bus for whites  
on the colonized bourgeois - like me.and her in the  
one for the coloureds.

This beautifully written book joins the chorus of Caribbean voices.  
—P. Crossland

## Baby butch grows up

Hucklenbroich, Frankie. *A Crystal Diary*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1997. Cloth, 1-56341-083-4, \$26.95; paper, 1-56341-082-6, \$12.95.

The opening lines on our heroine's youth in St. Louis in 1957:

Bouncing baby butches, boiling and bursting  
with glands. Kids, with our fledgling hormones  
doing a cha-cha-cha down teenage bloodstreams,  
anonymous libidinal message colliding inside our  
crotches like microscopic car wrecks.

Thus begins an epic odyssey from one coast to the other and lots of places in between. Like a dyke *On the Road*, this autobiographical novel, which seems very autobiographical, meanders and zigzags, life on the darker side of butchdom. The main character also zigzags in relationships.

Hucklenbroich's prose style is excellent, readable and tempting. She's tough and her style is tough, raw and dark: She has a lot to prove. From adventures with drugs, including speed and a welter of other chemicals, picking up men in bars in order to robe them, picking up and dropping femmes, leaving a wake of broken hearts, Hucklenbroich's narrator reveals her life outside the law, true only to the hard-learned lessons of working-class dyke life in her up and down career.  
—M. Tainton

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



1993 Dykes to Watch Out For Calendar (December)

## ALA Poster Sessions: Applications wanted!

Poster Session Applications for the 1999 American Library Association Annual Conference in New Orleans are wanted. Resolve to see that feminist librarians have a presence there. Visit URL <http://www.lib.siu.edu/ala> to submit your application and check out the guidelines for applying, helpful hints, and photos of sample poster sessions also at this website.

Or email [posters@lib.siu.edu](mailto:posters@lib.siu.edu) giving the title of the session, your name, address, and email address along with a 200 word abstract.

By snailmail or phone, contact Marta Davis, co-chair, ALA Poster Session Review Panel, Morris Library, Mailcode 6632, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-6632, 618-536-3391 for instructions on how to apply. Get right on it. The deadline is January 31, 1999!