

Broadside

A FEMINIST REVIEW

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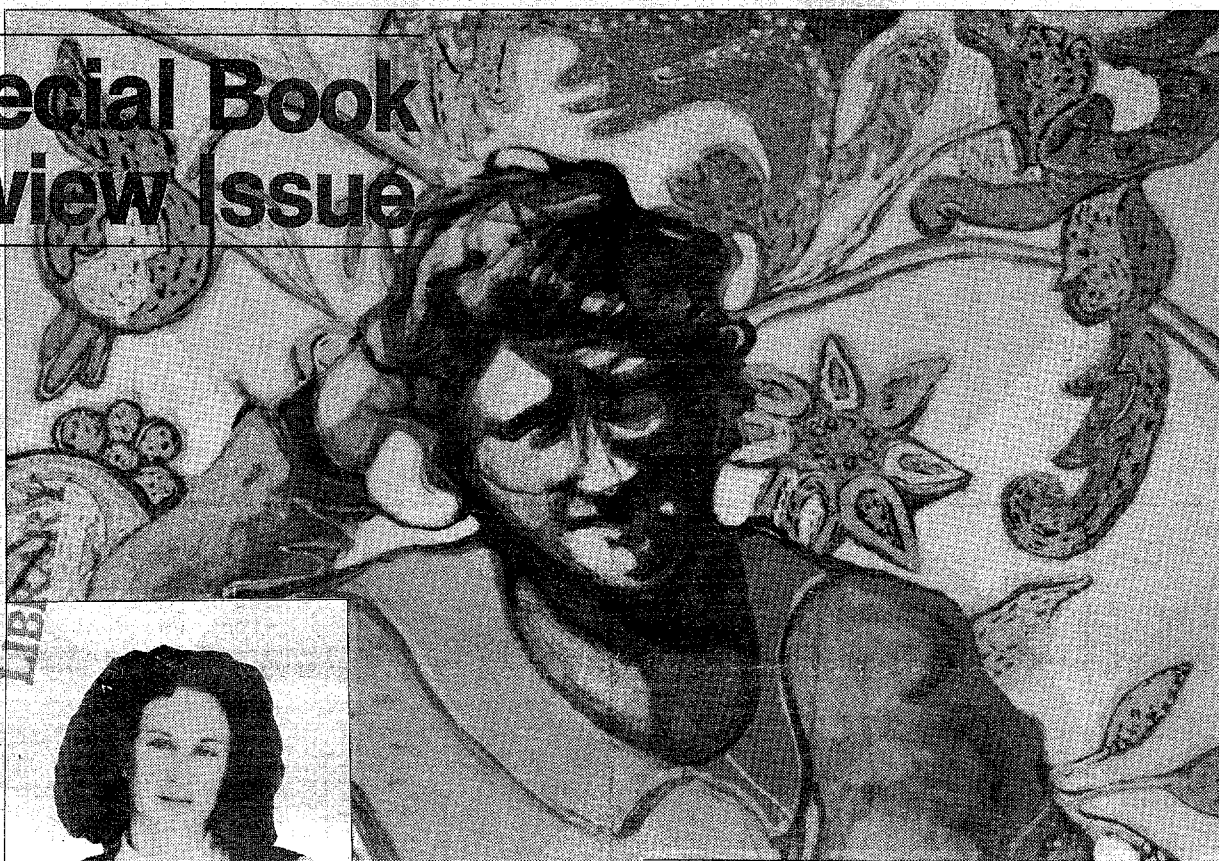
May 1983

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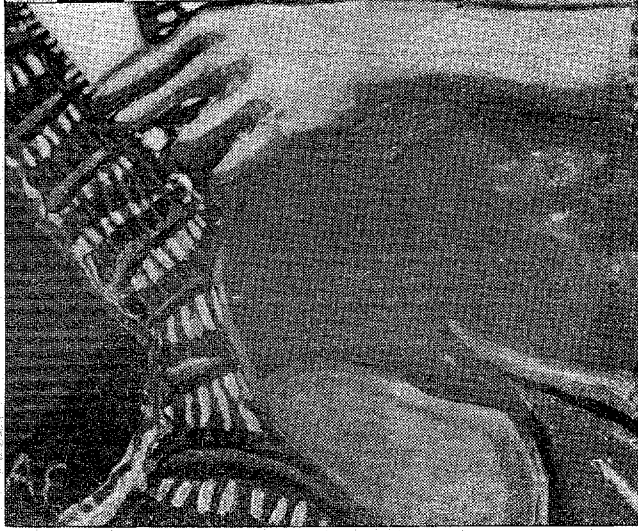
Special Book Review Issue



Anne Finlay



Graeme Gibson



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Preface

In November 1970, Discussion Collective No. 6 of the Toronto Women's Liberation Movement decided that it was time to publish some Canadian material on women and their oppression. Articles were solicited from women's groups across the country on the grounds that the material would be of use. After several months, the manuscript, *Women, Under*, was ready to be printed. However, the publisher was a small, leftist, organization which had the usual capitalist attitude. It was then sent to several feminist groups who would print the manuscript only on the condition that they have editing privileges. Collective No. 6 did not agree to this and so the manuscript was shelved. The following is the original introduction.

When the left in Canada has been content to allow the American left's analysis of and solution to social problems. The Canadian women's movement, along with the Canadian left, has been guilty of this attitude to a large degree. It is in response to this attitude and in order to understand the unique experience of Canadian women, that we have undertaken the present anthology.

The first three years of the days of radicalism about Canadian women, when we were pursuing the idea of internationalism, and the idea of a women's movement, is covered in all of the Canadian women's magazines but has been missing in its entirety from the pages of the left. The content of the collection and the introduction by the editors of Canadian women. After extensive discussions, we agreed to try to create an anthology of writing bearing on the history and current practice of the women's movement in Canada.

In striving to publish this anthology, we did not wish to advocate a particular political view or did not intend to make a conscious or unconscious view of the proper structure and work for the movement. However, we regret that the process of certain issues although we would like the experience of others, the case could be far more work. Therefore, the message in this book is to create an anthology of women's struggles in this country.

We hope, however, and realized in an effort to find better representation of the ideas of women of color Canada. We have generally included articles and have not included them, again nothing not to mention our own bias on the material. With 2 or 3 exceptions, articles which have appeared in other publications have not been used in this book.

We learned that it is not possible to create a women's movement, beginning with only the content, we were making the choice of each group of writers of its own process, events and events, and are articles which should be included in an anthology of Canadian women's writing. Each issue is listed for more information.

Books reviewed in this month's *Broadside* include *Murder in the Dark* and *Second Words* by Margaret Atwood, *The Lace Ghetto* by Maxine Nunes and Deanna White and *Women Unite!* (contents page inset).

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- Feminism in Canada**, eds. Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn; reviewed by Eve Zaremba. Page 5.
- Women and Children First** by Michele Landsberg; reviewed by Ann Pappert. Page 7.
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- Feminist Classics Revisited: **The Lace Ghetto** by Maxine Nunes and Deanna White, **Privilege of Sex** by Eve Zaremba, **Women Unite!**, Women's Press anthology, and **Mother was not a person**, ed. Margret Andersen; reviewed by Joanne Kates. Page 9.
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- Women and Words**: a look at the upcoming conference in Vancouver by Jan DeGrass. Page 4.
- Movement Matters, Letters and our monthly Toronto women's events calendar for May 1983.

EDITORIAL

About Books

Fortunately for those of us hooked on books, many continue to be published despite hard times. That is as true of books written by women as of any other kind. Reviewing the most important ones, let alone reading them all, is quite another matter. Each month in *Broadside* we try to review at least a couple of books we think are of interest to women, especially feminist books, but there are always others overlooked. To adjust the balance somewhat, we decided to make this issue primarily a book review issue.

The reviews included are exclusively of Canadian books by women that have been published within the last couple of years. Not all of them are feminist in orientation. Some are books of more general interest. Nor are there any reviews of books pub-

lished in a language other than English. A selection of foreign-language books by women might well be the focus of a future issue of the paper, but was not feasible for this issue given the availability of reviewers and of space.

Those two factors usually account for what is reviewed and at what length. By necessity, in this and other issues of *Broadside*, we are selective, not exhaustive. You will discover in this issue reviews of new books, old books — including a few Canadian "classics" — poetry, prose, fiction, non-fiction. Some you will know, others will be unfamiliar. All the reviews, we hope, will stimulate you to read the books mentioned and to patronize the bookstores which carry them. Happy reading!

LETTERS

Broadside:

With regard to a footnote to Sheila McIntyre's article on the Constitution in your March, 1983 issue, it is neither accurate nor fair for you to state that Lloyd Axworthy, former Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, cancelled a conference on the Constitution scheduled by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I was a Vice-President of the Council during that controversial period (1981) and would like to bring the actual, recorded facts to your attention.

The CACSW conference on the Constitution was not cancelled by Mr. Axworthy, or by anyone else for that matter, but was *postponed* by a wide majority vote of the CACSW Executive Committee and, again by majority vote, in a meeting of full Council. The conference was held, very successfully, in May, 1981, rather than the earlier February date.

Your footnote casts serious and completely unfounded aspersions on a number of women, myself included, who were members of the Council at that time. It is, in my opinion, careless and biased writing and lacks the fairness and the respect for women and women's work normally found in *Broadside*. It is particularly unfortunate, I think, as part of a supposedly accurate article on the constitutional rights of women.

I hope, unless *Broadside* has factual information contrary to the facts as I have stated them, that you will print this letter as a cor-

rection to the footnote in your next issue.

Hellie Wilson
Ottawa

Broadside:

We are writing in response to the letter written by Mary O'Brien and Frieda Forman, and to Lois Lowenberger's opinion piece, "IWD: Lip Service to Feminism", both of which appeared in the April, 1983 issue of *Broadside*. Since what is to follow is in many ways quite critical of their positions, we think it's a good idea to begin by saying that we think it's important that all three women took the time to write *Broadside* about their concerns. Their comments provide everyone with the opportunity to clarify key debates which preoccupy us as long-term feminist activists. So while we're about to take strong exception to O'Brien, Forman and Lowenberger, we do welcome their criticisms and believe this kind of spirited and tough-minded debate can only strengthen our movement.

In our view, the central question that both the letter and the opinion piece raise is nothing less than: what is a feminist perspective? As feminists, what should be our concerns, our issues our goals as a movement? All three writers feel that a feminist perspective was not part of Toronto's IWD this year. "In brief," Lowenberger writes, "it was far too oriented towards the male left, and paid only lip service to feminism." Some of us, when we first read these words, or heard similar sentiments in various discussions, thought: "Oh, for Chrissake, you must be joking." We thought: how could someone honestly believe that this day, planned and carried out by an army of hard-working, thoroughly committed feminist women, was male-dominated and unfeminist? However, once we'd set aside these initial impressions, we began to consider this question: just what is this feminist perspective that is alleged to have flown out the window this past International Women's Day?

Let us lay our cards on the table. The International Women's Day Committee (we are not here speaking for the March 8th Coalition), as a socialist-feminist organization, is necessarily committed to the struggle against all forms of oppression, whether based on class, sex or race. Now the theoretical and practical differences between socialist-feminists and other groupings of feminists, but particularly radical feminists, are well-known and so we're not going to rehearse all the debates of the last ten years or so. But it does seem worth it to refresh everyone's memories on a couple of main points. As socialist-feminists, we acknowledge that women's oppression well predated capitalism; we also acknowledge that women's subordination has not ceased to exist in socialist countries. But this does not mean therefore that women's oppression transcends all barriers of class, race and nation and that we all exist in a blessed state of

international sisterhood. We believe that while women's subordination is a fact throughout most of human history and in most parts of the world, it takes very different forms and is conditioned by many different factors. And that is the first reason why we raised the question of imperialism: for many women in the world, it is a key structure of their oppression *as women*.

Therefore, we must take exception to Lowenberger's statement that there is no necessary relationship between feminism and anti-imperialism, for the fact is that, for many Third World women, the two are bound up so closely together as to be inseparable in their lives and in their politics. That is why we cannot agree with her position that "a lack of feminist analysis led to the focus on national liberation movements preferred by the male left, rather than on women's oppression" precisely because it perpetuates either/or thinking on questions of international feminism. We also have real problems with Lowenberger's argument that we should abandon issues peripheral to feminism in favour of "more universal problems." But the whole difficulty is, who is to decide what is peripheral and what is relevant? What is peripheral vs. what is universal is a matter of continual debate in the women's movement. Let us remind ourselves that lesbian rights and the critique of heterosexism started out as the peripheral issue *par excellence* in the women's movement. ("Why, lesbianism concerns only one in ten women anyway — surely there is no direct link between feminism and lesbianism. Why alienate a lot of women who have more 'universal' concerns?") We hope you take the point. "Universal issues" can very easily become the issues of the dominant group. As women, we should know this.

It is in this context that we also reject the linguistic chauvinism and ethnocentrism that is implicit in Forman's and O'Brien's remarks about the Spanish language: "Is that the universal language of struggle now?" We are appalled and flabbergasted. Yes, Spanish is a language of revolutionary struggle in the world today; it is also the language of a significant part of the Toronto population. It is also the first language of many Toronto feminists. Open up your eyes, *compañeras*. As one Latin American woman recently wrote; "I have often confronted the attitude that anything that is 'different' is male. Therefore if I hold on to my Latin culture I am holding on to hateful patriarchal constructs. Meanwhile, the Anglo woman who deals with the world in her Anglo way, with her Anglo culture, is being 'perfectly feminist.'" (*This Bridge Called My Back*, p. 83.)

So yes, we believe there *are* real links between feminism and anti-imperialism. Let's get more specific. Lowenberger writes that: "Liberation movements are not even directly relevant to the lives of all immigrant women in Canada. Many women, even those from the areas of armed struggle, have not had any direct involvement with the national

liberation movements. Many immigrant women are conservative, may even be right-wing, and may not agree with the liberation movements. Should we ignore them? The immediate concerns of immigrant women are matters such as English language classes, education, wife battering, immigration policy, decent jobs and freedom from harassment." We are not about to deny for one moment that these are central concerns for immigrant women living in Canada today. That is why the Coalition raised these issues in the pamphlet prepared for IWD and why we'll continue to raise these concerns. But what mystifies us is how Lowenberger could think that the question of imperialism (and therefore the significance of contemporary national liberation struggles) is *unrelated* to these very concerns.

Two fast examples. One: surely one key root of the racial and ethnic discrimination that we see every day in Canada is a heritage from colonialism and imperialism? And can we talk about immigration policy without referring to the imperialist underdevelopment of many nations — which forces people to come to Canada? Two: surely we cannot talk about decent jobs for all without talking about the role of imperialism in securing a high standard of living for some and a living hell for the rest of the world? As Maria Teresa Larrain of Women Working with Immigrant Women has said on numerous occasions, immigrant women in Canada live a two-fold reality because they do not abandon their identities and political traditions the moment they set foot on Canadian soil. The fact is that many immigrant women active in solidarity groups organized around particular national liberation struggles are the same women working for the rights of immigrant women in the areas of labour, health and so on. For them, the links between the two political struggles are crucial.

We also take exception to the imputed "conservatism" of immigrant women. The fact is that immigrant women are neither more nor less conservative than the rest of the population. But in any case, we are not going to stop talking about women's liberation and anti-imperialism just because some women, whether immigrant or Canadian-born, don't see the link. We are not going to stop talking about imperialism any more than we are going to stop talking about abortion or lesbianism just because some Canadian women flip out at the very mention of these terms.

The question of women's liberation in relation to anti-imperialist and national liberation movements is a complex and difficult one, and no one knows that better than the women who are bound up in both struggles. But this is no reason for women to abandon anti-imperialist questions to the "male left" or to start talking about how such discussions are "patriarchal." For the fact is that there is a real relation between women's struggles and wider progressive struggles.

Broadside

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The *Broadside* Collective does not necessarily share the views contained in any article, even if the byline belongs to a collective member. Views of the Collective are expressed *only* in editorials, and essays signed by the Collective.

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EDITORIAL

This is Broadside

Item: Yes, this issue of *Broadside* is different from others. No, we did not paste-up the front page sideways by mistake. The "*Broadside*" logo was moved to the side first and foremost to make our paper more comfortable on store shelves. A tabloid paper does not fit as well as the more glamorous magazines and gets short shrift from store owners. So we are trying to adapt *Broadside* to the company it keeps on the store racks and give it more visibility, without spending any extra money.

In addition, we would like to make each issue somewhat easier to distinguish visually from the one before. We decided to start our visibility campaign this month because May is our annual "different" issue, this year featuring reviews of Canadian books exclusively. So now you know why and how this month's *Broadside* is different.

Item: A couple of months ago we mentioned our phone fundraising drive to subscribers.

Unfortunately we can only afford to call subscribers within the Toronto area; if we could afford long distance, country-wide calls we would not need fund-raising drives. As a consequence, the 60% of our readers who live outside the Toronto area do not get the chance to chat with one of our phone volunteers, tell her what they think of *Broadside*, or promise to put a cheque in the mail right away. To these disadvantaged people we apologise. However, they should feel free to make their contribution to the *Broadside* campaign nevertheless. Just send a cheque or money order to *Broadside*, PO Box 494, Station P, Toronto M5S 2T1. Thanks, we needed that.

Item: Most of our readers may not be aware how meager a shoe-string we operate on. *Broadside* is put out, on time, ten times a year for what the editors of an average magazine spend on coffee. Unlike many small presses, *Broadside* has not received any gov-

ernment grants, so far. So we need every dollar we can get from sales, subscriptions, advertising and fund-raising.

As we've said, donations are always welcome. But there are other ways any one can contribute towards the shoe-string: *subscribe* for yourself and others, for two years if you can; make it a sustaining subscription, if at all possible; *renew* in plenty of time; don't wait for your subscription to expire, don't wait for a reminder; *read our advertisements*: let our advertisers know you are a *Broadside* reader; advertising revenue is an important part of our income; *advertise* in *Broadside* and suggest that others do so: if you have anything to sell or announce to our readers, don't forget to advertise here; *talk up Broadside* to your library, school, local bookstore, community centre, and especially politicians of all stripes; tell them you support *Broadside*, *A Feminist Review*. Talk it up, show it and share it. ●

Struggles against racism, imperialism, class oppression and so on give all of us a greater space in which to conduct our political movements. Many of us enjoyed the recent article in *Broadside* by Myrna Kostash ("Across the Great Divide: Old World and New World Feminisms," April 1983) precisely because she talked about this relation in the context of Greece. The article is also important because it talks about Kostash's own change of perspective as she begins to understand the different conditions under which Greek and Canadian feminists struggle, and how those conditions can very much define the scope and character of a movement for women's liberation.

We want a similar understanding of the positions of the anti-imperialist women who appeared on the March 3 forum on women's liberation, anti-imperialism and disarmament. We did not ask women to speak with whom we were necessarily in full agreement; one of our goals was to stimulate debate among Canadian and immigrant women on the differing contexts of women's struggles internationally. As Kostash points out, this often involves an engagement with nationalist and socialist movements. While we did not expect feminists in the forum audience to agree necessarily with everything that was being said, we do not feel that such discussions can adequately be categorized as "conducted in the worn out and destructive language of patriarchy", "peripheral" or otherwise "male". In addition, we believe that the links between women's oppression, imperialism and war (whether conventional or nuclear) were well developed from an explicit feminist perspective by panelist Margaret Hancock of Women's Action for Peace. Or was she speaking the tired and divisive language of patriarchy too?

Many of the links we've developed with women in the anti-imperialist and peace movements are new; we're really just beginning to know one another and we want the space to develop those links without feeling compelled to agree with one another on every issue before the feminist movement — or the socialist movement either, for that matter. We realize that one of the mistakes we made at the meeting was not allowing enough time for a fuller discussion. (We planned for this, but as often happens, some speakers went over their time limit.) Despite the fact that we are clearly at opposite ends of the spectrum in many respects, we are also encouraged that women take these issues seriously enough to debate them in *Broadside*. Our goal was to stimulate such a debate at the forum. Now we've got it. Let's continue.

International Women's Day Committee
Toronto

Broadside:

A letter similar to the accompanying letter was sent on behalf of the Committee Concerned about the Israeli/Palestinian Question and IWD to various women's groups that supported, or had tables at, International Women's Day, Toronto.

We think that the letter speaks for itself but would like to briefly report on the response to it.

We have received support from various individuals and groups, including the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto, OISE Women's Research-Resource Centre, and the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League. All these groups wrote to the March 8th Coalition to express, in different ways and with different emphases, the viewpoint that IWD was not the proper time to take a stand on divisive issues that are not, primarily, women's issues.

We also received a reply from the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). NAC stated that they had spoken to members of the March 8th Coalition and that the Coalition had told them that the viewpoints expressed by the speakers at the Workshop were individual points of view. The March 8th Coalition, according to the NAC letter, had taken no position, explicit or implicit, on the Middle East situation.

We found it very strange both that the Coalition offered this explanation and that NAC accepted it. All groups with integrity take responsibility for the speakers they invite. If we went to a meeting where the only speaker on abortion was anti-choice, where

the slogans the chairperson asked the audience to shout were anti-choice, where the only poster on abortion was anti-choice, we would be very surprised if the organization sponsoring the meeting said they were not anti-choice. Certainly we cannot imagine a pro-choice organization or one that was even neutral on the subject inviting only an anti-choice speaker.

We were pleased to see this issue raised in the last edition of *Broadside*, and hope that the discussion will continue.

We are writing to your organization because you sponsored International Women's Day in March, 1983 and certain events occurred in connection with International Women's Day which should concern your group.

On March 3, 1983, as part of the International Women's Day program, and as part of the theme "Women's Right to Peace," a workshop was held on "Women's Liberation, Disarmament and Anti-Imperialism." At this workshop there were four speakers: Niginska Hinsach, from the National Union of Eritrean Women, Nahla Abdo, from the League of Arab Democrats, Feli Behacin, from the Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship, and Margaret Hancock, from Women's Action for Peace. (It is interesting to note, by the way, that there was no representative from, or mention of, Iranian women who were planning a protest on March 8, 1983, against the oppression of women in Iran.)

Nahla Abdo, from the League of Arab Democrats, did not mention whether her, or any other Arab, group was trying to change such practices as polygamy, unilateral divorce, or clitorectomies. Her entire speech was devoted to an implicit denunciation of Israel's right to exist. For example, she condemned Israel as a colonialist imperialist who took over from the British imperialists in 1948, described alleged tortures of Palestinian women in Israeli jails, and spoke glowingly of the support of Palestinian women for the PLO. (We agree that torture of women should be condemned, but if the torture was not being mentioned only as another excuse to criticize Israel the speaker should have covered torture throughout all the Middle East, especially in countries where there is far better evidence that it actually takes place than in Israel.)

It was clear that the speaker's views were generally supported by the March 8th Coalition who organized International Women's Day. For example, the chairperson asked the speaker if there were any slogans that she wanted the audience to shout. At the rally on March 5, 1983 itself, the audience was asked to shout support for Palestinian women; we were not asked to shout support for Israeli women (or, for that matter, for Saudi Arabian, Iranian, or Pakistani women).

The Middle East situation is very complex. Both inside and outside the women's movement opinions range from those who think Israel is an imperialist power who has no right to exist to those who look on the PLO as murdering terrorists who have no right to form a state, with many taking views that lie in between. Many supporters of the women's movement think that there is no particularly feminist position on this question; women are divided along the same lines that men are divided.

We believe that there are two acceptable positions that can be taken when dealing with controversial issues not intrinsically linked with the women's movement. The first, which is probably the wisest, is to concentrate on International Women's Day on those issues directly connected with women on which there is general agreement within the women's movement. There are certainly enough problems of immediate relevance to women, e.g., better daycare, better maternity leave, protection against sexual assault, that there is no need to raise on IWD issues with only a peripheral connection with the women's movement. If discussion is needed on controversial issues which are not particularly women's issues, interested women's organizations could hold forums at other times of the year to see if a feminist perspective could be developed.

The second option would be for workshops on IWD to present several alternative views of controversial issues while making it clear that none of these positions was regard-

ed as the view of the organizers. (We say several points of view because, for example, a supporter of the Begin government and of the Peace Now movement in Israel would present quite different perspectives.)

What we do not think correct is for one position, much less an extremist position, on such a debated subject to be presented as the viewpoint all supporters of IWD and the women's movement should espouse. Such an attitude could be very divisive. There are many women and men who would support, and march for, such causes as freedom of choice and better jobs for women who would not support the position that Israel is a colonialist imperialist. Such people will stop supporting IWD, financially and otherwise, if they think that their support for such issues as freedom of choice will be interpreted and used as support for other far less widely accepted viewpoints that they do not share.

We think that it is crucial that organizations such as yours express your concern to the March 8th Coalition and the International Women's Day Committee. If disagreement with the way this issue was handled is not expressed it will be assumed that you approve of what happened. It is very important that concern be registered, as soon as possible, not only to clarify what should be the IWD viewpoint on this particular issue, but so guidelines can be established for the future.

The address for the March 8th Coalition is: P.O. Box 70, Station F, Toronto, Ont. M4Y 2L4. The IWDC, who used to organize the march, and who are still a very important part of the March 8th Coalition, have the same address.

Reva Landau
Committee Concerned about the Israeli/
Palestinian Question and IWD
Toronto

Broadside:

I want to respond to the letter regarding IWD from Mary O'Brien and Frieda Forman in the last issue of *Broadside*.

First, I will deal with the remarks that made me feel put down and insulted; and then with the political issues which I think are at the bottom of this whole debate about the relation between anti-imperialist struggles and feminism.

About the anger. Mary O'Brien and Frieda Forman took great exception to the use of Spanish in one of the three public meetings. From their letter, one would have thought someone gave a whole speech in Spanish; in fact, the Spanish words amounted to five or six in total. These were: Women of Latin America, now and forever! Women of Africa, now and forever! Immigrant women in Canada, now and forever! etc. These slogans, which were indeed shouted in Spanish by a large part of the audience, are described as "simplistic Spanish slogans." Well! If they were in English, would they cease to be simplistic? That's certainly the implication. And the slogans in question are, it seems to me, pure and simple feminism: women of such-and-such, now and forever. Not a male leftist to be seen in this slogan! And then the letter goes on to make a sarcastic remark: "Is that (Spanish) the universal language of struggle now?"

Well, that sort of sarcasm is horrendously insensitive to the very real struggle which immigrant women have to go through in order to learn English. The women who spoke at that meeting, with the exception of

Margaret Hancock from Women's Action for Peace, were all non-native speakers of English. O'Brien and Forman are blissfully naive about the imperialistic use of English as the supposedly "universal" language of everything, including feminism. They do not seem to realize that for the 50% of the women in Toronto who were born outside of Canada, being able to say a few words in their own language at a feminist event is a liberating and rare occasion. They do not seem to realize that they have a good deal of privilege by virtue of being very fluent in spoken and written English. They do not seem to realize that complaining about the "divisiveness" of saying a few words in another language is putting down an already oppressed group.

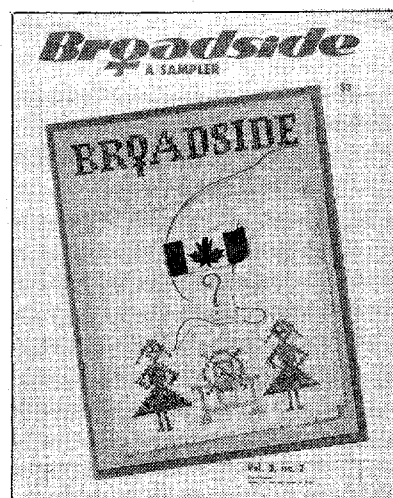
For immigrant women, language is indeed a women's issue. Just as, as lesbians, we have to be "blatant" about our sexuality, so we, as immigrants, have to be a little bit blatant about language. O'Brien and Forman dismiss the concerns expressed by immigrant feminists at that meeting as the concerns of "the male left." Well, apart from ignoring the increased visibility of women and of women's issues in the so-called male left, this comment presumes that some of us have a privileged access to defining feminism. Women in Nicaragua are indeed struggling for the issues that "count" as women's issues; but they're also engaged in a military defence of their revolution against the US-backed Honduran army. Are we going to go and preach to them about what is and is not feminism?

We can, and indeed do, have differences about what is the correct strategy for building the women's movement. I, for one, think that in order to include large numbers of working-class women in the movement, we have to include issues such as the right to a job, the fight against unemployment and wage controls and, in the long run, the fight against capitalism. In order to include significant numbers of lesbians, we have to include the struggle against heterosexism as an integral part of our platform. And, in order to include immigrant and Third World women, we have to include their issues, including the struggle against imperialism, as indeed feminist issues. We would be making a terrible mistake if we "ranked" issues, putting pornography or whatever at the top and imperialism at the bottom. Such a ranking would only express the values of a certain class and ethnic group. It would by no means express any universal feminist strategy.

The view that sees four or five words in a "foreign" language as "divisive" is not an inclusive but an exclusive, dogmatic view. It is the same perspective which says: "Let's get one black woman to speak, but only if she passes our test of politically correct feminism." It is a perspective which is not even aware of its own class and ethnic prejudices, because it simply takes them from the dominant culture, which is bourgeois and English-speaking.

I well know that many women do not want to spend their time in anti-imperialist struggles. That's fine. But do they have to insult those of us who do put some time there, and tell us that we are selling out to the male left? Women are after all not born speaking a feminist Esperanto: we are all born, like it or not, into a particular culture. Those who were born into English-speaking, affluent families think that everyone else is in an ethnic group — just as the bourgeoisie always

• continued page 8



SAMPLE THE 'SAMPLER'

Broadside's 'Sampler' — a collection of articles from our first two years — is an ideal present for birthdays, Christmas, surprises. Send \$3 (plus 60¢ handling) with your name, address and postal code to: Broadside 'Sampler', PO Box 494, Station P, Toronto M5S 2T1.

MOVEMENT MATTERS

Women and Words:

Hobnobbing and Hubbubbing

by Jan DeGrass

The portents are good for the physical health of the upcoming Women and Words conference. The tiny conference office is sandwiched in the BC sports building, between the olympic fitness office and just a handspring from recreational curling. In an office too small to shake an adida, conference organizer Victoria Freeman brought me up to date on the line-up.

Women and Words/les femmes et les mots will be held from June 30 to July 3 in Vancouver, BC and will host an impressive array of workshops, performances, readings, discussion, study and socializing. It will bring together women of all backgrounds working with the written word; from writer to bookseller, from native woman to francophone.

The first evening will open with a splash — an original theatre piece that will introduce the theme of the conference, followed by a gala reception. Short performance works will be interspersed throughout the conference to break up the discussion/reading format.

Two full days of workshops will explore a wide range of subjects from sexism and racism in writing to distribution of women's books. "No idea too bizarre" asked the conference organizers, as they solicited suggestions for themes.

The workshops will be led by some well-known names and some that ought to be more well-known: novelists Margaret Atwood and Marian Engel, reviewers Eleanor Wachtel and Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska (*Le Devoir*); editors Donna Smyth (*Atlantis*) and Sharon Batt; poets Dorothy Livesay and Sharon Nelson; publishers Margie Wolfe and Mary Schendlinger; critics, translators and readers.

The fee for the three days is \$40. Forty-five gets you membership in the Women and Words Society, Box 65563, Station F, Vancouver, BC, V5N 4B0.

Already this doesn't promise to be a conference of the "nice but uneventful" variety. In an October *Quill and Quire* article, columnist Janus* dramatizes the threatened male facing the spectre of "cultural terrorism" known as Women and Words. He accuses the conference organizers of being "one aspect of a well-orchestrated conspiracy of radical feminists" presumably bent on offing male privilege and exaggerating the problems women face in cultural activities.

The implication here is that men of the literary establishment will eventually tire of debating "irrelevant political and ideological issues" like the role of women in literature and will bravely turn back to their long-neglected poetry. Conferences which celebrate women writers, like Women and Words, can only prolong the cultural "hijacking" indefinitely.

Discrimination against women in the literary establishment around issues like association decision-making, reviews, awards,



etc., is a still-simmering stew — a hubbub precipitated, though not begun, by Sharon Nelson's documentation of sexism to the League of Canadian Poets.

Sex discrimination will be addressed at Women and Words, you can bet on it. And you can also bet that this conference will provide us with the kind of national power base we need to make changes in that direction.

Perceiving that an attack on feminists might generate less than a solid 5 column inches of letter response in the following issue, Janus alienates a further segment of the population. He proposes that such a conference could only take place in the "time warp" of the west — a land where, apparently, mass murderers sprout like cedar trees and inhabitants imbibe marijuana like mother's milk.

In this drug-crazed, cult-laden environment women from across the country would gather to hex the unsuspecting male poet. While all this might make for a pretty racy press release, it is not, of course, the stuff of reality.

Women will gather and hex, if hexing is necessary, those conditions that prevent us from realizing our creative capacities — as poets, authors, playwrights, publishers. We may even hex each other as we explore issues of censorship and self-censorship and discuss women who write on crime and violence. And, we will probably hex the geography of our country for forcing some of us to travel thousands of miles and pay large sums to airline companies, just to be together.

The choice of location should be addressed, though for reasons other than those presented by Janus. Why Vancouver? With the population centres of our country in Ontario and Québec and with a national conference

specifically wanting to attract Québécoises, why hold it so far away, forcing many women to arrange fundraisers or go after travel grants? What prognosis for those who must travel from PEI, like Ragweed Press publisher Libby Oughton? Or what of the enthusiast who registered from Goose Airport, Labrador?

One senses a certain quiet desperation emanating from any woman who lives in Goose Airport and wants to write. This conference, then, is for her. Similarly, prairie women seeking cultural stimulation have been known to travel vast distances in pursuit of it. This practice has developed a cohesiveness amongst the isolated that Women and Words seeks to bring to all of us on a national level.

For Toronto women, already gathered in the largest English-speaking cultural centre in Canada, the need to network may not be as pressing. A phone call gives immediate access to book and periodical associations, government agencies, and community grapevines. Typically, Women and Words organizers have received some of their greatest support from Toronto participants, but also some of their most negative criticism. For Toronto women there is probably a greater need to get away to freshen their perspective, and, well... Vancouver is very pretty in June.

For all us, however, a truly national conference needs to get out of Toronto to avoid becoming just another hollow block in the lego of the larger literary scene. Breaking down isolation, forming networks, examining new trends in our literature, meeting one another, is what Women and Words will be about. •

Ed. note — "Janus" is a pseudonym for writer Val Clery.

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Women and Words Conference

June 30 to July 3, 1983
UBC Campus
Vancouver, BC
Tel. (604) 684-2454

Some panel and workshop topics
(subject to change):

Inadequate coverage of women's news
Sexism, racism and the craft of writing
Mainstream vs. Alternative Publishing
Issues in review writing
Comparison of women writers from Canada and Québec
Lesbian literature
Translating women writers
History of feminist presses
Producing a feminist newspaper

Status of Women reports on women in literature
Trends in feminist critical thought

Some participants:

Linda McKnight, President of McClelland and Stewart; Judith Merrill, science fiction writer; Libby Oughton of Ragweed Press; Margie Wolfe of Women's Press; Donna Smyth of *Atlantis*; novelists, Joy Kogawa, Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood, Audrey Thomas, Louky Bersianik and Jane Rule; poets, Nicole Brossard, Suniti Namjoshi, Daphne Marlatt and Phyllis Webb; reviewers, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska and Eleanor Wachtel; journalist, Linda Briskin; Mary Schendlinger of Talonbooks; Mair

Verthuy of L'Institute Simone de Beauvoir; Denise Boucher, playwright; France Théoret of *Spirale*; Barbara Godard, critic; Shirley Neuman, editor of NeWest Press; and Margo Kane, native theatre director.

Vital info:

• Travel expense assistance will be available to some registrants. For information, contact your regional rep. or the Vancouver office. There will be fundraisers in your area to help with travel costs.

• Childcare will be available. Contact the Vancouver office.

• Simultaneous translation will be provided at major panels and workshops. Animators will assist at smaller workshops.

• Accommodation is available at the Walter Gage Residence, UBC; the Vancouver YWCA, the Vancouver Hostel, and through local billeting. Contact the Vancouver office.

• Registration is \$40 for Women and Words members, \$45 for non-members. Registration is limited to 500 on a first-come, first served basis. Register early to avoid disappointment.

Women in Science and Technology

VANCOUVER — The Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology (SCWIST) is sponsoring the First National Conference for Women in Science and Technology. From May 20 — 22, 1983 at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, questions concerning women in the sciences, math and science education for young women and social issues in science will be addressed.

Spurred by the lack of women in the scientific community and the forecasted need for individuals trained in science and technology the conference has chosen to focus on strategies for change. In general terms these concerns involve motivating young women toward scientific careers; analyzing problems common to women in science and highlighting career opportunities available to women in science and technology.

A combination of papers, panel discussions and workshops will cover topics such as: math/science anxiety; job diversification; entering the market-place; innovative high school programs and developing a national network of women scientists. Of particular interest to those teaching science will be a presentation by British scientist-educator, Barbara Small. She will outline and discuss GIST, a special program intended to encourage Girls Into Science and Technology. In the field of mathematics, the conference will feature a seminar and panel discussion with members of EQUALS. Designed and based in Berkeley, California, EQUALS is concerned with encouraging girls into mathematics programs.

Professional and career development will be addressed in workshops such as: Success... revising the Madame Curie Syndrome; Juggling Home, Family and Career; Getting where and what you want and Returning to the Scientific Workforce. Of more general interest will be discussion of Gender Politics, Social Issues in Science and The

Future of Canadian Women in Science. One address which promises to be most interesting is that of Evelyn Fox Keller 'Is Science Male?' and the panel following 'Gender in Science' featuring Harvard scientist, Ruth Hubbard and Rose Sheinin of O.I.S.E.

While these workshops and panels focus largely on the converted, Friday May 20, provides a forum for exchange between young women and professional scientists. The day will include a seminar for students 'Expanding your Horizons', led by Lucie Pépin of the federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women and discussions dealing with Why Science is Exciting; Careers on the Go and User-friendly: Women and Computers. A Career fair will complete the day, offering an opportunity for students and professionals to meet and discuss individual interests, careers and special branches of science. It is hoped that these exchanges will provide the students with a more realistic view of women scientists.

Conference registration is \$100 with a spe-

cial rate of \$25 for University and College students. Please make cheques payable to SCWIST. Further details about programs and registration are available from: Hilda Lei Chung, Ph.D., SCWIST, PO Box 2184, Vancouver, BC, V6B 3V7. ●

Support Judy Flanigan

GUELPH — Judy Flanigan was fired from her job of six years at Webman Printing in Guelph, for refusing to do camerawork on a pornographic paper. Since then the Coalition In Support of Judy Flanigan has been circulating petitions on her behalf. Petitions are available from: Lin McInnes, 114B Surrey St E, Guelph, Ontario N1H 3P9. The Coalition asks that people return the signed petitions as soon as possible. ●

Women's Movement Archives

TORONTO — The Women's Movement Archives staff invites you to visit their new office at 455 Spadina Avenue, Suite 205, Toronto. The office is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Arrangements can be made to visit outside regular office hours by calling (416) 597-8865.

The Archives grew out of *The Other Woman* newspaper that was printed in Toronto from 1972 to 1977. It has grown and is part of the women's liberation movement in Canada. It belongs to those women who are working in the anti-rape, abortion rights, health, labour, lesbian, day care movements and all other struggles which gives us more autonomy over our lives. All the Archives material is accessible and open to all unless donations have specific conditions to be closed to the public.

You can help increase the Archives' holdings by cleaning out your basements, boxes, files and attics. Their holdings consist of newsletters, newspapers, leaflets, flyers, papers donated from groups, buttons and posters. They will accept photocopies of material and can also photocopy your material for you, or help you in sorting through your materials and files.

Nothing should be thrown away. Send your correspondence with women active in other cities, your journals, almanacs, articles you have written, your notes from meetings, photographs. What is junk to you may be gold to the Archives. ●

Scholarship: Theory & Practice, and Politics: Theory & Practice. The division is somewhat forced and a number of the titles could have been more descriptive of the contents. But that is a minor cavil. I found that I read the first few articles at a gallop, finding them engrossing and stimulating: methodological rebellions, feminist critique of scientific method, of values, economics, history; a piece on the Rastafarian movement; a devastating critique of philosophy; how personal is political in the helping professions.

After a couple days off for R & R I proceeded to part two: women's specificity and equality, a key issue, usually carefully avoided; power in the Québec context; a closely argued piece by Mary O'Brien; inspiration translated from the French; and lastly, what about men? Whew!

This is not an easy book to read. It is packed with ideas, abstract concepts, complex insights, all demanding concentration. Academics, even feminist ones, have trouble avoiding some horrendously ponderous vocabulary. Could phrases like "ideological hegemony" not have been translated into simpler, popular English in a book for general readers? Even without the academese this book is not any fast food item.

I recommend *Feminism in Canada* not merely for the high-minded reasons given above. What grabs me is that, at the level of theory, I find much in it with which to agree. Not necessarily in detail or emphasis but in general, *Feminism in Canada* speaks to and for me and my political perspective as a feminist. ●

Borowski vs. Abortion

REGINA — On May 9, Regina's Court of Queen's Bench will be the scene for anti-abortionist Joe Borowski's long-awaited legal challenge to Canada's abortion law. The trial will last several weeks, net Borowski's lawyer Morris Schumiatcher \$250,000 in legal fees, and if successful, prevent any and all abortions in Canada, making them tantamount to murder.

While Borowski has won the legal right to represent Canadian fetuses in court, a judge has disallowed any other interventions in the trial. No one will be representing the thousands of Canadian women who face unwanted pregnancy; in fact no one will be representing women at all. The critical deci-

sion for Canada's future abortion policy lies in the hands of the judge, Joe Borowski, his lawyer, and legal representatives of the federal Department of Justice whose Minister is the avowedly 'pro-life' Mark McGaigan.

Outside the courtroom however, representatives of many women's community and labour organizations, the Regina Pro-Choice Coalition, will be challenging Borowski's case. A press conference and public meeting will take place in the week preceding the court case opening as well as activities during the trial itself.

The law in question, Section 251 of the Canadian Criminal Code, in place since 1969, allows for legal abortion when the 'life or health' of the woman is endangered. Since its adoption, deaths from illegal abortion in

Canada have dropped dramatically. The federal government's own taskforce, the Badgley Report, has already documented the regional inadequacies and restrictive nature of the existing law but Borowski's challenge would restrict abortion altogether, making it impossible for a woman in Canada to obtain a safe, legal, medical abortion.

Borowski himself has long been a militant opponent of liberalized abortion laws. His current legal battle over the abortion law was initiated in 1979 and argues that Canada's Bill of Rights and the newly drawn-up Charter of Rights, guarantee the right of life to 'persons' should extend to human fetuses. He is also attempting to obtain an injunction against the federal finance minister to stop the spending of public money on abortions. ●

Feminism in Canada:

New Challenge to Domination



by Eve Zaremba

Angela G. Miles & Geraldine Finn, Eds., *Feminism in Canada, From Pressure to Politics*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1982.

Feminism in Canada is a book worth reading with care. Not that it will tell you anything concrete about working-class women, or immigrant women, or lesbians, or battered wives, or single mothers. Not that it presents hot new information on "women's issues" such as rape or job ghettos or whatever. And not that it deals much with respectable "larger" concerns like ecology or nuclear disarmament or imperialism. This anthology is worth reading because it is about women: for the most part women as a category; the class "women", all women. Daring to deal with the specificity of women rather than

with specific kinds of women is fast becoming a rare and controversial endeavour.

Women differ from each other in great many ways; we come in many shades, ages, economic, social and sexual situations, levels of education and consciousness, degrees of powerlessness. In other words, there is much that divides us. The absurdly obvious fact that we are not all the same has permitted people to argue that nothing useful can be said about women, period. Which is a very handy method of avoiding dealing with the really hard questions, the kind which go to the core of feminism.

It is these difficult, radical questions on the nature of human societies under patriarchy, on women's place within them and on the urgent and ultimately crucial importance of feminism, which contributors to *Feminism in Canada* take up.

"...Solidarity among women — defining the world from women's point of view, building women's autonomy as individuals and as a collective power, is not merely the addition of one more 'constituency' to an existing radical politics nor only the articulation of the interests of yet one more special interest group. It is, instead, a qualitatively new challenge to domination...by a group whose relatively recent arrival on the political stage marks a major new departure for progressive struggle in general." (From the Introduction by Angela Miles.)

The book is a collection of thirteen papers — plus introduction and conclusion — by feminists working in nine Canadian universities from Memorial University in Newfoundland to Simon Fraser in BC. Many of the pieces were not written expressly for this anthology: five were prepared for a special inter-disciplinary session of the Canadian Political Science Association in 1981 (it is fascinating to fantasize about what impact papers would have had on any non-feminists

who might have been present); another was originally presented to 30 male members of the philosophy department at the University of Ottawa (how appalled they must have been!); there are two translations of feminist Québécoise writing, both unique in character; and I suspect that the last essay in this volume owes a good deal to the evaluation processes of the Feminist Party of Canada.

Anthologies are often written to order at the urging of the editors. These have their place and function. For instance, the Women's Press anthology, *Still Ain't Satisfied*, contains mostly descriptions of services and organizations and the development of well-defined issues with which the contributors are personally familiar. It is certainly important that the hands-on actions of feminists be documented and analyzed by them as they occur. But it's not enough. We need more long-term, thoughtful, theoretical work to inform our practice.

Crucial intellectual work of redefining and naming, of pushing out the edges of our understanding, of up-rooting established male-stream categories must go on concurrently with everyday feminist political activism. After reading the Miles/Finn anthology, I am pleased to report that this work is being done in back rooms and library carrels of our universities from coast to coast.

The appearance of this anthology should encourage other academic women to examine more rigorously the disciplines in which they currently work, to think heretical thoughts and to dare publish them. It should be pointed out to those who consider academics privileged and safe in ivory towers, that what feminist scholars are saying does not sit well with academic authorities or even their own colleagues. It is doing these women no good "career-wise" to question the very underpinning of established Western academic tradition. Yet that is what they are doing. More power to them.

The book is divided into two parts:

Mary O'Brien: Love's Labour Lost

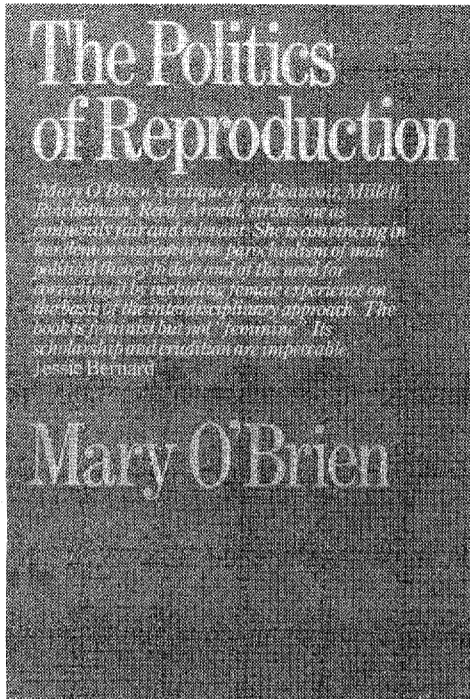
Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. Pp. 240.

by Susan G. Cole

Theory, Mary O'Brien admits, "is widely regarded as a drag." Political theory, its form and content, have been unmercifully patriarchal, and engaging in the exercise of developing theory has been deemed a capitulation to male values. But O'Brien forges on with the *Politics of Reproduction*. Her reason for persisting is grounded in her belief that the feminist failure to create a "unity of thinking" has weakened the basis upon which we engage in political activity. Once we have a cogent theoretical framework to accompany our personal and gut experience that women are oppressed we will have found a "praxis", a unity of theory and practice, which makes for success in the political arena.

Of course, the feminists who have considered theory a plague to be avoided at all costs are usually making a pretence of their own ignorance and neglect. Without necessarily having consciously identified or even articulated our individual points of view, most of us have opinions on the crucial question occupying feminist strategists. That, I would contend, is not whether lesbians and heterosexuals can get along, or whether we prefer socialism to capitalism. The fundamental question asks whether sex differences are a product of biology or intensive socialization.

Often this tension between the proponents of biology and the proponents of socialization has reduced the participants in the debate to some serious name-calling. The ones who argue that wholesale changes in our social conditions will put an end to sex roles are referred to as humanists, at worst liberals, at best myopic optimists who believe that reforms to our environment will solve all our problems. The "biology" contingent is accused of being the henchwoman of Freud and members of a radical right devoted to the status quo on the one hand, man-haters



on the other hand, proponents of a radical feminism that embraces the vision of the hopeless male relegated to concentration camps.

O'Brien in this landmark work clearly stakes out a spot in the biology camp:

...feminist philosophy will be a philosophy of birth and regeneration, not in a simple-minded or metaphorical way, but in an arduous re-examination of traditional philosophy and a vigorous critique of the pervasive oppressiveness of the potency principle as it lurches monolithically to Nirvana.

But she's hardly in league with the devil Freud and she will not settle for sperm banks. She argues that it is within "the total process of human reproduction that the ideology of male supremacy finds its roots and rationales." We can and must accept the fact that reproductive consciousness has played a decisive role in creating our world. Knowing that much, we can set out to change it.

There are a number of key elements to the reproductive consciousness of males. The first is the "alienation of the male seed" ("alienation is not a neurosis, but a technical term describing separation and consciousness of negativity") and the resulting uncertainty of paternity. This separation from the process of birth has helped to shape the philosophies of the West's great thinkers who have gone to great lengths to create a "universal man" preoccupied with the need to eat (Marx), with sexuality (Freud), and with death (any existentialist). With the possible exception of Plato, birth has been systematically neglected.

One political and social outcome of the uncertainty of paternity has been the entrenchment of the family. It is not that the family is "natural", the way Locke and Rousseau would have it, or that wives make

good chattel, as Engels perceived it, or that the family makes for conspicuous consumption, the way contemporary socialists have argued. The family has become such a powerful institution because only through such a tightly-knit controllable unit can men be certain that the children their wives bear are theirs.

When breaking theoretical ground, as O'Brien does, ambition is a virtue. Indeed, in the course of her argument, O'Brien takes on the entire western philosophical and political tradition. *The Politics of Reproduction* explores the works of Plato, Aeschylus, the contribution to democracy of Cleisthenes, the theories of Freud, Engels, Marx, Hegel, and Rousseau. This is not only an overview of western political thought, though. O'Brien takes her feminist assumption of reproductive consciousness and applies it to the works of these men whose thoughts and theories have shaped many of our cultural and political norms. And she emerges at the end with that ever-elusive feminist theory.

At the same time, O'Brien in her way is faithful to the western tradition. Her mode of argument is in keeping with the demands of western-style logic. She is careful to laud theorists when they deserve praise: to support her point she goes so far as to rescue the fifth book of Rousseau's *Emile* from the obscurity many of his admirers would like to consign it to. Sometimes she interprets the writers generously, or at least in such a way as to serve her purposes. Plato, that consummate elitist, for example, devoted a full chapter of *The Republic* to the communism of women and children. He fashions an elaborate scheme in which the Guardians copulate by lot and children are removed at birth from the community so that their parenthood will remain obscure. Typical of O'Brien's facility for argument and of the argument's strength is the ease with which she interprets Plato's manipulation of child-rearing as an attempt to make up for the real uncertainty of paternity by making maternity in the ideal state uncertain as well.

As always, O'Brien is at her best when she discusses the granddaddies of leftism, Marx and Engels. How, she asks, can Engels, otherwise so aware of the value of property and so insistent on recognizing class struggle, make the claim that the transfer of mother right to father right took place in history without the slightest struggle? After reading Engels and Marx, O'Brien complains that "...the world historical defeat of the female sex, which is a forerunner to civic development, is given no material reproductive substructures, but is perceived in terms of a faintly melancholic naturalism." The great theorists, it would seem, consider the relegation of women to second-class status an "impulse," a natural transition, ultimately dismissed and denied the rigorous examination that other social developments receive at the same hands.

Marx, O'Brien would argue, should have known better. His own vocabulary promised some more highly developed reproductive

consciousness. He does discuss labour after all, but not the labour associated with reproduction. The basis of society's continuity is not, according to him, reproduction but the ability of capital to regenerate itself. So determined was he to see capital as society's only important progenitor that he missed the boat on reproduction.

Of course, O'Brien's whole point is that he's not the only one who did. "Birth," she claims, "was not and will not become a worthy subject for male philosophy." Consider the Christian tradition as just one modest example, which manages to breathe life into Jesus twice, and in both the virgin birth and in his rising, denies women their natural function in the process. Spiritual rebirth, it turns out, is a major obsession of a good many male artists and philosophers precisely because the "spiritual" element is a gloss for that which eliminates women from the process and which helps men avoid the dread fact that they don't have a great deal to do with the real thing.

O'Brien challenges the works of feminist writers attempting to devise theoretical constructs with the same incisiveness she brings to the works of their male predecessors. This equal treatment of a much less developed body of theory is praiseworthy, but identifying Kate Millet as a theorist is a bit too generous. Millet's skill was in literary criticism and her theoretical musings in *Sexual Politics* were really a series of afterthoughts to the main critical text.

Apart from that small detail, there is only one tiny chink in the intellectual armour of *The Politics of Reproduction* and that is O'Brien's curious use of the phrase the "alienation of the male seed." "Seed" is a definite misnomer here, giving the impression that the male contribution to the birth process is the fertilized seed which is deposited into the female "soil" where it grows and develops. O'Brien's formulation perpetuates some of the patriarchal assumptions about birth which the entire book is designed to debunk. But this is a mild criticism of a brilliant assessment of the weakness in patriarchal theory.

As is probably obvious by now, *The Politics of Reproduction* is not an easy text to read. This is not to say that O'Brien's prose is dull. Anyone who writes that "men have lost control of their creations in some cosmic sorcerer's apprenticeship" or who expresses concern over women's "ideologically pierced ears" is not boring. But this work is dense, rigorous and demanding and unless you're after only snippets of feminist clarity, it is better to read the book with a substantial grounding in the texts O'Brien examines.

In a way that is too bad, because O'Brien has latched onto some universal truths about the way men have been talking about us over the centuries, truths that all women, not just those with a background in theory, would find valuable. O'Brien, after all, is not just writing about a few fellows' abstract obsessions. She is ultimately trying to discover why "patriarchy forces birth to give way to death as the primordial human experience." The connections between what O'Brien is doing with theory and, for example, our attempts to deal with the potential of a nuclear holocaust, should be self-evident.

The Politics of Reproduction is an instant classic of feminist literature and has already appeared in the footnotes of subsequent texts. Any reviewer would be remiss in neglecting to mention that O'Brien had to cross the ocean to get it published. This is evidence of a serious crisis in this country's publishing industry, one which has delivered a stinging slap in the face to feminism by failing to publish the work of one of Canada's best minds. •



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Canadian Feminism Today —
Women's Press, \$9.95

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day world her readers recognize. In doing so she has shown not only scores of readers the meaning feminism has in their own lives, but has opened the eyes of her editors to the fact that feminism sells newspapers. (*The Toronto Star* isn't the only paper that's got the message. The *Montréal Gazette* was rumoured to be looking for a "Michele Landsberg" type of columnist before recent cutbacks put a damper on their plans.)

Women and Children First is a collection of her columns that deals most directly with the lives of women and children. Many of the columns are bound together by strong original material that in most cases increases their impact.

Landsberg has never been embarrassed or intimidated by the label feminist. Indeed, she's one of the few mainstream journalists who's never been afraid to admit that, for her, feminism comes before any professional considerations.

This strong personal commitment is the very source of her power. She's not just another journalist writing about the women's movement from a distance; it's her life printed on those pages.

A passionate feminist, she's also a wife and mother as passionately committed to the idea of the nuclear family as any women's issue. She's also always believed that in some way this commitment sets her apart from other feminists as much as her feminism isolates her from more traditional women. She sees herself as "a contradiction, a committed feminist who's also a monogamous wife and a devoted mother." I, for one, think she truly believes that she can never be a real feminist, at least to other feminists, as long as her heart lies with the family. This dichotomy has never been more obvious, or more disturbing, than in *Women and Children First*.

When Landsberg deals with issues such as

rape, economic inequalities, and wife battering she's at the top of her form. Many of these columns are models of their kind. She personalizes feminist issues in a way that draws her readers into her world; Landsberg is probably responsible for more clicks of recognition than any other Canadian journalist.

A glance through the first half of her book might prompt some readers to wonder just what's going on here. A strong first chapter on images of women is followed by a chapter on such things as doing the laundry or Michele's love affair with bathtubs.

But Landsberg knows just what she's doing, and that is precisely why so many women identify with her writing. She has no illusions concerning her readers. While you and I might read her columns, she knows the majority of her readers have little if any connection with feminism in their everyday lives. She wants them to know that feminists aren't a bunch of weird crazies, as removed from their lives as a *Playboy* centrefold. And to prove the point she gives them nothing less than herself.

"See," she tells them, "I'm just like you. I lose socks in the laundry, make appointments with house painters who never come. If you met me in the supermarket you wouldn't look twice. And guess what, I'm a feminist." And if good, old, recognizable Michele Landsberg's a feminist, you could be one too.

She's not afraid to give feminists the credit that's due them, either. Time and time again, whether she's discussing changes in attitudes toward rape, the solidarity of women in the work place, or support for battered women, she reminds her readers that it's feminists who were in the vanguard of the fight to change women's lives, and that they're still fighting.

The second half of the book deals with

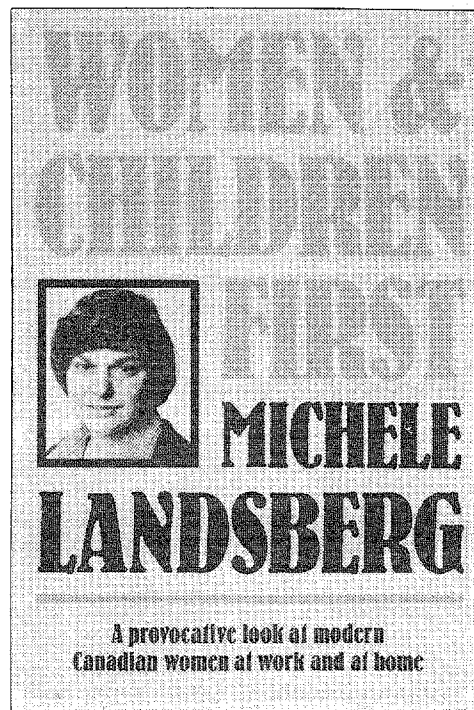
children and family. Many of these columns, on child abuse, images of women in pop music, childbirth technology to name a few, are powerful. There's real eloquence here as well: her column on the death of her father-in-law, David Lewis, or her tribute to her mother who died in a fire shortly after she began the book are among the most moving pieces I've read.

But particularly in her unabashed celebration of family and family life there's much here that's disturbing. Landsberg makes no bones about the fact that, as she puts it, she's a "cockeyed optimist" when it comes to the nuclear family. Her own family has been an ongoing source of love and support, her refuge from the outside world.

But in reading these columns one senses that to Landsberg the family is more than that; although she recognizes for many women the family has been a place from which to flee, the family Landsberg embraces is bathed in every romantic myth about marriage and motherhood we've ever heard. There's also a strong feeling that those of us whose lives don't include a husband and children have settled for second best. She seems to assume, that if offered, every woman would choose the route she has taken.

This singular view of just what constitutes a "real" family leaves little room for many of the options other women have embraced by choice.

Although I don't doubt for a moment that her emotions for her family are genuine, I wish she could find as much joy for those whose lives don't match her ideal family image. Their struggle to create meaningful alternatives for love and support have played an important role in all our lives and they deserve the same recognition Landsberg pays to those fighting for job equality or support for battered wives. ●



by Ann Pappert

Michele Landsberg, *Women and Children First*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada 1982. Pp. 256. \$19.95.

It would be difficult to deny Michele Landsberg's influence since she began writing for *The Toronto Star* in 1978. Any columnist who reaches more than half a million women every week would be hard to ignore, but Landsberg's impact can be measured in more than numbers. Thousands of women who've never heard of Charlotte Bunch or Mary O'Brien, who've never been to an IWD rally, or indeed read *Broadside*, have realized they, too, might just have something in common with feminists after reading Landsberg. She makes feminism accessible, no mean trick, by linking it to the every-

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Learning to Love

by Maureen Phillips

Paula J. Caplan, *Between Women: Lowering the Barriers*. Toronto: Personal Library Publishers 1981.

In *Between Women* Paula Caplan examines the experience and implications of being a daughter in a culture that traditionally imposes significant responsibility for child-care onto females. Caplan argues that barriers between women (if they are acknowledged at all) are often regarded as a normal aspect of the way women relate to each other. Tensions and conflicts experienced by adult women have their source in the fact that the role of primary nurturer is filled by a woman who operates within a social framework that consistently undervalues women and limits their range of acceptable roles and behaviours.

So what we have here is not another mother-is-to-blame-for-everything theory but a clear picture of mother as a social agent who reflects and embodies the frustrations and limitations that have been part of her emotional history. *Between Women* describes how that history re-cycles itself to become part of a daughter's history as well.

The book follows a logical pattern: Caplan outlines the general, pervasive myths about women (such as men are superior,

women are naturally nurturant, women are insatiably demanding) and shows how they are applied on an individual level. The individual receiving these standard social messages can easily feel, on a fundamental level, that her value depends on how well she performs in her relations with males and that performance will depend on how well her mother has taught her.

Therefore, it can become difficult for women to see the value of contact with other women and the woman who chooses to challenge traditional female roles runs the risk of implying that her own mother has somehow failed in her role as social agent, often her only role. This is the argument that is developed to discuss how it can be difficult (but obviously not impossible) for women to establish legitimate and supportive connections with each other. Caplan clearly indicates that such connections are essential if women are to realize their full growth.

Between Women is a concise, balanced treatment of a sensitive topic and a good example of the application of a feminist perspective to an area of immediate concern. It might be particularly useful as a practical introduction to some basic feminist concepts and how they can be set in motion. ●

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Margaret Atwood



SECOND WORDS
Selected Critical Prose

by Mary Meigs

Margaret Atwood, *Second Words. Selected Critical Prose.* Toronto: Anansi 1982.
Margaret Atwood, *Murder in the Dark. Short Fictions and Prose Poems.* Toronto: Coach House Press 1983.

As a critic, Margaret Atwood, judging by *Second Words*, has always had something akin to perfect pitch and the voice we recognize immediately as hers and no one else's. She has a phenomenally broad-ranging and humane intelligence and never yields to the temptation many critics find irresistible — to show off, to put down, to scold or to destroy. She attempts, rather, to understand what writers are about ("You have to try to see and say what is actually there," she says in her introduction) and her small strictures never taint one's sense of the whole. Her fairness comes not only from a finely-tuned sense of justice but from her artist's sensitivity to other artists and her own experience as the victim of every kind of non-understanding that critics can dish out.

In the course of the years, Atwood's critical vision has come more and more to reflect the gaze of the third eye of which she speaks in a 1973 review of Adrienne Rich's *Diving Into the Wreck*, "an eye that can see pain with 'clarity.'" The use of the third eye might be compared to looking at the Gorgon's face without turning to stone. In "Mathews and Misrepresentation" (also 1973) Atwood defends her choice of writers in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, i.e. as those who recognize that something is wrong with society and want to change it; "to fight the Monster, you have to know that there is a Monster and what it is like." And at the end of the essay, she says, "The problem facing all of us writers... is: how to describe the Monster... accurately and without being defeated?" The problem is the Monster; the answer is that of the poet in "Instructions for the Third Eye" and also the unflinching gaze in those pieces in *Second Words* which show the direction of Atwood's thought.

Atwood's Perfect Pitch

As a poet and novelist, writing from the stronghold of her integral artist's self, Atwood is in a sense less visible than she is as a critic, when she is called on to explain, to define, to arbitrate cultural differences, to persuade, and to defend. *Second Words* has filled some of the huge gaps in my Canadian education, those typically American gaps of which Atwood speaks with her wonderful deadpan humour, but since I can never hope to catch up, I read it with particular attention to anything that might be seen as autobiography. A recurrent voice in the book, along with the temperate, kindly voice that defends the work of others, is the one that patiently or impatiently, or occasionally bitterly explains what she, Atwood, is and what she isn't, and affirms her in her artist's pride, which she has come by the hard way. She expresses the ferocious wish every true artist has, to be allowed the liberty of her own vision without being fitted into Procrustes beds or given those strangling bear-hugs which masquerade as approval and encouragement, but are really acts of possession.

Like many of her fellow-writers and like many women writers before her (Charlotte Brontë, Olive Shreiner, Virginia Woolf, for instance), Atwood is a self-made feminist who refuses to be coopted by a movement which she feels she anticipated in her own struggle as a woman writer and her perception of the sources of the injustices she suffered. "There's a great temptation to say to Women's Lib 'Where were you when I really needed you?'" she says in "On Being a Woman Writer" (1976). As one reads *Second Words*, one becomes progressively aware of the artist's dilemma, compounded if the artist is a woman, the abhorrence she feels for all those forces in society which, in Cézanne's words "essaient de mettre le grappin dessus." Atwood, with her hatred for dogma and conformity, with her determination to grow in her own way, to think her own thoughts, has evidently been irritated by feminists eager to claim her as a disciple, those she calls the "vocal Women's Libbers" who substitute "polemic for poetry, simplistic messages for complex meanings." When I read this in her review of Rich's *Diving Into the Wreck*, I felt a rush of sympathy for the "vocal Women's Libbers," for though I, too, am most moved by the poems in which Rich states a truth which is "imaged, imagined" without any hint of preaching, I feel thankful to those feminists whose task is thankless, the Cassandras of the movement, who keep battering away at patriarchal structures, who get hold of you and won't let you go until you bless them.

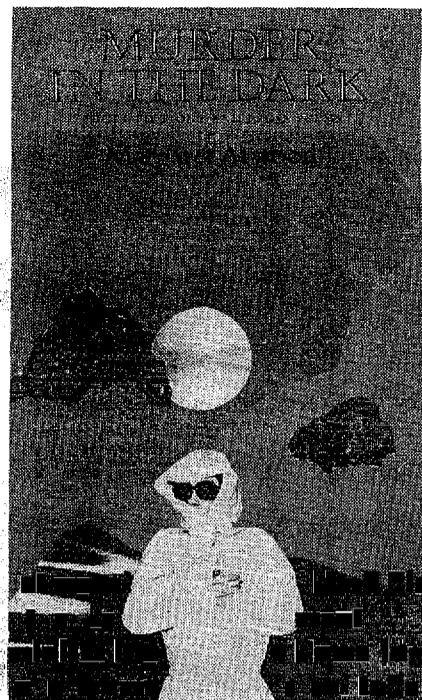
Atwood feels close to Adrienne Rich as a sister-poet and because Rich like herself (as she says in a 1975 review of Rich's *Poems, Selected and New*) "anticipated many of the

themes that were later hit on as fresh discoveries by the feminist movement." Each poet's feminism is an organic flowering, beginning in a woman writer's solitude and frustrations; Atwood is now deeply involved with human rights issues, and Rich, as a radical lesbian feminist, is in the political vanguard of the movement and is one of its most eloquent spokeswomen.

At I try to trace Atwood's progress into "larger" surroundings ("When you begin to write, you deal with your immediate surroundings; as you grow, your immediate surroundings become larger," she says) — the three reviews of Adrienne Rich seem to form stepping-stones. In the first (1973), Atwood defines the poet's work, half of which, with the aid of the third eye, is to "see pain with 'clarity.'" "The other half is to respond, and the response is anger; but it is a 'visionary anger,' which hopefully will precede the ability to love." Two years later Atwood seems to have accepted the fusion in Rich of politics and poetry, the movement of her poetry toward "mercilessness, of a desirable kind," including the direct expression of anger, specifically the anger Rich feels towards men. A year later, Atwood writes a deeply understanding review of Rich's *Of Woman Born*, with only minor reservations ("Aren't there any nice men? Don't some men love their children, too?").

Despite this almost plaintive plea of a woman who has known nice men who love their children, who believes in negotiation and the power of persuasion, one sense a crystallization of herself as feminist, something different from the objective musing that one finds, for example, in a 1971 review of Al Purdy's poems. "Do all men..." she asks, "share Purdy's tendency to think of women in terms of separate anatomical features — for Purdy usually ass and breasts... like cut-up chickens?" But the overall honesty of Purdy's work, she thinks, redeems the "lies, the cruelties, the pathos and the trivialities." She does not overlook, since there is nothing that escapes her attention, but she points out what she sees with firm politeness, whereas a radical feminist might have taken Purdy as a glaring example of sexual politics. As the years go by, however, in a whole series of reviews and speeches: "Witches, An End to Audience," and particularly in the 1981 address to Amnesty International, one sees a coming together in Atwood of the personal and the political, and impatience, a fearless toughness, her own kind of "visionary anger." From her experience of individual oppression she has moved to a belief in the artists as a "lens for focussing the world."

Murder in the Dark is this kind of lens; it focusses the world by focussing microcosms: ambiguities, lies, laughter, and the coming of age of the Monster. It focusses irreversible changes in the human condition, not those which are inevitable in every generation but a final mutation into the creature that lurched "toward Bethlehem to be born." On the front cover of the book is a collage by



Atwood that shows a woman wearing dark glasses and something like a modified strait-jacket, standing with her back to a barren, incinerated landscape, presided over by the full moon in an infernal sky; on the back, a photograph shows Atwood's extraordinary eyes with their sharp pupils set in clear blue, outward and inward-looking. The third eye is not visible. "If you want to use the third eye," she says, "you must close the other two."

The blurb on the back cover made me angry: "While *Murder in the Dark* is accessible and entertaining, it is also experimental, an out-of-the-ordinary sampling," in other words — in this guide for shoppers — something for everybody. In fact, the book is a coming-together in one small volume of simple-seeming visionary states that explode in one's mind, "so bright you can hardly look," as Atwood says of the vision of the third eye. Try reading "Liking Men"; try reading "Him" or "Worship" or "Mute"; they are not "accessible," they describe inaccessible states of being, of despair, visions of the relation between men and women, of the falseness of words, of truths "imaged, imagined." Some are visions of nostalgia, the death of innocence — multiple deaths which Atwood explores at greater length in her fiction. "This is the old days. This is before the war." It was a time when things were closer to what they seemed to be, when beautiful things did not harbour a Judas kiss. "Hawks nested there," says Atwood in the first piece, "Autobiography," and somehow the verb *nested* in its past tense seems to stand for the entire tragedy of loss and change. "Then" there was such a thing as hope, but now, "Hope is when you expect something more, and what more is there?"

And yet Atwood succeeds in moving from the remaining small comforts in "Hopeless": "a river, some willows, in sunlight, and some hills" — the direct vision which persists despite the death of hope — to the vision of the third eye, which is the poet's vision. "One day you will wake up and everything, the stones by the driveway, the brick houses, each brick, each leaf of each tree, your own body, will be glowing from within, lit up, so bright you can hardly look. You will reach out in any direction and you will touch the light itself." Needless to add that "you will touch the light" at your own peril. ●

If the women's movement is to deal with the issues of class, imperialism, and race in a non-tokenistic way, it will have to go through a struggle similar to that around lesbianism. It cannot dismiss the concerns of 50% of the population as un-feminist and go on its merry way. We shouldn't fool ourselves that we can somehow absorb immigrant women into the movement as it is now: they (us?) are already making a big impact and changing many women's views, and there will be many more occasions for dialogue and education, for self-criticism and for working in coalitions. Yes, this means that the whole definition of what is or is not a "women's issue" is on the table again; but let's not get frightened by this. Feminism is not a static dogma that has been set in stone by Kate Millet: it is a dynamic movement of women, and it has to seek to include as many women, and as many issues, as possible. I am confident that we can integrate issues such as anti-imperialism and class exploitation in a way that will strengthen, not dilute, what we have already built.

Mariana Valverde
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• LETTERS, from page 3

thinks that those socialists make such a fuss over class. Well, the news is that *everyone* is in some ethnic group or other, that *everyone* is a member of a particular class and has certain class interests. Being a feminist does not remove one from all other areas of contradiction, or excuse one from all other forms of oppression. An international feminist movement can only be built by acknowledging and dealing responsibly with such power imbalances, and real contradictions, among women. It will not be built by the mere words of North American white, middle-class feminists who do not have to deal with imperialism or for that matter with starvation, and who therefore define such issues as outside the purview of feminism.

As lesbians, we have had to be blatant about our sexuality in order to redress a historic imbalance, a historic silence. In being blatant, we may have indeed appeared to be acting in a "divisive" way, but the eventual result has been (in some places) to *unify* all women around an understanding of how heterosexism oppresses us all.

Classics Revisited:

A Decade Makes a Difference

by Joanne Kates

Eve Zaremba, *Privilege of Sex*. Toronto: Anansi 1974. Out of print.

Maxine Nunes and Deanna White, *The Lace Ghetto*. Toronto: General Publishing Co. 1972. Pp. 152. \$5.95.

Mother was not a person, ed. Margret Andersen. Montréal: Content Editions and Black Rose Books 1973.

Women Unite! Toronto: Women's Press 1972. Out of Print.

At the end of an introduction in her book *Privilege of Sex*, (1974) Eve Zaremba says: "Right on, sister!" I winced reading it last week. Did we really talk like that then? One looks so rarely to the memoirs of the recent past that they appear as dated as dinosaur bones at first glance, but some of them deserve a second glance, in spite of those funny slogans that we no longer employ. I hunkered down reluctantly for a few days with four Canadian feminist classics (*Privilege of Sex*, *The Lace Ghetto*, *Mother was not a person* and *Women Unite!*) I had expected to fall asleep on dusty archives, and was astonished to delight in most of the pages. All four books were published in the early 1970s: They are historical documents, dated by more than phrases like "Right on, sister!" but they are also still worth looking at, for the light that the intelligent past invariably sheds on the present.

Privilege of Sex is the least dated of the lot, because it's about nineteenth century women. Eve Zaremba's connecting passages are incisive and well written, but they are not the meat of the book: it is a collection of writings by nine turn-of-the-century women in Canada. The words are their own, not someone else's, and therein lies the book's charm and its strength. We hear how pioneer women saw themselves and their roles as women, not how other people (such as male authorities) thought they should see themselves. This is lost women's history, and it's wonderful to read, for it is indeed a chart of the early stages of women's progress in Canada.

One of the book's major themes is the contradiction between the pretty Victorian helplessness that women were educated for, and the hard lives they actually led in the Canadian bush. Here the book shines a particular light on today; the Victorian parlour may be gone, but the contradiction remains. Zaremba's women voiced their struggle to maintain their so-called femininity. As Anne Langton wrote in 1837: "Perhaps you would think my feminine

manners in danger if you were to see me steering a boat...." In 1834 Frances Stewart wrote: "I believe few wives have ever acted so little from their own mind as I did. My dear husband from over-tenderness never allowed me to think or act...." In these lines we're seeing women waking up from their Victorian slumber.

Anna Jameson, a British writer who travelled a great deal in Canada in the 1830s, was one of the earliest uppity women writers here, and to read her caustic comments on woman's place is to know that we're not alone in history. She was rebelling 150 years ago, articulately and on paper: "...are our weaknesses, and our innocence, safeguards — or snares?" Later she writes: "Where she is idle and useless by privilege of sex, a divinity and an idol, a victim or a toy, is not her position quite as lamentable, as false, as injurious to herself and all social progress, as where she is the drudge, slave and possession of the man?" Here again we see the Victorian ideal woman — helpless and privileged, but Jameson *analyzes* her contradiction as a feminist, and that's quite the step for the 1830s.

The middle section of the book consists of two long and tedious accounts of woman's travails in the bush. We have mosquitos, hunger, bad roads, and Indian massacre *ad nauseam*. The point is the endurance of pioneer women, but it isn't pointed enough to be interesting in 1983, when women's strength is a fact that one no longer questions.

In Part Three, Zaremba returns to writing that questions women's roles more overtly, and here we see the delightful roots of modern Canadian feminism. It is the turn of the century and women are beginning to stand up on their hind legs (Thank you Mr. Johnson) and demand changes — not only for themselves but for all women. We read the young Nellie McClung's precious first words of rebellion against senseless strictures; "Why shouldn't I run with the boys? Why was it wrong for girls' legs to be seen?" We hear her account of the conflict with her traditionalist mother over what is and is not woman's place in the world. And with all the vigour she brings to her argument against "appropriate" female modesty, Nellie McClung rails against Indians and Métis being crowded off their prairie lands. Her hatred for authoritarian ways is expressed in words to be re-read and cherished.

If I were talking women's liberation to a young woman today, I might give her *The Lace Ghetto* by Maxine Nunes and Deanna White. It's the "easiest" of the four books: The least intellectual, the least theoretical, more cultural than the others. It has a lot of pictures, big type, and enough anecdotes to be an easy read and it is the only mass market book of the four. Because it's a potpourri, a collage of interviews, quotes and newspaper clippings it feels choppy, but this should be just about right for people raised on the small bites of pop culture.

There are dozens of wonderful quotes to raise young feminists' anger. Alfred Lord Tennyson deserves our thanks for saying: "Woman is the lesser man." There are inspiring vignettes of suffragists' struggles, their hunger strikes and their prison terms. They are easily understood consciousness-raising chapters on dating rules, how children are socialized into their sex roles, how the fashion industry pressures women to compete with each other sexually.

But the book's real strength lies in its interviews. In the motherhood section, women speak of their lives as mothers; their message smashes our culture's air-brushed myths of mothering. The sexuality section consists of two taped discussions, one of men only and one of women only. Both groups speak the language of alienation — from themselves, from their sexuality and of course from each other. The discussions are wonderfully



frank and they're affirming: If a woman has never talked about sex openly with other women, the discussion affirms that other women have trouble with sex too, other women also experience men's penises as a threat. And what the men say is horrifying (if it's true) but also affirming. Yes, the men say, they do think vaginas are ugly. We may be paranoid, but somebody really is following us.

The 1983 reader hopes that all this ugliness is dated. It isn't, but we have come a certain distance since *The Lace Ghetto* was published in 1972, and that's heartening.

That same year *Mother was not a person* (compiled by Margret Andersen) was published. It is the mirror image of *The Lace Ghetto*: serious narrative, *sans* pictures. It's an anthology of student writing that resulted from a Montréal women's studies course and it has all the strengths and weaknesses of anthologies — the energy, the variety of subjects and approaches, and also the difficulty of focussing and the uneven writing.

Even more than *The Lace Ghetto*, it shows how far the women's movement has come in a decade. To her credit, Andersen states the book's limitation honestly in her introduction, calling it a middle class book for middle class readers, with middle class purposes. What are middle class feminist purposes? It's an unanswered question, and one that seemed less pressing in 1972. It seems the authors thought then that they would win because they are right, and because they were articulate. We have since discovered that it is not enough to have justice on your side. This book illustrates the naiveté of fine goals with little strategy.

Still the book is interesting, and still stands as a feminist primer, with useful sections of sex role stereotyping, job discrimination, marriage, a feminist approach to literary criticism, abortion and C-R groups.

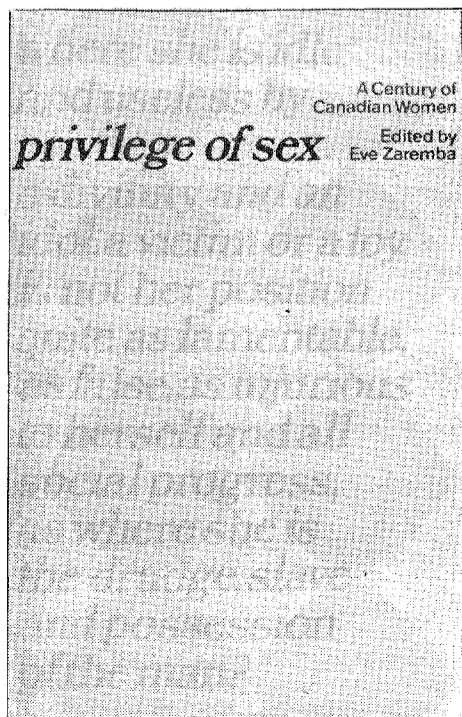
1972 was a very good year for the rising tide of women's anger. The Women's Press pub-

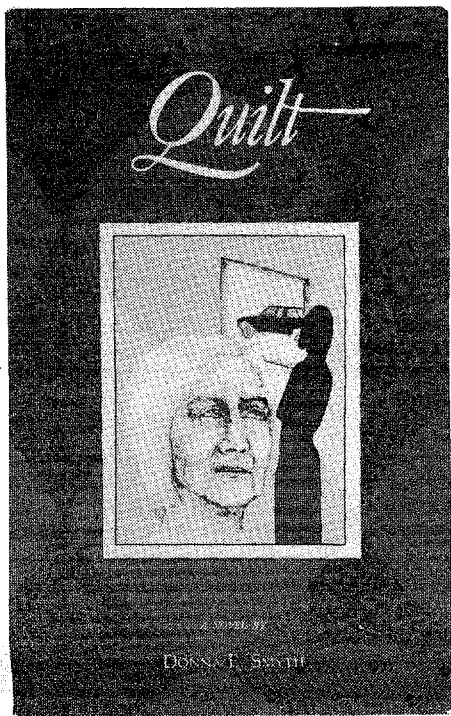
lished its first book, the anthology *Women Unite!* It's a dense book, neither an easy nor a quick read, and it sets the tone of The Women's Press with a Marxian theoretical approach, thoughtful prose and pleasure in the back seat. The book's major weakness is also its strength: it assumes a politically sophisticated reader who leans distinctly to the left, and that assumption puts severe limits on the book's audience. But the book has depth and breadth, even in 1983. It represents advances in feminist theory, in the shared comprehension of the relationships between women's oppression and capitalism. Both that strength and weakness are especially apparent in Peggy Morton's important essay on capitalism and the family.

The position of women in the labour market is beautifully documented and unfortunately barely dated because so little has improved. The only important change is that more women are organized now, and unions have slowly begun waking up to women's demands. In 1972 that was just a dream.

In that same way, *Sisters, Brothers, Lovers ...Listen...* (the essay on women in the New Left) is a cheering indication that we have come a distance in a decade, both in terms of what we understood and in terms of winning at least some battles. Then they were still licking envelopes for the boys in the Movement. They wrote that the Pill "has the potential for making women free agents in this matter" (sexual choice). Now we know better about the Pill, and we no longer lick boys' envelopes. This book is like a time capsule exhumed 10 years after its burial. It's joyous to see how far the women's movement has come in the decade, in terms of comprehension of the issues, especially when this early effort was already so insightful.

The women who wrote these books were not by and large professional writers, and therein lies their other power, for they represent the breaking of the bonds of women's silence, the discovery that it didn't take "experts" to pontificate about women, that all women possess the right and the ability to speak aloud, to name themselves and their lives. ●





by Philinda Masters

Donna E. Smyth, *Quilt*. Toronto: The Women's Press 1982. Pp. 128. \$7.95 paper

In recent years, quilting, that fine old craft of rural women, has been resurrected to an "art." What was once a skill of necessity — making warm bedding from discarded material — has become a hot tourist industry. In *Quilt*, Donna E. Smyth reminds us that for those women making them, quilts are a close-to-the-bone symbol of their lives.

"You find that old wedding dress you was going on about?" says Sam Sanford to her neighbour Hazel. "You bring it over. It's time." Sam has called her neighbours together for a quilting bee. She herself has saved some old blue curtain material, a green dress, a worn-out overcoat and a white tablecloth of her mother's. For Sam, a quilt is made up of moments from her past, scraps of intention, a patchwork of her life.

For Myrt, a young "welfare case" boarding at Sam's to hide from her violent husband, quilts are passé: "No one wants a quilt these days. It's all electric blankets and bedspreads."

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Patchwork Lives

The story of *Quilt* takes place on one oppressively hot rural Nova Scotia summer day (not the traditional season for quilting). The story ostensibly revolves around the making of the quilt (Sam kept bumping into the huge quilt frame taking up most of her living room). But, in fact, the characters are more concerned with waiting for a storm to break, to "cool things off." It is the build-up to the storm that provides *Quilt's* action.

Sam is old; she has recently buried her husband Walt and is still mourning. She is fiercely attached to the house and barn and the elms on her property. Without them, she says, she has no meaning. She is looking back, rather than forward, and the quilt functions as a physical integration of her life. Essentially, Sam is passive. She watches her boarder Myrt, waits for the storm, fights a feeling of doom which has haunted her since Walt's death.

Her neighbour Hazel approaches the quilt-making quite differently. She does it partly to please her old friend, partly to escape making pickles, a task that had formed a large part of her identity (and of her mother's, for that matter). Although her husband resists her interest in quilting, saying she has more important things to do (like picking raspberries or freezing the beans), Hazel is determined. She understands the quilt's meaning in her life: "...those quilts you could buy ready-made. When you looked at them you didn't remember anything. They had no stories."

Myrt, who has the slovenly look and total lack of energy of the severely depressed, nevertheless lives a life of fond memories and impossible, electric hopes. For her, the quilting is just a pastime — she joins in to be polite, so no-one will ask her any questions, expect anything of her. She is more interested in the plastic lives portrayed on the TV soap operas which form a background to the quilting bee. Meanwhile, she reminisces warmly about her mother: her laughing, easy, bingo playing, flower loving mother ("Why did Mother have to die?") In the next breath, she decides to return to her husband Ralph, who has badly beaten her many times, who follows her around, parks his yellow Datsun pickup truck outside Sam's house and is obviously a menace. Still, he's all she has, and she longs for the "security" of home and husband and potatoes boiling on the stove. When the "storm" breaks at the end of the book, and tragedy strikes Myrt, all she's left with is the yellow pickup, which she's never learned to drive. Her hopes crash with the storm.

The men in Sam's life have a more than peripheral role in the unfolding of the story: they are not cardboard cut-outs, stuck in for the sake of realism because most women have husbands. Myrt's husband Ralph is the embodiment of the self-destructive male principle. When he drinks he feels small and fearful of storms, when he's fearful he beats his wife, drives her away, years for her return. He "loves" Myrt and wants her back, but he realizes he's blown it, and therein lies the seeds of his destruction, adding his offering to the patchwork quilt of life. Sam's husband Walt, on the other hand, dies a slow death from old age, begging Sam to help him die more quickly. He has made his peace with life and death, fears pain and feebleness and longs to rest. He forces Sam to deal with the reality of his, and therefore her, death; he offers her a struggle she must resolve. When at last he is found dead in the hallway, "like a bundle of old clothes," one wonders if those clothes will become prospective quilt material.

But probably the pivotal character in the book (oh, sacrilege) is Hazel's husband Herb: he vies with the quilt and the storm for focal point. While Walt dies and Ralph disintegrates, Herb integrates. He disapproves of Hazel's quilt-making, not because of a male need to control his wife, nor a warped masculine sense of women's priorities, but because he is, of all the characters, the most concerned with *real* life, lived in the present tense. At every point in the story, Herb is there, viewing it all, commenting. His constant thought-stream serves to focus the book, to bring all the elements together: to him, the quilt is unnecessary. When the storm finally comes, and all hell breaks loose, Herb sits calmly at the factory, whiling away his shift-time doing a jigsaw puzzle.

There is an intensity to *Quilt* that reflects the impending storm, the hours before the storm when "the light is such a strange colour, yellow and green mixed." The characters are all obsessed, with pickles or dead kittens, sick chickens or impossible dreams. They all suffer from tunnel vision, they are

off-balance, out-of-focus, uncentred. They are unhappy, waiting for death, for the storm, for the end of the quilt. They are jittery, like restless animals before an earth quake. Donna E. Smyth so skillfully creates the pre-storm tension that when the thunder finally claps and lightning strikes, whether or not it cools things off for the characters in the book, it certainly provides relief for us readers.

Quilt is Donna Smyth's first novel. For a book from an avowed feminist (Smyth is an editor of *Atlantis* and teaches women's studies at Acadia University), *Quilt* is refreshingly free of formula-feminism. Although there are a few feminist goodies (when Sam's religious sister says "The Lord is my shepherd," Sam answers "If he were mine, I'd fire him") at least none of the characters joins a C-R group or converts to political activism as a balm to all wounds. The people in *Quilt* are real people, living a rural life, fighting for survival. There are no absolutely final resolutions for them.

And, by the end of the book, the quilt isn't even finished. ●

Portrait of a Diminished Woman

by Gail van Varseveld

Joan Barfoot, *Dancing in the Dark*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982.

There are some rewards to book reviewing. In a review I wrote of *Abra*, Barfoot's first novel, I complained of *Abra's* failure to understand the importance of naming the causes of her oppression. In *Dancing in the Dark*, Barfoot's second novel, the narrator Edna is concerned with only that. She sits, day after day, writing her life out in three-hole notebooks, trying to name what has happened to her. Oh, the power of the reviewer!

Edna's story is not so much about naming, as about naming in the wrong language, and then avoiding noticing that the names don't fit. Growing up in the forties and fifties, reading magazine instructions on proper feminine behaviour, struggling through social activities her younger, prettier sister excelled at, assessing her parents' marriage with adolescent righteousness, Edna made a bargain with fate. When her man appeared, as he surely had to, she would devote her life and self to their domestic happiness. In return, Edna would be forever safe in the fortress of their perfect marriage.

Fairy tale land. For Edna, it worked like the Ugly Duckling: she went to college, met Harry (attractive, intelligent, ambitious) who loved her and married her, and spent twenty years tending her fortress and her white knight. While marriages crashed around them, including Edna's much-envied sister's, Harry and Edna continued in perfect wedded bliss.

Until Edna found out Harry was having an affair with his secretary. Her fortress crumbled. For the first time in her life, this woman who could give new meaning to the term self-effacing, takes action in her own interests. She kills him. And ends up in a hospital (any woman who kills a husband who isn't killing her *has* to be crazy, no?) where she is filling the notebooks that tell us her story.

I let no cats out of the bag by revealing Harry's death and Edna's incarceration, because Macmillan has thoughtfully done so, not only on the inner flap of the dust jacket, but outside, on the front cover, and on the title page as well. Apparently, the fact that Edna's narrative is structured to delay open assertion of these events made no impression on the relevant editors and designers. The point is not that suspense (as in mystery) is destroyed, but that the reader is deprived of the impact of the changing perspective and growing depth with which Edna examines the truths of her life.

Nonetheless, this is a compelling portrait of the diminished woman. Edna works so hard at erasing herself, at becoming only — and I emphasize *only* — the perfect, blend-with-the-decor wife, that even Harry sometimes complained. (Edna didn't hear him.)

"Talk to me, Edna" he'd say. Yes, but what about? Really, I preferred to listen." And,

Sometimes he said, "Edna, are you okay?" and I didn't know what he meant. "I mean," he'd say, "you just stay home. Are you okay?"

What makes Edna stand out from the ranks (legions) of humble housewives is her obsession with her perfection. How many women without children do the laundry every single day? For twenty years? But dint of careful, dedicated effort, Edna developed routines which make her house perfect and left her only time for a bath.

All those little jobs, they were my payment and my expression of my duty and my care. They added up to safety and escape, love and gratitude spoken in a different language, words in shining floors and tidy beds.

Thus, life flowed quietly from one year to the next, broken only by the uncomfortable vacations away from the all-consuming home. Edna submerged herself in her role so totally, she became it. *Abra* complained of feeling this way in her old life, but Edna loved it, and made the condition credible.

People make investments all the time. I, too. I took the only thing I had, my sole possession, myself, whatever that might have turned out to be, and invested it in Harry. People make investments all the time. Why not me?

Little wonder she kills him. That twenty year investment is rendered worthless instantly she knows of his affair. He dies, not for adultery, but for treachery: betrayal of a trust, a total trust.

At first, Edna assumes she failed at perfection and seeks the corner she forgot to vacuum, the stain she neglected to scrub out. The challenge is to slip the obsession, to learn there is no absolute security in life, regardless of the state of one's cupboards. Nor can disaster be avoided by keeping one's eyes firmly on the laundry pile.

By the end of the book, Edna is beginning to accept this and, for the first time in her 43 years, to be curious about the people she always kept outside the walls of the fortress. She even realizes the possibility of trying to find out what terrorized her in the first place. The psychiatrists aren't likely to be impressed, but the dancing Edna looks suspiciously like a complete individual.

Unfortunately, this final transformation comes rather too abruptly for comfort: one accepts that it happened but doesn't feel it. Another cavil I have is with the forgiveness Edna manages for Harry. Edna doesn't really blame Harry for what happened — he is not so much evil as weak. This is more generous than the passing nod her mother gets after years of being blamed for almost everything. So while Edna has found out how to dance, she has not yet learned everything about naming. She'll need her second forty years to get it straight. ●

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Mothers, Moons and

by Alexa DeWiel

Edna Alford, *A Sleep Full of Dreams*. Lantzville, BC: Oolichan Books, \$8.95.

Audrey Thomas, *Real Mothers*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, \$8.95.

Alice Munro, *The Moons of Jupiter*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, \$17.95.

It happened to be the same week that I made several visits to see an eighty-five year old friend of ours who is recovering in her own feisty manner from a second stroke, and also bailed my grey muzzled Irish Setter from the dog slammer after a late life roaming bout, that I was also reading *A Sleep Full of Dreams*, by Edna Alford. The events fit into each other like an interlocking puzzle.

The back cover of the book had not been inviting: Edna Alford chronicles, with great sensitivity, the lives of a group of senior citizens who spend their last days in a nursing home.

Let me assure you, my hat's off high to Edna Alford. What a stunning collection of short stories. The cadence of the language is heart melting. Its vitality and essentially compassionate, woman-affirming tone is very refreshing.

The central character in each of these stories is Arla, the young day nurse in a Calgary lodge for seniors. During the daily schedule of feeding, cleaning and administering to these old women, Alma runs the mile. She uncovers their winsome habits, their peculiar preoccupations, the fainting spells, their pride, and their unwillingness, after years of prudence, to keep their feelings and words in check.

This collection of stories is a testament to the fact that in our late years, we become the summation of everything we have been throughout the years of our lives. There's no dust on these old girls. No sweet little old

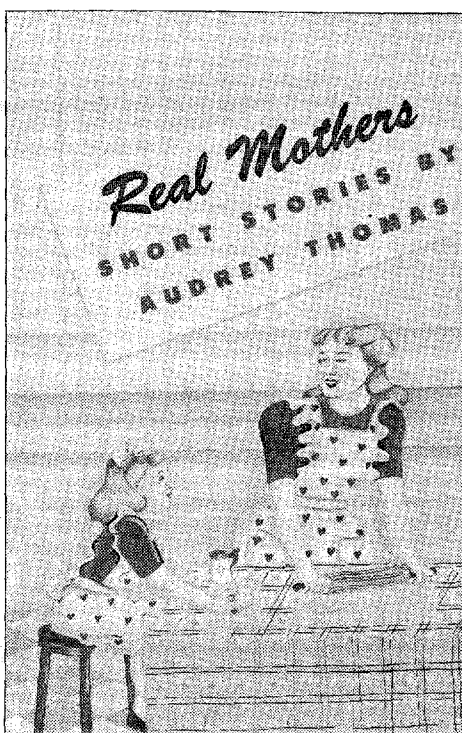
ladies. No grandmotherly advice to young Arla. They whimper and rage and ooze and tell her outrageous stories about their past lives and loves and Arla continues working in the midst of their combustion.

In "The Visitor," Myrtle Jane Emmerson, whom Arla has secretly taken to calling Hot Wheels, sees mafiosi and Nazis everywhere. Her confrontation with the German cleaning lady is surprising. In "The Hoyer," Miss Bole regales Arla with various accounts of gruesome happenings, always just as Arla has her trussed up in mid air in the hoyer to lower her rotund and immobile body into her bath.

Arla is continually caught between the lodgers and the matrons who operate the lodge, between her fiancée and her job, between the women and their feuds with each other. She is at once repelled and compelled by her charges. Sometimes she just longs to be free.

In *Communion*, Mrs. Pritchard's room has to be readied for a visit by Reverend Paul. While accomplishing this task, Arla notices two dogs frolicking outside and before her fascinated gaze, one mounts the other and undertakes an urgent copulation. The Minister arrives and begins the Communion service which Arla hears with one ear while her eyes are riveted to the window. Finally she has to lock herself into the bathroom for a while to relieve herself of a sudden transferred tension. Arla doesn't think anything special of herself, but she rises to every occasion.

The details of life in the lodge, which could be presented pathetically, are brought to life spectacularly. Sensitive, but sparing no feelings, the stories are charged, one after the other. We meet many of the lodge's inhabitants and Arla's character grows until by the last story it seems you've read a novel containing many episodes. This is a must read.



The women in Audrey Thomas's *Real Mothers* are diverse: they are mothers, potential mothers, maybe someday mothers, no thank you mothers. Some of them don't consider motherhood at all. What they have in common is that they operate fairly close to the skin and they are all on a quest. A familiar quest for independence, love, self expression, absolution and responsibility all rolled into one. In some stories the search for self discovery is adventurous, such as in *Timbuktu* when Rona leaves her cryptographer husband in Senegal while she takes a train through Mali to ponder the "is this all there is?" syndrome in her marriage.

In others, such as *Harry and Violet*, the search takes place directly between two people, new lovers trying to make a go of their relationship despite the man's resentment of the presence of a child:

Sometimes they asked each other if maybe it was only the sex. "Our adult lives have been so different," she said. "You are so used to so much personal freedom. I've never actually lived alone with a man for more than a few months. Maybe I like children because I've

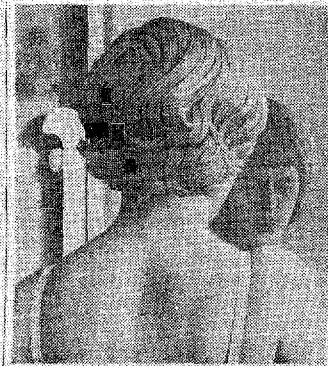
Mafiosi

had to like them, who knows? But I do like them and I love my child—I love her. She's part of me, part of my life. She and I help each other grow." "You're ruining her," he said. She repeated, "What do you know about it?"

In the title story, Mom and the kids are left on their own after the father has gone to live with his girlfriend. One night the mother announces that her mourning period is over and she will damn well do something with her life. She goes on a crash diet supported by her children and soon she acquires a lusty, but sardonic, pot smoking lover. In the eyes of her oldest daughter she goes overboard and in the end, Mom is reduced again to her impotent and reactionary wailings. At least by this time we hope that she has seen the light end of the tunnel and will recover from her passivity.

ALICE MUNRO

The Moons of Jupiter



The fact that the women are much the same in each story as they explore the same terrain of wilful and sometimes self indulgent introspection can sometimes come across as being a little tedious. But Thomas's easy style, full of interesting tidbits of information which marks ordinary human conversation saves the potential problem areas.

While there is no apparent solidarity between the women in the book (they are just good old strong intelligent women who seem uninterested in reaching out for each other), the odd perceptive phrase is thrown in to inform the reader that the individuals are fighting the good fight in a world somewhat hostile to female consciousness.

And there are some very nice touches, reminiscent of finely crafted pottery. In *Natural History*, a recently separated woman and her little girl establish a daily rhythm together at the beginning of their summer holidays. The caseload is familiar, the multitude of innocent questions and off hand comments and details of life right down to a schedule taped on the fridge door which announces each project: a study of intertidal creatures, painting the kitchen, learning the names of the constellations, and periods of time when each person would wish to be alone. Sound familiar?

The underlying tone in these stories is a kind of passive desperation, cheerfully rendered. In *Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe*, the protagonist tells an imaginary doctor: "I have had this pain all my life." Her friend mourns her stripped spirits: "I want to fly before my feathers fall off."

Generally, I found these stories to be entertaining, occasionally endearing, and, once lodged in the mind, memorable enough.

I have heard Alice Munro interviewed several times and I have always admired her confidence as she asserts her lack of interest in plot. People ask her "what happens" in her stories and she tells them that they have simply missed the point. While I do not share her particular mind set and as a fiction writer am off on another tangent entirely, I have great admiration for the moment captured in a certain relief of character and a particular event.

• continued page 13

Undelivered Messages in Suburbia

by Carroll Klein



Carol Shields, *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Toronto: MacMillan of Canada 1982. Pp. 216.

The response of some of my friends to the novels of Carol Shields has been dismissive — and occasionally quite snooty. I have always cheerfully defended Shields. She is no Doris Lessing or Nadine Gordimer; she has no discernible political perspective; she may never enter into the realms of the literary elect. But her novels are well written, entertaining and intelligent. I always look forward to her next one.

For those of us who live somewhere on the fringes of the mainstream, it is instructive —

and sometimes humbling — to be reminded that life goes on, often with grace and energy, in suburbia. Shields's characters are denizens of this world. Their lives are careful and balanced; they observe the emotional chaos around them with some awe and probably with more tolerance than most of us could muster. They are nice women, concerned about their families and their interior lives. They are well organized, they bake cookies, they make sure their children wear clean underwear, they get their hair done — and somehow, they manage to escape being smarmy.

Brenda Bowman, "a quilter in her own right," (this being a joke she shares with her husband in an earlier novel, *Happenstance*), is the protagonist of *A Fairly Conventional Woman*. She is just that, too, except for her discovery, well into her thirties, that she has a remarkable gift for quilting. Brenda, who has always seen herself as a reasonably happy woman, throws herself into her art with an energy that still surprises her. She is amazed by her sense of colour and design and she has the good sense, born of her optimistic nature, to trust her untrained but unerring eye.

But even Brenda's ordered and loving world is developing some flaws. She senses in herself "a restless anger and a sense of undelivered messages." As she grows an artist, she dares to be more critical. At the same time, she withdraws from her anger:

What did it mean, this new impatience, this seething reaction to petty irritations? It could get worse, she saw. You could become crippled by this kind of rage. It was all so wasteful in the long run.

Brenda has learned her lessons well. She doesn't complain, doesn't demand. Her life

is pleasant enough, her husband loves her, and she is thankful. But she is burdened by a vague feeling that she has missed out on life and agitates quietly, all the while knowing that it is not in her nature to take risks.

Brenda does manage to pry herself loose from her family long enough to attend a craft convention in Philadelphia. The novel hinges on her week on her own. Not much really happens; it is quite clear to the reader that Brenda is not about to jeopardize her life in Elm Park, Illinois by behaving in an untoward manner. So much for hanky-panky, despite the temptation of the good-looking metallurgist in the room across the hall. The winds of possibility have cheered her up, freshened her perspective, but Brenda remains her realistic self, unalterably sane, committed to her family.

All this seems to damn *A Fairly Conventional Woman* with faint praise. The novel is a disappointment, given Shields's earlier work. *Small Ceremonies* (1976) and *The Box Garden* (1977), which should be read as a pair, are better novels. *Happenstance* (1980), which tells of a week in the life of Brenda's husband Jack while she is away, is rather more compelling than this latest book.

Shield's studies of ordinary lives, however, are never boring. Her writing is subtle and insightful. She handles dialogue with great skill and injects it with considerable wit. Her novels soothe rather than inflame, offering the reader intelligent, perceptive commentary on the world of good people who strive to make their own lives more livable. One might wish that Brenda Bowman had been a bit less conventional indeed, but the disappointment will inevitably be outweighed by the delights of Shield's honest, well-crafted storytelling. •

The Personal is Historical

by Carroll Klein

Rhea Tregebov, **Remembering History**. Montréal: Guernica Editions 1982. Pp. 62
 Carolyn Smart, **Power Sources**. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books 1982. Unpaginated
 Anne Szumigalski, **A Game of Angels**. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press 1980. Pp 48

Joyce Carol Oates once wrote that the personal perspective is the only kind of history that exists. This is certainly evident in much of the best contemporary women's writing being published in Canada. While men pursue literal truth and plod after facts, women, ever non-linear, seek knowledge from visceral sources, from their own histories, from the stories they have shared with other women. The current collections of Tregebov, Smart and Szumigalski unfold as studies of women who have acknowledged the influence of their pasts and who seek to reconcile their pasts with the women they have become. Their self-knowledge leads them to ponder, inevitably, the question that Carolyn Smart asks: "What becomes of women/who want as much as we?"

Though hope has been mutilated, Tregebov writes of changes in women's lives that bring forth a new order. There is a closeness, a silent understanding among women that closes ranks against the aggression of the male world. In "Lady of the Shopping Bags," one of the most successful of the poems, a crowd gathers around a woman who has stumbled, whose groceries lie about her on the street:

they are weeping
 the women tear their clothes
 they too cast their jewels
 in the gutter

it is true
 they are murmuring
 "bene, bene"

Tregebov's work escapes the simplistic notions of feminist shoulder-to-shoulder rhetoric with ease; nothing is without complexity, no woman is without some ambivalence. She writes, particularly in her travel poems, of the historic complicity of women in their own slavery:

It is strange to me that
 flesh is sometimes willing
 to execute what it can't understand:
 the hands of those two women —
 mother- and sister-
 in-law — who set her on fire
those hands
 it is strange they
 didn't catch too, flesh
 being what it is.
 ("Women Are Not For Burning")

But such complicity is mitigated by the older, deeper sense of otherness that women share, a conspiracy against their historical masters. Tregebov's poems are filled with images of flight and freedom, of veiled resistance. Her women, often caught in circumstances over which they have little control — culture, the responsibilities of children, aging — nonetheless chip away at the restrictions of convention and domesticity, shaping a world that offers them, if not comfort, at least some sense of their own lives:

I can live in one house my whole life
 and never look out onto the yard
 and see the bushes pressing their green paws
 against the wind, avid, angry as I am.
 Everything wants to live.
 Me too.
 Everything wants to live forever.
 ("What Makes You Sure")

Not all of the poems in this collection are successful. The Central America sequence seems forced, overly ambitious and oddly empty. "Graffiti" might well have been omitted; "Acid Rain" belongs in a different

volume. Tregebov is at her best when she explores the minutiae of women's lives. And her best is well worth reading.

Carolyn Smart's most recent book, *Power Sources*, is a search back through her own history — family, travel, lovers — that leads to some bleak conclusions about the possibilities of happiness for women who yearn for personal freedom, private lives, knowledge. The pain is often laid most bare when the poet recounts the sense of alienation experienced in foreign lands:

...coming up that river through the desert
 with a killing ache in your chest
 to find this gentle thing, yourself,
 staring helplessly into the past?
 ("Hunger")

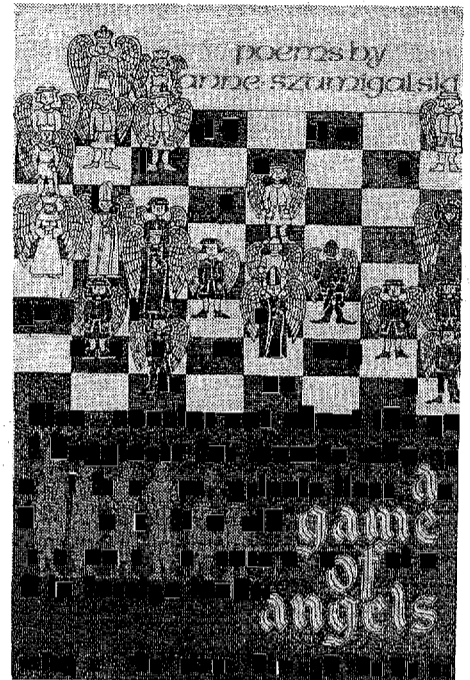
This alienation, coupled with unfulfilled expectations, threads through Smart's work; women are betrayed by family, by countries that resolutely refuse to unlock their secrets, by men unable to acknowledge gestures of need. But couched in her watchful, passive persona is a sure sense of strength, the ability to survive and pursue her own life:

Every day I'm approaching the dark place,
 measuring the distance between us:
 you get into your car in the morning
 and never look back.
 I cross the snowy field to my work,
 the cold desk, colder fingers on the keys:
 the country I carry in the wall of my head.
 ("The Kind of Man You Are")

Survival and knowledge have their price. Smart never lets her reader presume that the process of becoming conscious, adult women will take us through pain to ultimate content. There are flashes, moments of extreme joy "as you take/your life to the edge of emotion" but more often she asks the reader to acknowledge the uneasy alliance we have with the world: "I'm almost thirty, /and almost unafraid."

Smart sees the sisterhood of women as the one hope in an otherwise grim world. The possibility of reconciliation with a dead mother, the sharing of love and sorrow with friends — in acts such as these may we find a way to pursue the future and bury "...the sadness of youth...wasted."

Power Sources is a remarkable book in many ways. Smart's writing is strong; she manipulates language and imagery with skill. But her self-absorbed and depressing vision can leave the reader feeling trapped by the unrelenting difficulty of being alive. Perhaps in her next book she will offer us a means of escape.



Anne Szumigalski is the oldest and most accomplished of these poets; her voice is nearly flawless, her imagery is constructed with great intelligence. *A Game of Angels* deals with the reconstruction of memory, the piecing together of fragments of the past. The result is startling, for the poet soothes the reader with history, with mythic imperative, but never fails to skewer, eventually with the cold knife of her honesty and clear vision. In "The Name of Our City," the poet befriends a broken woman and travels with her across a landscape of pain that is both metaphoric and real:

...who is the enemy?
 I ask — she tries to open
 eyes swollen to slits
 from weeping

just a man she says...

Szumigalski writes of the disillusion of women in love with men. Bewildered at finding themselves wives and mothers, her women retain a curious and wonderful irony. In "Dahlia's," the narrator, taken into the garden to admire the flowers, sees them as:

ugly and tall as men
 whose flowerheads are bigger
 than summer hats
 they flop about dangerously...

When she returns to the house:

the old lady calls me over
 to give you some good advice my dear
 whispers wetly into my ear
 not to neglect your nice kind husband

Many of Szumigalski's images are comic and inventive: an elephant pissing in the back porch, a woman giving birth to a red fox, a picnic of round food. She seems sure enough of her writing to take risks and amuse. More often, though, her poems are concerned with her personal understanding of women's discomfort in traditional roles. In "The Weather," she writes:

I have been dead all winter
 no one has noticed it...

I shuffle into the kitchen to make tea
 soft dust rises from the floor
 I pour and pour
 the cups remain empty

This is ambivalent poetry, a search for what is best in our world, an understanding that women are unlikely to find what they seek, that compromise is probably inevitable. While we may ponder eternal verities, and sometimes discover moments of small truth Szumigalski leaves us with the sense that much is still beyond our grasp:

they chant
 a voice from the centre of the earth
 answers them *now you know everything*
 it declares *it is up to you to discover*
 how much that is

("For Padmanabh")



In Rhea Tregebov's *Remembering History*, even Jane of the infamous, ubiquitous *Dick and Jane* readers has become "promiscuous in her anger." And with good reason, as we might remember. Tregebov leads us through a female world of expectation and loss, where women are fragmented, outraged but are learning, slowly, to cultivate private power. In "The Reapers," she asks a question that informs this collection:

What was the name of the land, the home
 we were promised? By whose will are we
 here
 where no one leads us, nothing is given?

Les Femmes et le travail à temps partiel Julie White

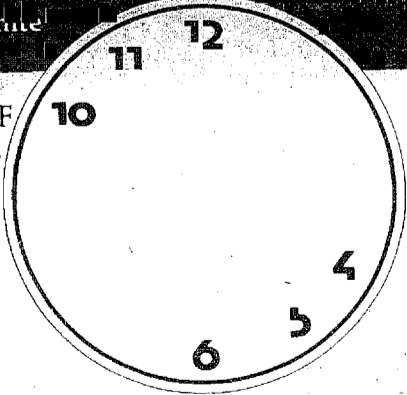
Women and Part-Time Work Julie White

La nouvelle publication du CCCSF examine la position des travailleuses à temps partiel par rapport au reste de la main-d'oeuvre, aux syndicats et à la législation actuelle.

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Conseil consultatif canadien de la situation de la femme



Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Bronzed Baby Boots



by Jean Wilson

The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English. Chosen by Margaret Atwood. Toronto: Oxford University Press 1982. Pp. xliii, 478. \$19.95.

Margaret Atwood observes in her introduction to this book: "Being in the Oxford anthology is like getting your baby boots bronzed: the aim is durability." Previous editions of this anthology (1912, 1960) and

of its relation, *Modern Canadian Verse* (1967), have duly bronzed many poets, though some names inevitably have come and gone with their anthologizers. Durability is not a likely result, not guaranteed.

Wilfred Campbell and A.J.M. Smith, the previous anthologizers, both also poets, might have been surprised to see what Margaret Atwood considers to be representative of the Canadian poetic tradition, but her guide has been much the same as theirs: "We see where we are and where we're going partly by where we've been, and an anthology such as this one is not only gathered from the past but aimed towards the future."

This is one of those standard reference books with which anyone interested in Canadian literature and culture should be familiar. It is unlikely that everyone will agree with Atwood's selection of poets or of poems and it is possible to quibble with some of her principles of selection, but even to undertake and to accomplish a task like anthologizing a representative selection of Canadian poetry demands attention, especially when one of our best contemporary poets is responsible for it.

Unlike Smith's Oxford anthology, and *Modern Canadian Verse*, which he also edited, the new Oxford includes only poets writing in English. Smith also selected poets writing in French. Atwood remarks that:

The yeast-like growth of poetry in both languages since 1960 has meant that considerations of length, as well as the ignorance of the present editor, have limited this collection to poetry in English only. This in no way denies

the existence or worth of the poetry that has been written in languages other than English, including native languages, as well as many European and Asian ones.

That this limit had to be observed is unfortunate but unavoidable. In the previous anthology, readers in places other than Québec at least had to notice the names of a few poets other than those writing in the dominant language. We risk becoming even more ignorant than we are already of poets writing in other languages in this country. However, translation is a difficult and costly art so it is not surprising that the scope of this book was limited. In fact, given the number of languages in which poetry is written in this country, probably there will always be an imbalance in our own or anyone else's analysis of Canada's poetic tradition.

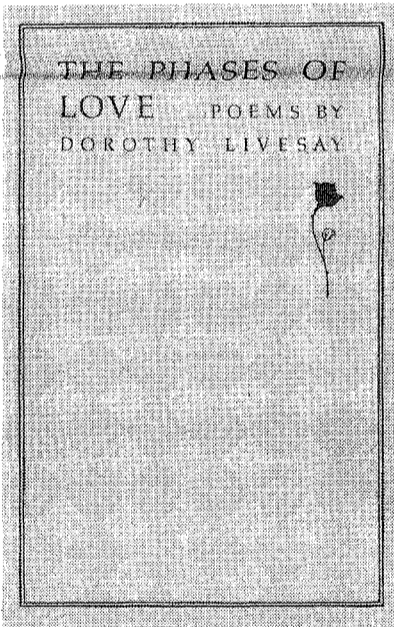
There is one other noticeable imbalance in the new Oxford anthology, as in previous ones, that seems to be a condition of Canadian poetry, not necessarily a bias on the part of anthologizers. That is that there are few women poets included in this or previous editions. Out of 120 poets in the new collection, only 29 are women. (In Smith's 1960 anthology, there were 20 women out of 100, and in his *Modern Canadian Verse* there were 14 out of 81.) As Atwood says, it is an indication of a major shift in sensibility between 1960 and 1982 that she even felt compelled to comment on this imbalance. Her view is that

there are more male poets in this book because there are more in Canada. There is no reason why equality should be present in the field of poetry when it is absent everywhere else. *Why*

there are more male poets is a matter for fascinating speculation...My guess is that the process starts long before any poet gets to the point of submitting to a little magazine, and has something to do with that unfortunate term 'socialization.' There is another view of this question however...Whether the glass is two-thirds empty or a third full depends on how thirsty you are, and it is possible to see women poets not in terms of their scantiness but in terms of their relative prominence and excellence...The truth appears to be that, although Canada is and was no Utopia for women, it has historically and for mysterious reasons favoured the production of good women poets to a greater extent than have England, the United States, or Australia. The reader of this anthology, however, may rest assured: no poet has been excluded because he is male. (p. xxix)

You may want to take issue with Atwood, and if you want to read only poetry by women, pick them out in this anthology — especially less well-known poets such as Paulette Giles, Colleen Thibaudeau, Roo Borson, Gail Fox, Mary Di Michele, Kristjanna Gunnars, Sharon Thesen, Marilyn Bowering, and Daphne Marlatt. Atwood has included some very fine poems by these women, all of whom are new to this edition, as well as by older and more established women such as Dorothy Livesay, Anne Marriott, Phyllis Webb, P.K. Page, Miriam Waddington, and Atwood herself. But if you want to understand the context in which they have all written and which they share with the male poets represented, read the whole anthology. You may not like everything you read, but you won't be bored.

Songs from Experience



by Jean Wilson

Dorothy Livesay, *The Phases of Love*. Toronto: Coach House Press 1983. Unpagged. \$5.95.

One of the best Canadian poets for the last five decades has been Dorothy Livesay. Her first book was published in 1928 and she has hardly stopped publishing since. She has won two Governor General's awards and many other honours, has travelled extensively as a representative of Canadian poets, has made women's concerns a significant theme

of her poetry, has been an inspiration and teacher for generations of younger poets and critics, male and female, and as a result of all that activity has become a kind of grande dame of Canadian literature — if grande dames are so called at the early age of 74. This year Dorothy Livesay is writer in residence at the University of Toronto and so has become a familiar of the poetry circuit in Toronto and nearby Ontario centres. In March an excellent conference in her honour was held at the University of Waterloo. When she is not elsewhere, home is the enchanted isle, Galiano Island, BC.

Coach House Press of Toronto has recently published a new Livesay collection, *Phases of Love*. It is a collection of love poetry written between 1925 and 1982. Naturally, given the time-span of the book, the poems range from expressions of innocent idealism to poems reflecting the maturity of a long life lived fully. As anyone who knows her will attest, Dorothy Livesay is nothing if not passionate — and passionate as much about love as about any political or social cause in which she might be embroiled at any particular moment.

Some of the poems have been published previously, in journals such as *Room of One's Own*, *The Malahat Review*, and *The Canadian Forum*, but many are previously unpublished. Though not Dorothy Livesay's most substantial work, *Phases of Love* is an interesting collection, very attractively presented by Coach House, a worthy addition to the canon and a good introduction to a fine Canadian woman poet. ●

• MUNRO, from page 11

Such is the situation in the story for which *The Moons of Jupiter* is titled. A woman visits her old father in the hospital 'trapped by a leaky heart', during the days in which he is making up his mind whether to have major surgery. As she passes the time expecting a life or death decision, they converse like an estranged couple about their family, auras, what's in the paper, the names of the moons of Jupiter. Nothing really happens, but much more than that, I didn't really care if anything did.

Whether the woman is named Prue or Frances or Lydia, or the tale is told in the first person, the persona in each story is strikingly similar. Whether married or single, she is alone, confused at the seeming lack of substance in her life, defender of womanhood but not of women. Relationships among the women are generally marked by jealousy, suppressed discord, and always a hint of self righteous indignation. Reason over passion at all times. Even when passion, sexual passion that is, does occur in "Accident," is to evoke guilt in our heroine who acquires another set of bite marks on her neck as she and her married lover steal a quickie in the utility closet of the school where they both teach. These are dark bruises to be nurtured after he is hastily summoned by the school secretary who reports through the key hole that his young son has just been killed.

In "Dulse," a 45 year old Lydia, editor at a Toronto magazine, leaves her boyfriend and takes a trip to an island off the coast of New Brunswick. She stays in a guest house near Willa Cather's old summer cottage. Another guest, an old gentleman who has been a fan of Willa Cather's for sixty years, tells Lydia an anecdote of which he is fond. A mutual friend of his and Cather's had once talked long and well about the mutual friend's intention of marrying. Lydia snaps, "What would she know about it anyway...she lived with a woman." Her tone implies that only women in the world of men could be qualified to comment on life's vicissitudes.

I was bored silly reading *Moons* and I felt incensed that a writer of Munro's capacity would write to further the negative image of women. From a great writer one has come to expect more than wooden characters browbeating each other. One comes to expect understanding, dimension, and insight into the human dialogue, not this mean-spiritedness in the name of realism.

I found the *Moons of Jupiter* arid reading, an introduction to limp-wristed characters who have largely dissociated themselves from the vitality of life. I felt that perhaps Munro became self-conscious during

the writing of this selection. This could be a natural by-product of the close scrutiny which she has been under in recent years. Perhaps in writing about people who are often ill tempered and begrudging of each other she accurately describes the mood of small town people. I for one rather doubt it and I cared little for the tight-lipped people who populated these pages. The sweetness of *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* has given way to a metred, cryptic style. The sense of intimacy of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is missing and I miss it.

Munro is a superb chronicler of detail, weaving graphic domestic and geographic descriptions of the southern Ontario landscape for which she is well known. If I wasn't pleased with the nature of her characters, this is not because Munro hasn't described them well. The problem is that like TV's Quincy, she has dissected and analyzed the bodies well, but lifeless they are. ●

Our Mistake

• In last month's interview with Berit Ås, "To Russia With Love," there were several spelling mistakes as a result of transcribing from Norwegian to English: Two organizers of the March to Moscow were Eva Nordland and Marie Larsson; the Norwegian press ran a large front page headline saying JUBEL, meaning "great joy"; and the first town in Finland the marchers arrived in was Aabo. Also, the official march slogans should have read: (1) No nuclear weapons in Europe, neither in the East nor in the West; (2) No nuclear weapons in the world; and (3) For Disarmament and peace.

• Dorothy Rosenberg, who interviewed Berit Ås, was described as a filmmaker. She is in fact a film consultant.

• The annual members' meeting of the Women's Information Centre will be held on *Friday, May 20, 455 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, Suite 205, at 2 pm.*

• The article on Bill C-127 by Gilleen Chase reported that spouses are "not obligated to give evidence against one another in respect of offences against persons under fourteen." The sentence should have read "now obligated...."

Contributors

Jan DeGrass works with *Kinesis* in Vancouver.

Alexa DeWiel is an Ottawa poet and short story writer.

Joanne Kates is a restaurant critic for the *Globe and Mail*.

Mary Meigs is the author of *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait* and lives in Montréal.

Ann Pappert is a Toronto freelance writer.

Maureen Phillips is a Toronto freelance reader.

Gail van Varseveld is a founding mother of *Room of One's Own* and now lives in Toronto.

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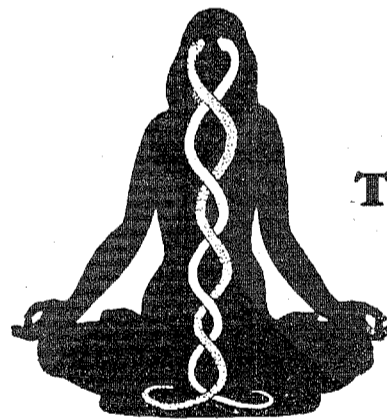
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Week of May 1

- **Tuesday, May 3:** Wen-Do, women's self-defence, 12 hour basic course. 7-10 pm. Queen/Broadview. Tuesdays until May 31. Classes also begin Saturday, May 7; Wednesday, May 11; Thursday, May 19; Saturday, May 21 and Wednesday, May 25. Info: 461-6311.



- **Wednesday, May 4:** Donna Marchand, feminist singer/songwriter. Fat Albert's Coffee House, 300 Bloor St. West, 8 pm. \$1.50.
- **Thursday, May 5:** Regular meeting of women's cultural and political fair/discussion group. 7:30 pm. 519 Church St.
- **Thursday, May 5:** Marianne Girard, appearing with her band. One night only. Larry's Hideaway, Carlton and Jarvis. 10 pm. \$2. Info: 534-9771.
- **Friday, May 6:** Phoenix Theatre presents "Ever Loving," a play by Margaret Hollingsworth about three war brides from 1944 to 1970. Adelaide Court, 57 Adelaide East. Info: 363-6401. To May 15.
- **Friday, May 6:** "Lianna" with Linda Griffiths, continues at Carlton Cineplex.

- **Friday, May 6:** Network of the Americas of the International Gay Association. Spring meeting to discuss planning for International Year of Lesbian and Gay Action. Information: Jo-Anne, 926-1769.
- **Saturday, May 7:** Women's Perspective, a multi-media women's art show. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. West. Info: 532-9681. To June 3.



- **Saturday, May 7:** Gay Community Dance Committee presents "Mad Hatter Masquerade" at the Concert Hall, 888 Yonge St.
- **Saturday, May 7:** Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund sponsors a bake and rummage sale at 519 Church Street. For more information and to donate, call Francie: 465-6822.
- **Saturday, May 7:** Women Out of Doors holds a hike and brunch. Meet at the entrance of the Old Mill Subway station, 11 am. Bring food. Information: 463-0924.
- **Saturday, May 7:** "Write-On '83" festival features Canadian women authors. Moot Court Room, Osgoode Hall, York University. 2 - 7:30 pm. \$10. Info: 667-6434.

OUTSIDE BROADSIDE

TORONTO WOMEN'S EVENTS CALENDAR

May 1983

Week of May 8

- **Sunday, May 8:** Artsoup and Friends — storymaking, art and music for children 5-10. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. West. 2-4 pm. Info: 532-9681.
- **Sunday, May 8:** Jennie's Story, Betty Lambert's play about women's rights in rural Alberta. St. Lawrence Centre. 366-7723. To Saturday, May 21.
- **Sunday, May 8:** March for Control of Our Bodies, Control of Our Lives. Organized by the Ad Hoc Committee for the Right to Choose. North east corner of College and University. 1:30 pm.

CHOICE

- **Sunday, May 8:** CBC Stereo presents "The Young in One Another's Arms," an adaptation by Anne Cameron of Jane Rule's novel. 94.1 FM. 7:05 pm. Part 2, Sunday, May 15.
- **Sunday, May 8:** "The Mothers of El Salvador", workshops 1-5 pm, public rally 7 pm, U of T Faculty of Education, 371 Bloor St. W.
- **Monday, May 9:** Photo-xerography by Caroline Murray. 940 Queen Street E. Info: 466-8844. To May 15.
- **Monday, May 9:** The Women's Group, a support and CR group for lesbians, meets at 519 Church St. 8 pm. Info: 926-0527. Also Mondays May 16, May 23, May 30.

- **Tuesday, May 10:** Lesbian Phone Line open tonight for calls from women. Every Tuesday evening, 7:30 to 10:30 pm. 960-3249.
- **Wednesday, May 11:** International Women's Day Committee (IWDC) meeting at University Settlement House. 7:30 pm. Info: 789-4541. Also Wednesday, May 25.

- **Wednesday, May 11:** Toronto Addicted Women's Self-Help Network (TAWSHN) meets at Central Neighbourhood House, 349 Ontario Street. 7 pm. Information: 961-7319. Also Wednesdays, May 18, May 25.

- **Thursday, May 12:** "Bag Lady Prosperity Dance and Benediction" — performance by Virgin Territory and Chong. 8:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. West. Info: 532-9681.

- **Thursday, May 12:** General open meeting to discuss women's cultural and political fair to be held in July 1983. All women welcome. 7:30 pm. MacPhail Residence Gym, 389 Church St. Info: 537-6989.

- **Friday, May 13:** Women's Independent Thoughtz (WITZ) A seminar/discussion group for the exchange of ideas and creative endeavours in art, literature, philosophy and political thought. Special showing: Gay Community Appeal slide show. 7 pm. Info: 536-3162.

- **Saturday, May 14:** Cruise Missile Teach-In. Conference on missile testing in Canada organized by the Against Cruise Testing Coalition (ACT). Council Chambers, City Hall, 10 am. Information: 469-4171. Also Sunday, May 15.

Robin Belitsky-Endres and Zoya Stevenson. 7:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. W. Info: 532-9681.

- **Thursday, May 19:** Theatre Plus presents "Eve", an adaptation of Constance Beresford-Howe's novel about a 65 year old woman who leaves home. St. Lawrence Town Hall. Info: 366-7723.

- **Friday, May 20:** Women at Home" dance performance. 8 pm. Partisan Gallery 2388 Dundas St. W. Info: 532-9681. Also Saturday, May 21.

- **Friday, May 20:** Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario social evening (preceeding AGM), 7 to 10 pm. 519 Church St. Saturday, Annual General Meeting (location to be announced). Sunday: workshop on institutionalized chauvinism — "Pots and Kettles" (location to be announced). Information: 533-6824.

- **Friday, May 20:** Women Out of Doors (WOODS) Allegheny Back-packing weekend. \$30. Info: Gail 530-4007

Week of May 22

- **Sunday, May 22:** Poets Marlene Philip and Jianna Patriarca read from their work at the Havana Restaurant, 488 College St. 9 pm.



Marianne Girard in concert May 5

- **Saturday, May 14:** Music Cabaret. 7:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas Street West. Info: 532-9681.

- **Saturday, May 14:** Ferron in concert on "Simply Folk", CBC Stereo, 94.1 FM. 11:05 pm.

- **Wednesday, May 25:** Poetry Cabaret. All interested women welcome to come and participate. 7:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. West. Info: 532-9681.

- **Thursday, May 26:** "Caution: Women at Work" theatre performance: 8:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas Street West. Info: 532-9681. Also Friday, May 27 and Saturday May 28. 2:30 performance on Sunday, May 29.

- **Thursday, May 26:** "Not a Love Story," 1981 NFB film on pornography, Superchannel Pay TV. 11 pm.

Week of May 15

- **Sunday, May 15:** Women Out of Doors (WOODS) Hike at Rattlesnake point on the Bruce Trail. Info: Gail 530-4007.

- **Monday, May 16:** Feminism and Culture, panel discussion with Robin Belitsky-Endres, Susan Crean and others. 7:30 pm. Partisan Gallery, 2388 Dundas St. W. Info: 532-9681.

- **Wednesday, May 18:** "Gold Earrings — The Selected Poetry of Sharon Stevenson," readings with

Week of May 29

- **Sunday, May 29:** Women Out of Doors (WOODS) cycle tour in Toronto. Info: WOODS, 925-2474 x 369 (leave message).

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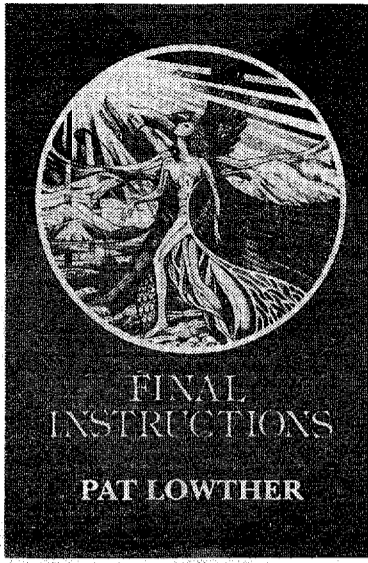
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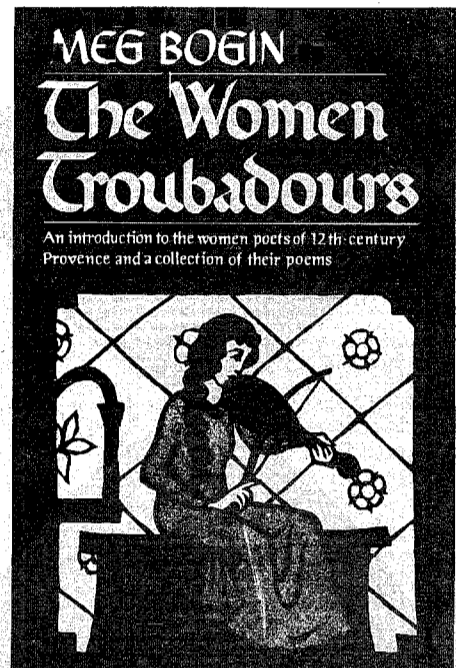
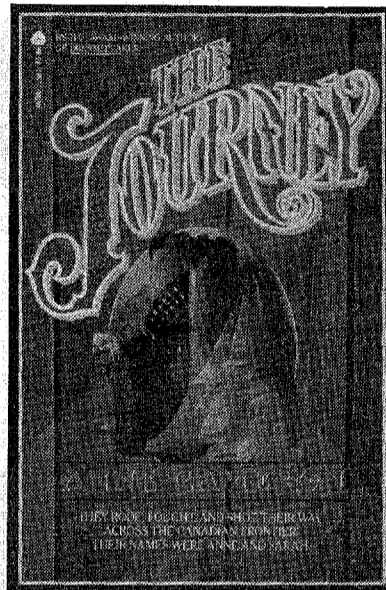
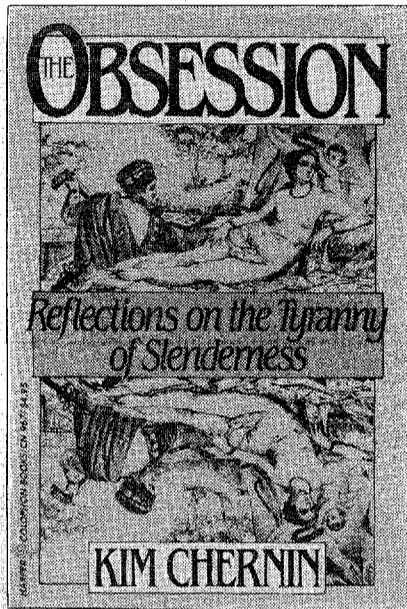
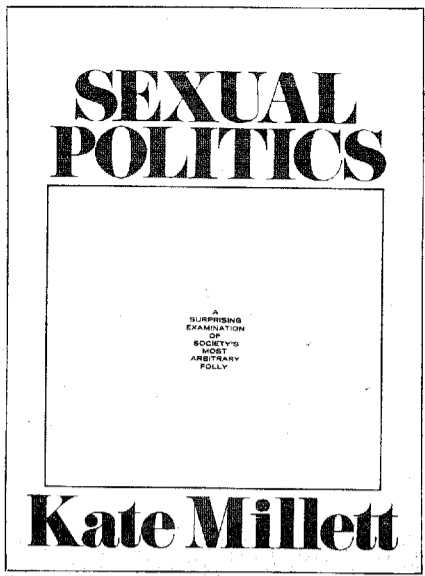
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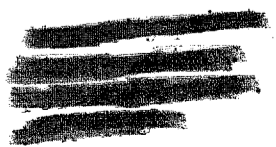
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