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canadian magazine for women

Volume VI Number 1 1979 \$1.25



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# Branching Out

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cover illustration by Cathy Hobart

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## About This Issue

This issue marks the fifth anniversary of *Branching Out*, and with an anniversary comes the temptation to wax philosophical. Thus we present a rather soul-searching issue, one which looks at the dynamics of the women's movement in Canada.

You may ask, does Canada even have a women's movement? This question occurred to us many times over the past five years as we ventured to produce a magazine for Canadian feminists. That there are feminists in Canada was never in doubt, but it is often difficult to detect coherent traditions, patterns, directions. If they are there, we should understand them and bring them into relief in this magazine. We decided to call on some keen observers of the women's movement to join us in defining Canadian feminist identity. We asked a segment of our readers, through a questionnaire, to add their voices to the discussion. We also asked the secretary of state Women's Programme to give us some money, so that this could indeed be a 'special issue.'

Everyone came through wonderfully. We received more manuscripts than we could print. We received an avalanche of completed questionnaires. We received \$2500 from the Women's Programme.

Our thanks to everyone who contributed to this commemorative effort. And, just as important, we thank the hundreds of people who have put some part of themselves into *Branching Out* in its first five years.

## letters

### Songs Release Tension

Perhaps my consciousness has not been sufficiently raised, or perhaps my intelligence is such that I cannot even recognize when I've been insulted, or perhaps it is just that my experiences in rugby are from North American cities other than Edmonton, but I see very little of the sport I know as rugby in the article by Ms. Samler and Ms. Ford.

My husband coaches women's rugby and has played for nearly fifteen years with the Cleveland Blues, the University of Georgia and Clemson University rugby clubs. We have travelled to countless matches and tournaments all over the eastern U.S. and Canada. In those fifteen years I have never been subjected to any kind of verbal or physical harassment, never felt I was without my own identity and have never been particularly offended by rugby songs. The songs sung after games are

traditional, all players know the words and their function is not to put anybody down, but to break the ice socially and to release tension from what are usually clean but hard-fought, sportsmanlike contests.

I am acquainted with another Edmonton Rockers player. Her accounts of the women's team, male rugby parties in Edmonton and her treatment by male team members do not jibe with the Samler-Ford accounts. Therefore I tend to think the article "Can This Sport Be Liberated" is a bit one-sided and reflects an overly sensitive if not intransigent viewpoint. In an otherwise well balanced issue, this article stood out as biased and it would be a shame if it frightened women from participating in an enjoyable team sport.

Ann Peatee Zimmerman, Toronto

### Misrepresentation Claimed

We feel that the views stated in the article "Can this Sport Be Liberated" by Jo Samler and Frankie Ford (*Branching Out*, V, 4, 1978) are not representative of the Edmonton Rockers Rugby Football Club. The problems described in the article do not give a representative view of rugby and women in sport. The events cited by the authors are isolated and do not reflect the attitude of the general membership towards women's rugby. As members of the Edmonton Rocker RFC we enjoy rugby as an aggressive, exhilarating sport which involves physical fitness and skill. It fosters comradeship and friendship among all players. The Club invites inquiries: contact Ginger Scott (President) at 467-7043.

Edmonton Rockers RFC

*Frankie Ford replies: In the article, the point we hoped to stress was that the game of rugby played by women is an exhilarating one that offers many rewards, in physical fitness and in the experience of playing a team sport with other women. In a game traditionally played by men, who created a subculture that excluded women on many levels, the problems encountered by the women who were part of the beginnings of women's rugby in Edmonton consisted mainly of verbal opposition. Most of this opposition had been overcome by the time the Rockers RFC incorporated. If asked whether the effort was worthwhile, I would say yes, as the club has flourished, and I wish its members all the best for the coming season.*

### Canoeing Neglected

I enjoyed the latest issue immensely, though I'm always sorry to note the neglect of "my own" sport, white water canoeing. I began backpacking and canoeing in my forties and I'm investigating instances of women over 40 involved in this and other sports. For some reason I can't explain, Canadian women seem less likely than U.S. ones to "start late". So far I've come across only one Canadian woman but about half a dozen Americans who have done so. In the summer of 1977 three grannies and four men did a DuMoine River trip, including rapids and portages. It would be great to get an all-woman wilderness trip together.

Congratulations to *Branching Out* on steady improvement. "Printed Matter" is a good addition.

Alma Norman, Ottawa

## classified

**Spinners** A research project on spinning in Alberta requires information from women who have been spinning over a period of years. If you are a spinner who has old equipment or if you know someone else who might be able to contribute to the project, contact Barbara Schweger at R.R. 4, Sherwood Park, Alberta, ph. (403) 922-2878, or at the Department of Home Economics, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

**Drop-ins** We would like to welcome gay women of all ages (single, married and housewives) to our Thursday evening drop-ins. Meet people over coffee, 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. Gay counselling, information and public speaking services also available. GATE, Edmonton, 10144 - 101 Street, Edmonton. Phone 424-8361

**Feminist Postcards** Maureen Paxton's "Could this woman bake a cherry pie?" from the cover of *Branching Out*'s last issue, now in post card form. Perfect for short notes, a gift idea. Package of 10, \$3.00 from *Branching Out*, Box 4098, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 4S8.

**Party** Celebrate *Branching Out*'s fifth anniversary. Come to our party and exhibition "Salute to Women Artists" at Latitude 53 Gallery, 10048 - 101A Avenue, Edmonton, February 2. Phone 433-4021 for details.





# Deck the Halls With Boughs of Holly, Santa Must Be Off His Trolley, Fa-La-La

by Claire Mackay  
illustrations by Sheila Luck

Dear Ms. Claus,

I have a complaint and I'm writing to you instead of to your husband because frankly, Ms. Claus, I think your old man's slipping. (Men do, you know, once they reach a certain age. We have a few Provincial Court judges down here showing the tell-tale signs; poor fellows are quite irrational. Have you noticed anything like that in Santa? Is he confused? Forgetful? Does the bonfire in his blood burn only fitfully? Are his brains askew?)

Anyhow, he certainly hasn't been paying attention lately. The things I ask for I never get (and I swear I haven't been all that naughty — at my age the opportunity seldom arises) and the things I get I sure as heck never asked for.

Now I don't like to complain, especially since I know you're probably extra busy while Santa makes all the important decisions like whether to put his right boot on before his left, but if you could spare a minute from scraping out the reindeer stables — from being a subordi-

nate Claus, so to speak — to set him straight, I'd be grateful. I just can't seem to get through: Christmas Eve I waited up half the night for him but as soon as I started to explain, he put his finger alongside his nose, shook his belly at me (rather suggestively too, I'm sorry to say, Ms. Claus), and then took off up the chimney hollering "Ho-ho-ho," fer-gawdsake. Does he act that way at home?

So first of all please tell him to pick up some of the stuff he left last year. For



example, there was this huge bag sealed in goldleaf paper, spangled with stars of royal beauty bright, and fragrant with frankincense and myrrh. Must have cost a fortune to wrap it up. I was dazzled, let me tell you. The tag read, "From Marc Lalonde and the rest of the guys on the Hill." Well, I set to and started to open it up, very carefully of course, so I could use the paper again. There were several layers of wrapping, each more splendid than the last. One by one by one, fairly swooning with excitement, I peeled them away, as from some colossal and opulent onion.

But somebody must have goofed. Because once I got all the paper off, there was nothing there! Strangest thing! Just a bag of air. Well, I slapped the parcel back together and I'd appreciate it if you could ask Santa to drop it off in Ottawa next time he does his rounds. I'm sure they can use it again. And again. And again.

Oh, about those subscriptions to Penthouse and Hustler? (Crazy mixup there, hey?) Not to worry — I managed to get rid of them all right. There's a chap in my office who gets a real bang out of them.

Then at the back of the tree I found an enormous carton of paper. I would've kept it for grocery lists but unfortunately it had printing all over it. There must have been dozens of reports and studies and fancy documents, with titles like Female Emancipation, Status of Women, The Need for Day Care, Equal Pay, Divorce Reform, Women's Rights, etc., some of them dating back a hundred years or more. And the kernel of extracted wisdom from those uncountable reams, the conclusion, shiny as a politician's shoe every time, was always the same: women are getting ripped off and gosh, we better do something about it. I

wonder, Ms. Claus, how many innocent trees were and will yet be murdered to enshrine — or entomb — that mouldering inanity. Anyway, the paper's no good. I even tried it in the bathroom but it's too slippery. So could you tell Santa to stuff it? In his sleigh, I mean.

And finally there were a few items in my stocking I really didn't know what to do with: the set of see-through aprons, one for each day of the week; a book called "Total Submission, or 101 Ways to Please Your Man"; and an electric face-brush (no kidding, Ms. Claus! And apart from one rather fetching hair fastened to the mole perched on my right cheekbone and which adds, I think, a touch of piquancy to my appearance, my face is perfectly bald). Will you make sure Santa takes them with him? Pin a note to his suit if you have to. They're all crammed into a box marked POISON on the top shelf of the kitchen closet. I didn't want my kids touching them.

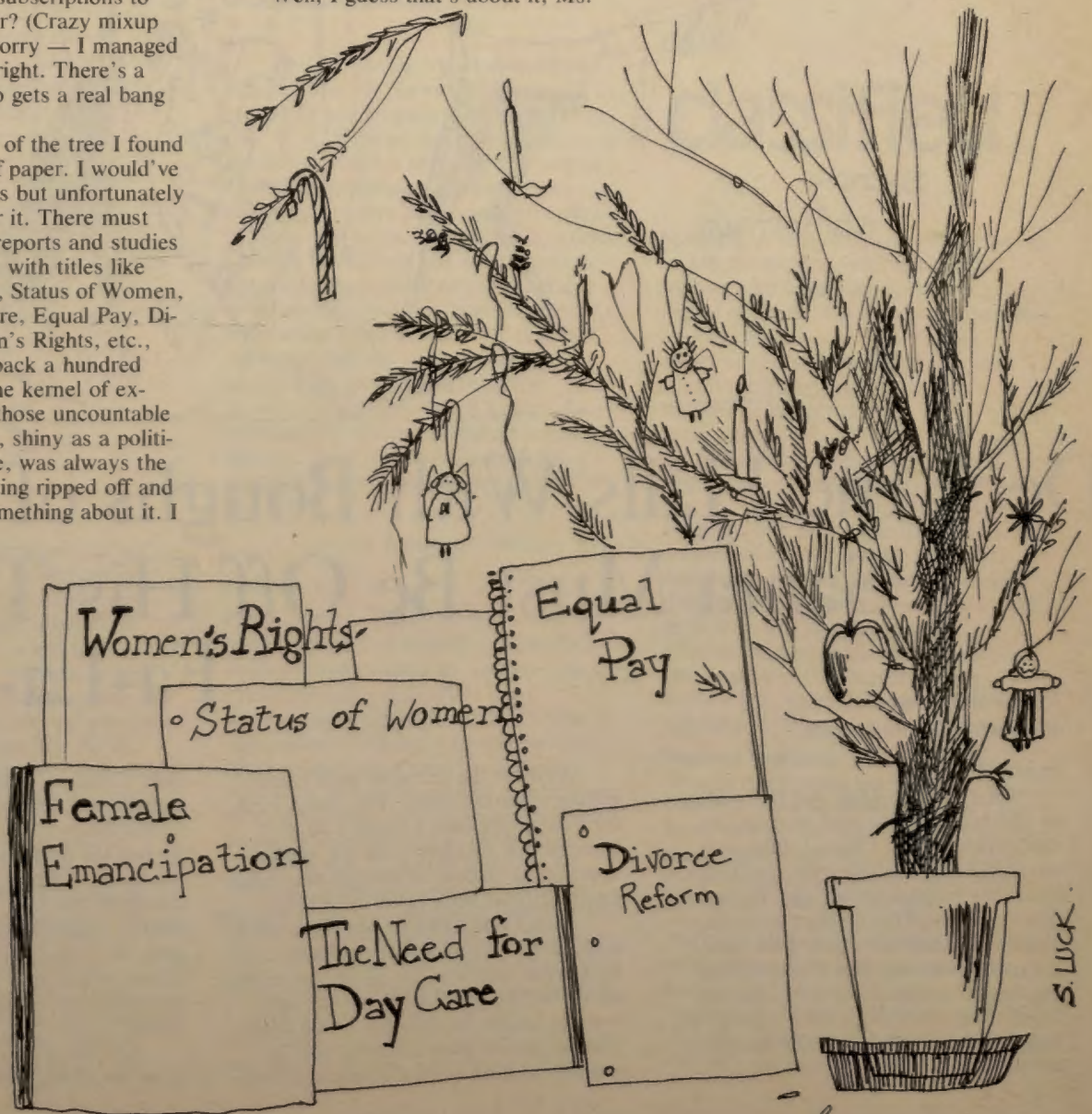
Well, I guess that's about it, Ms.

Claus, except to say that there is one gift that I — and most of the women in the world — wouldn't mind finding under the tree next year. It's something we've been wanting for a long time: the chance — the equal chance — to grow and work and live as abundantly as we can. Perhaps then we can help to make real at last humanity's age-old Christmas dream of peace on earth, goodwill to men and women everywhere.

So please, Ms. Claus, see what you can do. We've tried everything else. And New Years greetings from all your sisters.

*Claire Mackay has written three children's books and various magazine articles. She has three children and lives in Toronto.*

*Sheila Luck is studying Fine Arts at the University of Alberta.*





## OWL Women Politically Wise

OTTAWA — Once again women have taken up political arms in the fight to improve the status of women in Canada.

The newly-activated Ottawa Women's Lobby, an umbrella group of local feminist organizations, has reached the conclusion that only through direct political action can women effectively change what they say is the shoulder-shrugging attitude of too many federal, provincial and municipal politicians. Between now and the federal election expected this spring, OWL plans to act as a thorn in politicians' sides, whether through lobbying, demonstrating or other methods.

"Women are, by God, a force to be reckoned with," says OWL member Pat Hacker, of the Ottawa women's career counselling service. "And they're becoming sensitized to the fact they're not getting a fair deal in this country."

"I work with grass-roots women — women who have never thought about politics or how it affects their lives. And they're starting to say 'I don't think this should be going on. I'm going to do something about it.'"

Hacker says unemployment, cuts in family allowances and welfare benefits touch women deeply.

These concerns and others were the subject of a recent OWL conference where members were given a chance to practise their lobbying skills in a role-playing workshop. Discussion focussed on four issues on which OWL will concentrate through the months leading up to the next election: violence against women, women and employment, abortion, and native women.

"There are many other problems we could be dealing with," says Hacker. "But we chose these four because we didn't want to spread ourselves too thin. We want to be effective."

Carol Swan, who works with the federal communications department says OWL's most immediate goal is to

organize members into ridings and issue teams for more effective lobbying.

The teams of four or five members, each versed in a different issue, will canvass politicians in one riding, grilling them on their stands on various issues and informing them of women's problems they may not be aware of, says Swan.

Issue teams, again composed of four or five members all knowledgeable in one area, such as native women, will attend all candidate meetings in the five ridings in the area to focus attention on that one issue.

First formed before the general election in 1974 and regrouped several

times since as an ad hoc force during elections, OWL began holding regular meetings after the March meeting of the National Action Committee on the status of women, the association of national women's organizations that stages an annual lobby on Parliament Hill on behalf on several million women.

The 40-50 OWL members include staff and volunteers from the local rape crisis centre, the women's career counselling centre and members of the Canadian Association for Repeal of the Abortion Law. They also include university professors, lawyers, government employees and members of NAC's executive.

*Deb van der Gracht*

## NAC Brief Hits CBC

"The CBC would not dare to ignore any ethnic group, language group, or region as badly as it does women."

This was only one of many hard-hitting statements contained in a brief presented recently to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission by the National Action Committee on the status of women, an umbrella group which lobbies the federal government on women's issues.

The CRTC was holding public hearings on the CBC before deciding whether to renew the government-funded network's licence.

The brief said CBC's English-language television programs are grossly unfair in their treatment of women, portraying them as beautiful objects or servants, while men are usually shown as "active and expert."

In an interview with the Toronto Globe and Mail, NAC executive Lynn McDonald, who helped present the brief, said the CBC rarely portrays the realities — housewives who work full time, career women and volunteer workers.

The National Action Committee

found in an analysis of the 1978-1979 program schedule that women figure prominently less often than men. Men predominated in 83 per cent of day-time shows and 73 per cent of prime-time shows, the brief noted. Women figured in only nine per cent of both day-time and evening programs. The sexes were equally represented in eight per cent of day-time shows and 18 per cent of those in the evening.

Where women did dominate numerically was in soap operas, and usually in a domestic role, the brief pointed out.

Women's issues are treated poorly or ignored on CBC's national news, the National Action Committee accused. The brief suggested this could be because the network has so few female reporters and editors.

The group recommended the CBC promote more women to managerial and producer positions, saying the corporation would improve its programming with such a move.

In 1977, CBC women held only 10.7 per cent of management posts and 16.3 per cent of producers' positions.

*Deb van der Gracht*



## Solid Brick, Solid Asset

A group of Winnipeg women recently purchased The Women's Building, the first women-owned women's centre in Canada.

Located at 730 Alexander Ave., The Women's Building was bought for the sum of \$30,000 in October, 1978 by the Winnipeg Women's Cultural and Education Centre Inc. from the United Church.

Joan Campbell, President of the Winnipeg Women's Cultural and Education Centre Inc. said that in response to the needs of the women's community "we wanted a large building that we owned ourselves where we could have room to have social functions and businesses and other fund raising activities. This way we hope to generate enough revenue to make us permanently self-sufficient, so we won't have to depend on short-term funding."

Presently a number of women's groups have moved into the building and are renting some of the available office space. This includes Women in Trade, The Winnipeg Lesbian Phone Line Counselling, and Winnipeg Women's Liberation. In addition, a neighborhood family drop-in program sponsored by the Mennonite Church, Adventure Crossroads, operates during the week out of the basement. Finally, The Women's Building houses the Hedy la Wood's Thrift Boutique and plans are being made to house a book store, a social club for drop-ins, theatre, concerts and women's yoga and self-defence courses.

Although a definite date has not been selected, Ms. Campbell expects the grand opening to be held sometime in February 1979. The program, yet to be finalized, will feature theatrical performances, women's group displays, special



The Women's Building, 730 Alexander Avenue, Winnipeg.

guest speakers and concerts.

The idea for purchasing a women's building had been around Winnipeg for quite some time, Ms. Campbell explained in a telephone interview. The idea finally began to materialize when the United Church put this building up for sale. In June, 1978 a group of women banded together to form the Winnipeg Women's Cultural and Education Centre Inc., a non-profit corporation "whose function is to ensure that the building is operational, look after maintenance and repairs and other matters concerning the management of the building."

In order to legally deal with the United Church we had to become a corporation, Ms. Campbell added.

Referred to in the past as the McLean Mission, The Women's Building was built at the turn of this century.

"It's a real edifice in the community," Ms. Campbell commented.

"The building is located in the core area of Winnipeg and it has become a community centre in the area. The United Church specified that they would sell the building to a group which was involved in carrying out activities similar to those of the church like social outreach programs," Ms. Campbell went on to say.

In describing the building, Ms. Campbell stated that the three-storey structure is made "of very solid brick."

On the main floor a stage runs off the centre hallway while three offices are located on each side of this main thoroughfare. On the third floor, one large lounge and office as well as one smaller office can be found. In the basement is a large lounging room, two fireplaces, a kitchen with two ranges and a large boiler room.

To date, The Women's Building is "operating in the black." A portion of the revenue is generated from a "sinking fund plan" where people donate money towards the Building. In addition, money is raised through socials, rental fees for offices, the concert area and from the rental of other building space.

Joan added that the Women's Building's main concern is to "serve every facet of women's groups."

This includes groups working towards action on the needs of women, those concerned with women's culture, education, and the physical and social needs of women.

## Holding Pattern May Spell End

After five years of operation, Lethbridge's only women's drop-in centre is still suffering growing pains and fighting to establish firm roots in a basically conservative community.

Although supporters say the continued existence of Women's Place is a victory in itself, the centre has not established a strong identity in Southern Alberta and seems bedevilled by leadership problems.

Since its inception during a confused and exciting summer in 1973, Women's Place has received over \$24,000 in funding from the federal government, via the secretary of state's women's programme. Over the years, the centre's volunteer workers have built up a formidable library of books and papers on women's issues, offered women coffee and company on a drop-in basis and sponsored activities as diverse as garage sales, self-defense classes, art discussions and political awareness conferences.

Although the centre's location and leadership has fluctuated over the years, the membership has remained the same. About 140 women pay \$5 each in annual dues as general members of Women's Place, says Eudene Luther, a past co-ordinator and five-year member of the centre.

She says there are those who express surprise that the centre has "that many" members, since Lethbridge has a reputation as an arch-conservative city.

"Nobody's going to come out and say that Mormon attitudes are the cause of the conservatism here," says co-ordinator Ellsworth-Boone, "but that attitude is definitely there, and it is very powerful and pervasive."

As if battling conservative mores weren't problem enough, there seems to be a feeling among Lethbridge women that Women's Place lacks direction and focus.

Eudene Luther, says they have deliberately been "doing more acceptable things" over the past year in an effort to encourage participation of more conservative women. This past fall, for example, the centre sponsored courses in French, money management, self-defense, art appreciation and consciousness raising.

Luther admits that even the board of directors is divided between a conservative element, which doesn't want to "offend" anyone, and a more militant faction, which wants to see the centre

Janice Michaud



take stands and assume a more aggressive profile.

In addition, she says, "we can't do anything overtly political. We're registered as a charitable organization . . . and the government certainly wouldn't want to fund a revolution".

Women's Place did arouse negative reactions in the community when it was first formed Luther says, "but the radical end of our activities has been muted — we haven't carried placards, we're no longer a contentious issue".

University of Lethbridge anthropologist Karla Poewe, says the centre should stop depending on government funding and should attempt projects like running its own coffee shop to generate funds and thus be free to take independent action.

Another member says the lull in activities at Women's Place could also be

representative of the "holding pattern" the women's movement seems to have assumed on a nationwide basis.

"Things have calmed down. We have made a lot of progress and there's not the excitement there was . . . we don't know what to go out and charge up against, it's come down to a lot of subtle things."

Earlier this year when the centre's board applied for \$6,500 to finance its varied programming, the secretary of state agreed only to provide \$3,400 to sponsor a political awareness conference which board members say is not relevant to Southern Alberta women.

Since receiving its abbreviated grant in August, the centre decided to sponsor a conference on women and health, which took place Nov. 25, with a roster of guest speakers including female psychologists, psychiatrists and physi-

cians.

Women's Place newsletters this fall announced other changes: a move to a new location (the third this year); the hiring of yet another part-time co-ordinator (the tally varies, but the centre has had almost a dozen co-ordinators over the past five years, some on salary, some volunteers but none staying with the job more than a few months) and a move to expand to 12 the centre's existing seven-woman board of directors.

Whatever the success or failure of the centre's projects this fall, money will likely be the major deciding factor in the future of Women's Place. The centre is eligible to apply for another federal grant in January and Luther isn't at all sure the secretary of state's answer will be "yes".

Lynne Van Luven

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## INTERNATIONAL NOTES

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### West Germany

In July of last year a group of women in West Germany brought a class action suit against that country's leading weekly magazine, *stern*, for having violated their human rights and dignity with the publication of certain cover photos depicting women as sex objects. The action was initiated and sponsored by the feminist magazine EMMA under its outspoken editor, Alice Schwarzer. The other complainants came from diverse professional backgrounds, from high school student to secretary to psychoanalyst, among them actress-director Margarete von Trotta, known in Canada for her film *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*.

At the outset the defense, particularly chief editor Henri Nannen — treated the action as a mere publicity stunt to promote EMMA and patronized the plaintiffs with smirks and remarks implying they were just a bunch of priggish, frustrated old biddies (e.g., in Nannen's words: "joyless grey-skirts," etc.), the point being that *stern* is no cheap porno publication, so "what's all the fuss?"

In fact, the magazine reports on contemporary issues and concentrates on feature stories much like *Paris Match* does or *Life* and *Look* used to do. The difference is that in Germany the major weeklies, such as *Der Spiegel* and *stern*,

don't hesitate to use pictures of naked or part-naked women's bodies, particularly on the cover, presumably to dramatize the corresponding feature article. As EMMA and her associates pointed out, it isn't that the bodies are unclothed or even that they're of women; it's how, in what positions, they're photographed and what such posing suggests to the buyer-reader. The covers in question were representative not just of *stern's* tactics, but of the major publications' sex stereotyping of the female body to sell products. *stern's* covers showed professional models with their rear-ends roundly if not totally exposed and cocked toward the viewer in the familiar come-and-get-some pose.

The news media's initial response was to regard the case as good diversionary summer filler material; but the obvious substance of the complaint filed by EMMA & Co.'s attorney, Dr. Gisela Wild, and the sharpness of public reaction, made it into a headline item. Feminist or not, German women felt themselves directly touched by the issue, and men realized that a certain masculine aesthetic was being challenged: their inalienable right to look on women as available bodies.

Dr. Wild argued that her clients had been individually offended by the *stern* photo, but offended as individuals who

had come together in recognition of their communal claim to human dignity. The very collective nature of the oppression and discrimination implied in the offense, and not simply their shared sexuality, legitimized their right to be regarded as a separate social group. The *stern* covers denied their dignity not just as persons but as women, thus making it a class action complaint entered by representatives of that "class." The precedents for this were the successful suits brought by individual Jews against the German State after the war for the oppression each suffered under the National Socialists. Reparations were granted them as individuals who had been segregated and persecuted because they were Jewish, members of a distinct social community. Simultaneously established is the reverse side of the argument, i.e. that an offense against the collective is committed when one or more of its members are dishonoured and their rights violated. By injuring the human dignity of individual women, *stern* had offended German women as a whole.

In establishing the specific case against the defendant, Dr. Wild maintained that contrary to its libertarian posture and stated policy of defending human rights for all people, *stern* persistently violated the rights of more than half the population by presenting



Woman as a sexual object willingly dominated by Man. In this way the magazine demeaned women and perpetuated inequality between the sexes and dehumanizing role stereotypes in the public consciousness.

Strictly speaking, EMMA & Co. lost their case. The court did not recognize the class action characteristics of their argument on the grounds that 1) the parallels drawn between the discrimination suffered by the Jews under the Nazis and by German women in the German Federal Republic weren't historically justified, and 2) the plaintiffs had

not established that they were personally injured by the said photos and thus couldn't claim representative compensation. But if they lost the first part of their legal argument, the court did not deny the basis of their complaint, i.e. that the *stern* photos were indeed sexist and defamatory of woman's role in society. The presiding judge stated that the court had "profound respect for the commitment of the plaintiffs" and added, not a little patronizingly, that he was "almost sorry that the plaintiffs did not win . . ."

Judith Mirus

## INTERNATIONAL NOTES

### Ireland

"No, I don't think women are equal to men; no, I don't think women can or should belong in the same places as men. I don't like to see a woman in a pub. I know it's terrible, I know it's unfair, but that's what I believe." These were the words of a Dublin taxi-driver explaining the nature of Irish reality to me this summer. "Ah, yes," he concluded, "the women have a terrible life in Ireland."

At first glance, it seems that the women's movements in both the North and the South of Ireland are very similar to the various feminist movements we have here in North America; the issues are familiar. One important area is the reform of legislation affecting the position of women (rape, abortion, homosexuality, divorce, employment opportunities and equal pay). Women have become increasingly concerned about domestic violence, and are creating "refuges" for battered and deserted wives, as well as Women's Aid Centres and rape counselling services. Since the early days in 1970, consciousness raising has been an important part of the movement, as has the building of a strong feminist culture, and a vigorous lesbian contribution to that culture. The women's movement has supported women's struggles within trade unions and has had International Women's Day actions. There is a Status of Women Commission in the South; many groups belong to the Commission and make representation to the government through this organization.

However, the women's movements

in Ireland face a set of very specific obstacles which are not shared by any other country in Europe, including "Catholic" countries like Spain, Italy and Portugal. And it certainly is true that, in many respects, women in North America are more fortunate than women in either the North or the South.

There are no fulltime state daycare centres ("nurseries") in Ulster or in the Republic. Until 1974, a "marriage bar" was in effect in the civil service in the Republic: put very simply, a married woman could not work for the government or state-related bodies. The effect of this kind of legislation continues, for at present, women constitute only 27% of the workforce in the South, and 30% in the North. Married women make up only 4% of the working population in the South; these figures represent the lowest rate of female participation in the workforce in Europe. Equal pay legislation was a requisite for entry into the European Economic Community; years of stalling on that issue thus had to be brought to an end in 1976.

In the Republic, the Church and the state have interacted to keep women dependent; the Constitution of 1937 declares that "... by her life in the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." Divorce and abortion are illegal, not only in the South where the Catholic Church has been given a special status in the state, but also in the North. Normally, British legislative reforms extend to Northern

Ireland, but Members of Parliament have blocked attempts to apply recent British reforms (on homosexuality and married women's property rights as well as divorce and abortion) to Northern Ireland.

Although women in the North are no more fortunate than women in the South in the areas of divorce and abortion, they do have one advantage: contraception is legal and available. In the South, the situation is ludicrous. The pill is the only contraceptive available, and that only for reasons of "cycle regulation". It is not illegal to use birth control in Southern Ireland, but it is illegal to buy, sell, advertise or import contraceptives; education about birth control is also illegal — not only education of the public, but also the education of medical students. At present, doctors are prescribing the pill to 60,000 Irishwomen for the regulation of their periods — with no formal training about these hormones.

The women's movement in Ireland also has the responsibility of relating to the struggle in the North, and in some cases, taking an active part in it. Historically, there has been a subordination of feminist causes to the nationalist cause, beginning with the question of suffrage early in the century. The women's organizations have been adjuncts to the nationalist or republican organizations, providing safe houses, doing the fundraising and attending marches or funerals where the men couldn't be photographed. But in recent years, perhaps because of a general growth in consciousness, and perhaps because of the heightening of the struggle, women have been more integrated into the struggle (in defense of the neighbourhoods and in political decision-making), and issues concerning women have been incorporated into the programmes of these organizations.

The women I met in Dublin were discouraged as they compared the strides taken by Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and North American women in recent years to their accomplishments; yet they showed a grim determination in the face of their uphill battle.

Maureen Hynes

If you wish to contribute news from your area, please write to Printed Matter for guidelines. We request that clippings from other publications be sent on the entire page on which they appear. Include the name and date of the publication, and your name and address.



## Midsummer Evening

If you lean back into a midsummer evening,  
from a porch, you may see girls at the windows  
of their mothers' houses, dumb little wooden dolls  
with painted smiles. They cannot speak  
except through their mothers.

If you are a stranger and a man  
and you walk by such a house,  
the moment the girl turns from her mirror,  
look at the moon, see how pale it is,  
while the sun still shines, it is a white  
chip in a blue enamelled sky.

Do not look at her or this view will blazon  
you the brass serpent, in a golden age,  
supine in a bed of rose petals you will find  
thorns budding from her eyes.

If you recognize her,  
if you are a woman and were born on that street,  
who are you?  
the girl, mouth ajar,  
face drawn like a venetian blind,  
or the mother, waiting, folded arms propping  
an overabundant bosom, for the woman  
she has always been,  
while a lover cools his heels  
servicing another gal's apartment.

Who knows this girl?  
her lovely face, a rider in a tapestry,  
is eager for the hunt or afraid.  
Watch out for her  
eyes are dissolving  
in a mirror of brine.

by Mary di Michele

*Mary di Michele was born in Italy and grew up in Toronto attending the University of Toronto for a B.A. in English and the University of Windsor for an M.A. in English and creative writing. Her poetry has appeared in many periodicals in the past few years including Grain, The Canadian Forum, Fireweed, and CV II. Her first book, Tree of August will be published shortly by Three Trees Press.*

illustration by Barbara Hartmann



## Glamour

(for Kathy Leblanc)

I will bleach my hair to the hue  
of pale California sands,  
I will polish my legs and dress  
them in nude hose,  
I will pinch my toes into spiked  
patent whore shoes, if I have to cut  
off my heels, they'll fit.  
Under the flimsiest of silk gowns,  
I will reveal buttocks as an excuse  
for chantilly lace, a moon dressed in midnight,  
I will live on carrots until the bones  
look alive under my skin,  
and you will know that I am in  
mourning,  
because I dress in black,  
because I am so thin,  
because the one I love  
can't see me.



# Where There Is Oppression

by Dorothy E. Smith

The Canadian women's movement is only just becoming visible to us as Canadian. A little more than a year ago the media were announcing its death. The women's movement in the States seems more visible than the Canadian. We have no ERA to create a single organizational focus for many groups and interests. We haven't made stars here. In Canada, a star in the west is a mere glimmer in the east and vice versa. The great luminaries of the women's movement — media version — have been mostly American. They have risen over our horizon, strode majestically across the sky crying their battle cries and departed again over the 49th parallel, leaving us to wonder about our own women's movement.

What is the Canadian women's movement? Where is it? Who are the women involved? What are its strengths and its weaknesses? How should we work? How organize? What directions are being taken? Where should we move next?

We dreamed of a massive political organization of women and of a mass assault on the centres of power. The dream of monolithic organization has been translated into practices here and there as in the National Action Committee or the B.C. Federation of Women, or in more ephemeral forms of mass organization such as demonstrations on International Women's Day.

We tried to put such forms together. I can't say they haven't worked in a way or that they lack achievements. But none have brought into being a unitary organization of women. Every time we've tried to do that our differences have riven us. Painfully indeed. No matter how often we told ourselves and each other: 'trashing is out!' we could not prevent processes of division, of splitting, and of defining ourselves and our enterprise in opposition to others.

We've been much criticized for this — by men (for our disunity), by government (for redundant funding requests), by Marxists (who told us we were disorganized), and by ourselves (ad nauseam).

But look again. What has really been the outcome of the splits and conflicts? The result has been growth, movement, development. Who could have thought fifteen years ago that we would be so extensively and intimately grown and growing into every part of the society. It has been extraordinary. Our setbacks, our difficulties, lack of money, the problems of women and the economy — in spite of these the women's movement has grown, spread, and diversified.

Our divisions, fights, even trashing have been integral to this growth. We thought we were taking this direction and leaving that behind. We made choices. We argued. We fought for ours as the right way to go. We split. Some went one and some another way. In so doing we formed a different and larger movement in the society than the one we thought we were making — the enterprise of many working together and apart, divided, divisive, not disorganized but organizing.

Women are half or more than half the population. What society has ever seen a monolithic unitary organization among its male members, unless maintained by force? Then we call it fascism.

There are many bases of political divergence within a population. There are class divisions. There are differences in our experience as women, as young women, as mothers, as housewives, as employed women, as old women. We have interests in common too. Our work divides and unites us. We are assembly line workers, housewives, artists, cleaning women, bank tellers, bureaucrats, writers, teachers, telephone operators, nurses, clerical workers, waitresses, prostitutes, unemployed. Oppression has many forms for women. Some we all share. Others are specific to our location, interests, or work. We have struggled and continue to struggle as women on many fronts.

As we divided so also were different bases of struggle taken up. Different aspects of oppression were identified. Struggle developed around issues of abortion, matrimonial property law, childcare. It developed in private and personal battles fought by women as individuals against men as individuals, in universities and colleges against the totalitarianism of men, everywhere against violence against women, for equal pay, for union organization, to create a feminist art, film, literature.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY '78



# MARCH 11

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poster design by Barbara Klunder



# There is Resistance

We came to see that women must not be personally dependent on men. We came to see the nature and form of our inequality in how the professions dominated and demeaned us. We learned to understand our sexuality in relation to oppression. Whether we were lesbian or not, we learned the power implications of heterosexuality. We saw that generally we were held as less, that we did not count, that we were not heard. We saw that we lacked an art, a literature, a political voice, a theory, a history, even information. We saw that we did not know how to speak to one another or how to listen to one another.

The arguments and dialogues changed, shifted and broadened as different bases of women's oppression in the society entered into them. At the beginning the forefront of the movement was young. For young women their relation to children and marriage was key. Central issues of the movement at that stage were those concerned with control by the individual of her body. As others entered the movement, the debates and issues changed, broadened and new focuses emerged. The topics were enlarged. The originals didn't

disappear, but the arguments were over a greater range of experience of oppression.

It was a big moment for me when I realized that the women's movement was not "out there", an organization that you joined. There are no rules about who can be members, it doesn't have dues, standards you have to meet, or beliefs you must adhere to. The women's movement consists of any woman who takes up the struggle against women's oppression. In whatever form. That is the moment of membership. That is the point of entry which gives you right to speak in (though never for) the women's movement. At those times, you started by engaging in what is politely called dialogue, but it was generally furious, hurtful, angry, and mean conversation, rows, silences. And you started to work.

## The Society of Women

As we divided and moved into new areas of work and as more women came from different places in the world and as we made space for ourselves, we created something new — shall I call it a society of women? Something new has happened recently. Notice that we are no longer freaks — for there was a period in the '60's when reality kept slipping. We could hardly find our feet. What was obvious to us didn't match with what everyone (mostly male) around us saw as obvious, natural, real. We no longer define our positions relative to those held by men. This is one big shift. Lately, we have come to that slowly emerging and truly miraculous moment — we have begun to talk to one another, to create our own political culture, our art, our scholarship, our thought, our music, our poetry, our knowledge of each other, our organizational competencies, our analyses.

As we moved into new areas of work and quarreled and thought and quarrelled again, we developed also a vocabulary, now taken for granted. It's hard to remember how difficult it was at first to get a term such as 'sexism' accepted, to learn to apply the concept of oppression as an ordinary piece of the currency of our politics. We developed theoretical positions: marxist feminist, socialist feminist, radical feminist, women-identified-women. We worked politically and our experience became part of the theoretical debate.

What women had to say, thought of each other, what women were doing (in the movement, outside the movement, today, in the past) became central to us. Men's positions moved to the margin. They were there like natural hazards, but they didn't really count for us any more. Sure you have to take them into account, but for thought, direction, reflection on our work in relation to women, political advice, analysis, formulation of issues, critiques, we have learned to look to each other.

The society of women as a dialogue links the work and practice of women in many places. In rape crisis centres, transition houses for women beaten by their husbands, childcare centres, health collectives, the organization of demonstrations, union organizational work, arranging lobbying, establishing women's studies programmes in universities, schools and



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community colleges, in running bookstores, publishing, newspaper work, in our work places and in our homes.

As we worked we learned almost first of all that the established channels of communication and action in every institutionalized structure of power were not and are not available for communication and action from women to women on behalf of women. The media, government, political parties, universities, schools, business, the professions are carefully sealed off from incursions from below, from outside, from those who have something very new to say and very new to do.

So we had to build our own connections. They were connections of communication and mutual help. They mobilized people, put things in place, got things going, redefined goals and above all built the general exchange of practical understanding and knowledge of how to go about it which is integral to the women's movement.

### Networks

About three or four years ago I think feminists started talking about networks and networking. I think each of us thought we'd invented the term. But in fact we pulled a term out of a currently fashionable social science inventory, to talk about doing consciously a kind of political work we were already doing. Networking is the making of linkages between individuals which connect up sources of information, support, competencies and other resources. It includes the networks which can mobilize numbers of people around an issue. Networking means hours on the phone and the telephone ringing constantly when you're not on it. It means finding someone who can do this or who knows how to find someone who can. It means putting someone in touch with someone else in a particular place who can give support or who knows how to find those who can. Networking means having a fat, fat address book held together with a fat rubber band. It means having contacts with people who have contacts. And making networks means setting those up in areas where they don't yet exist.

It can be said that the women's movement consists of just such networks.

There are networks forming structures cantilevered out from what is already in place into spaces not yet built. Along with these come the women's movement media. We can begin to name them but new media emerge all the time. There are magazines such as *Branching Out* (Alberta), *Priorities* (an N.D.P. women's caucus publication in B.C.), *Atlantis* (the Maritimes), *Fireweed* (A new Toronto magazine for poetry and stories), *Room of One's Own* (B.C.), *Makara* (B.C.), *The Witch and the Chameleon* (a women's science fiction magazine published single-handedly by Amanda Bankier in Hamilton, Ontario), *Tightwire* (from Kingston Women's Prison). There are newspapers, bookstores and women's presses.

Feminist publications do something different from commercial newspapers and magazines. They organize a system of political communication, where political means — as it does in the women's movement — taking up the struggle against oppression in some way. Different newspapers do it in different ways. The *Yukon Optimist* for example creates a relation in the paper among the six main women's groups in the Yukon so that each has space for political comment, news, notices and the like. It's like a travelling wall poster, notice board and big character poster combined. The *Saskatchewan Status of Women Newsletter* organizes and coordinates relations among the representatives in the ten regions into which the Status of Women Council in Saskatchewan has been organized. *Les Tetes de Pioches* (Montreal) and *Kinesis* (Vancouver), in addition to providing local information and news, also tie readers into the women's movement elsewhere and both also are distinctly political, with articles raising and exploring political and philosophical issues (the latter more characteristic of *Les Tetes*

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, MARCH 8

國際婦女節 三月八日

ΔΙΕΘΝΗΣ ΗΜΕΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΑΣ, 8 ΜΑΡΤΗ

ਦੁਨਿਆ ਭਰ ਦੀ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦਾ ਦਿਨ 8 ਮਾਰਚ

Internazionale Giornata della donna 8 marzo

## JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME, 8 MARS



poster by Wendy L. Davis and N. Dvorsky

Information Day on Women and Work at Britannia School Cafeteria Sunday, March 5 from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Benefit Dance at Britannia Community Centre March 8 with live music and refreshments 8 p.m. until 1 a.m. Admission \$2.50

Parade March 8 1983 at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. (Parade 10:00 a.m.)

*de Pioches*). *Upstream* (Ottawa) is more like a regular newspaper drawing, among other sources, on a U.S. women's news agency and including valuable and well informed discussions of current government policies. Each has invented its style and relations and each is specifically political in its motive.

Networks, media, meetings, conferences, demonstrations — these are the arenas of our meeting as a movement — flexible, innovative, open. Here our varying practical experiences, our anger, laughter and sorrow, and our thinking become part of the movement. In this way they become part of the lateral lines and linkages of talk extending indefinitely and in all directions. These communication networks and arenas mean that our practical experience gets fed very rapidly into the movement. Problems and issues arising out of it are almost immediately entered into the thinking, experience, concern and argument of the movement. So as we moved from whatever form our consciousness-raising took, to practical work of whatever kind, that work created the practical basis for the theoretical, political, and artistic communication.

Our practical work took up specific problems such as rape, health, violence against women, or local organizational work in women's centres. Or we worked in relation to political parties, government and the like. Or we developed educational possibilities and materials. These were the practical forms of struggle. What we learned from these was fed back into the networks and arenas. This was how we got our understanding of the shape of oppression in the society. This is how we began to form a place from which the society came into view in a different way. Very different from the view organized by the male occupied apparatus of ruling, governing, administering, and instructing. Very different also, though extending out from, the restricted perspective of the domestic and personal which had been our sphere.



This continual interplay through the communications networks and arenas of our developing thinking and the actual work of struggle in specific local and sometimes personal setting, was integral to the movement and its growth. No single political frame could contain this process. This is what is meant by a mass movement — a movement simultaneously developing on many fronts.

This is how we have advanced. At each point in the development of the movement a new basis for further action and for different forms of action has been laid down. One woman in a company town in northern B.C. could do little, two or three in three or four company towns could do more, four or five in several towns and a women's studies course here, an organizer there and something different is happening and can happen. That's how we've built up. What we do now is possible because of what has been done, the bases that have already been laid. What we will be able to do next, will depend on what we do now.

### Some Weaknesses

A great deal is in place. There are capacities to work and mobilize and possible new forms of action because what was unthinkable before is possible now. In B.C. the networks set up by the N.D.P. women's caucus and the funding of women's centres throughout the interior of B.C. by the B.C. Coordinator for the Status of Women, Gene Errington, made possible in 1976 the organization of the Women-Rally-for-Action bringing women from all over B.C. to demonstrate and lobby the legislature in Victoria. We've seen the possibility of mobilizing rather large numbers very rapidly such as in the demonstrations organized by Women against Rape and Women Against Violence Against Women, or in support of the women striking the Fleck plant in Ontario. Our lateral networks mean that actions drawing on more than one institutional sector can be thought of — there is organization in the churches, there are connections in the established media, the educational system, in the unions, law, health care and wherever women work (including the home). We don't have to be confined by the institutional lines and jurisdiction — we now have networks and channels of action of our own. And we could do more thinking about how to draw on our potential organizational resources.

At the same time there are weaknesses. A major danger is a process of institutional absorption. I imagine it to be like a starfish eating a clam, sucking the living tissues from the shell. Institutional structures are set up to organize and control and they do it well. When critical positions and action emerge

poster courtesy of Women's Kit (OISE)



## DECADE OF THE WOMAN

1975 - 1985

United Nations Resolution passed December 18, 1975

related to an institutional focus, processes are set in motion which bring things back into line, which absorb the anomaly, and keep things stabilized. For example the Canadian Labour Congress did less than nothing to support SORWUC's organization of the bank tellers even though SORWUC made the breakthrough making that organization possible. The outcome has been that SORWUC couldn't sustain their organization and the bank workers' locals set up were largely absorbed by the established union structure. Provincial government funding strategies in relation to rape crisis centres have sought to integrate them with established professional agencies, in social work or health care. The issue of men's violence against women in the family setting is being transformed into a professional psychiatric or counselling problem. The 'battered wife' concept is substituted for the political analysis of violence by men against women. There are conferences, a literature, the elaboration, of a professional practice (often focussing more on men than on women). The issue of women's passivity and silence, our socially enforced inability to speak out and to express our anger, these become transposed from a political issue into a technique. We can take courses in assertiveness. We can practice screaming.

Each new way of absorbing women's movement initiatives into the institutional structure isolates them from the movement and depoliticizes them. Each is reassembled as a technical or otherwise limited problem. It is relocated in its professional or other institutional setting. It is given a new terminology tying it into the controlled institutional communication and action system. How it becomes visible, can be thought and acted upon, gets restricted to that frame. The problem becomes specific, contained, cut off from its general relation to the whole question of women's oppression in contemporary capitalist

\*SORWUC, the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada, was founded in Vancouver in 1972 to organize female workers and bargain for contracts tailored to the needs of women.



women and film international festival 1973

la femme et le film

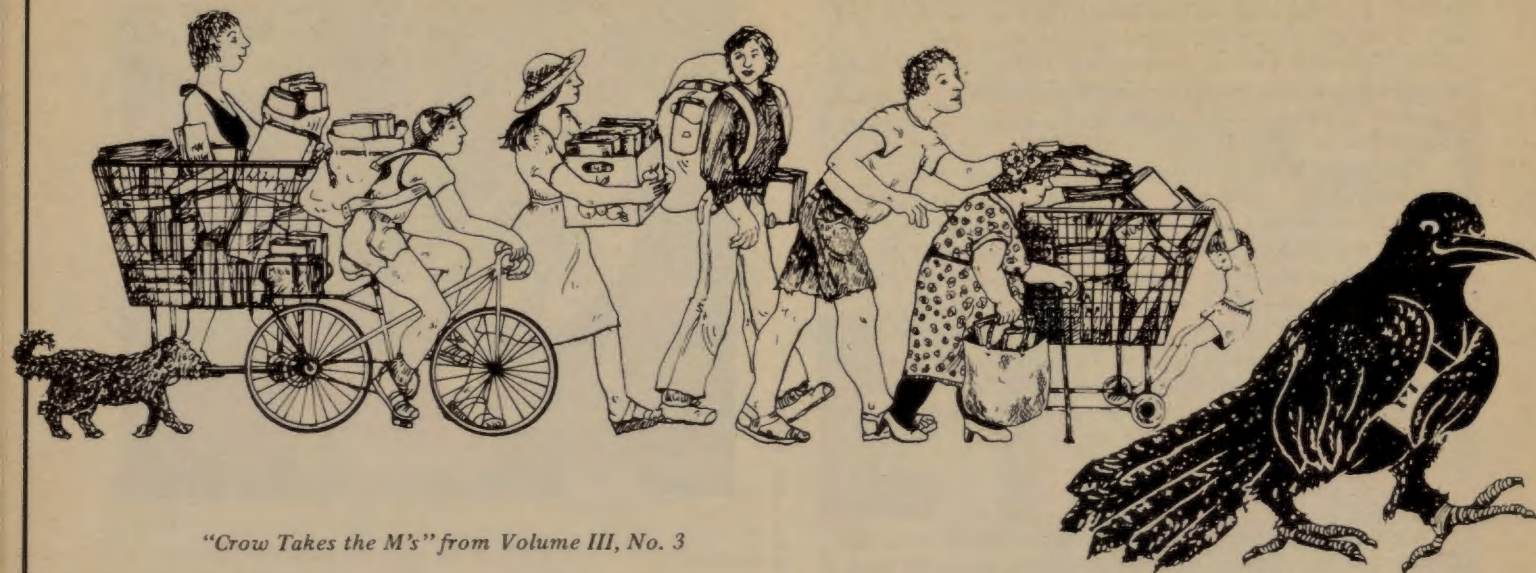
film · videotape · photography by women

speakers · seminars · workshops · videotape production · day care

june 8 to june 17 · ten day festival · st. lawrence centre

poster design by Pat Bourque





"Crow Takes the M's" from Volume III, No. 3

graphic by Makara publishing and Design

Graphic, above, from a Makara funding appeal and pledge card. Recently this Vancouver women's group was forced by financial difficulties to suspend publication of the 3-year-old magazine Makara. The group will continue to do design work to clear its debts and plans to resume publishing when finances permit.

## **"As our work is absorbed by the ruling apparatus it is withdrawn from the general struggle of women."**

society. In isolation from the women's movement the relation can't easily be rediscovered. It is not reasserted continually in the debates, arguments and other movement activities. It is through these that it is seen in relation to other issues and to the general issue.

As the process of absorption goes on, its effects are a progressive weakening of the active dialogue, the active political talk; the continual challenge and advances. The problem is not that we don't continue to talk. Rather our talk isn't fed and vitalized by an intimate practical relation. Now when the women's movement comes together, the call for a new theoretical base is made in a practical vacuum. Too often then the dialogues follow the old tired tracks, repeating the familiar sectarian routines. The practical basis of the political process is being leached away. The active workers in the different practical sectors of our struggle and work no longer participate. The search for new impetus retreats into abstractions.

The work goes on of course. It goes on in specific and separated places, often located within or in relation to the ruling apparatus formed by the institutions of state and professions. We work as hard and struggle as determinedly as ever. Our experience and capacities are immeasurably greater. The possibilities of mobilizing and the range of action now available to us are greatly increased. Women organize and support women's actions in relation to the workplace. Women are beginning to seek ways of organizing and supporting women's actions in relation to unemployment. Women support women against violence against women. We mobilize for demonstrations. We meet at public meetings. In our homes. At our work places outside the home. But as the work is absorbed by the ruling apparatus it is withdrawn from the general struggle.

The conception of women's oppression has been central to the women's movement. It is this that has made it a movement

of women rather than a bundle of separate problems taken up as such. The women's movement has grown and spread and with it our grasp of women's oppression has broadened and deepened. The women's movement has always been as much a practice as ideologies. It has always existed in a tension between the two. And now at its height a weakness shows. It comes from the way we have located the practical bases of our work. Much of it has been organized in relation to the institutional structure of the ruling apparatus. To do something about rape it seems that we should work in relation to the police, the courts and the law. To change the ways in which women are treated in medical contexts, health education and health clinics and collectives sought to revise and offer alternatives to the medical establishment. But these came to work in relation to the established structures, organized and funded by federal or provincial governments and subject to professional and bureaucratic supervision. Though government funding has been often given for enterprises and on terms which have been concerned with feminist objectives, it always is subject to controls which organize the work in relation to the objectives of the state. In developing political impetus, we have worked generally in relation to the major political parties, in lobbying legislatures and making use of all and any of the practical political means available to us to exert pressure. In the field of education we've worked within the institutional structures that provide the facilities, the connections with those who would learn, the organization and controls of the educational apparatus. And so on. In most every field.

I'm not criticizing this. I don't know how else we could have gone forward. It has been essential and enormously influential. But its location in relation to the institutional structures also means that it is most at risk. The very importance of the work increases the consequences for the women's movement of the process of absorption.



### Another view of class

I want to take up this process of absorption as an issue of class. When we see how this process goes forward, aspects of class, class relations and class organization, come into view which have not been properly visible to us before. We have learned to use class to think in terms of individuals whose interests, motives and consciousness are determined by their class situation and can be called into question on that ground. So issues of class became a means of discrediting the work, opinions, and claims of individuals in terms of their backgrounds or the present location of their activities. But there is another view.

Issues of class and class struggle must be seen in some other frame than that of individuals. The institutions of the ruling apparatus are in many ways working against the liberation of women. In relation to our struggle, *they are on the other side.*

The institutional structures form an apparatus providing for the functions of government, of education, health, and other functions of the state in such a way that they are controlled by and serve the interests of a ruling class. A ruling class is not just a relatively small elite working behind the scenes. It is that class which in general in the society dominates and controls the means by which people's existence is produced. It exists in all regions of our society. It isn't just located somewhere at the top or centre. The apparatus of the state and the professions is integral to the organization of its rule.

In times of economic crisis the class character of the ruling apparatus becomes clearer. The process of absorption is a characteristic mode of response to the social problems which arise and to a movement which takes them up as part of a general struggle. We see that too in relation to our setbacks and to intensified repression. Many of the gains we had made have been withdrawn — notably in the area of

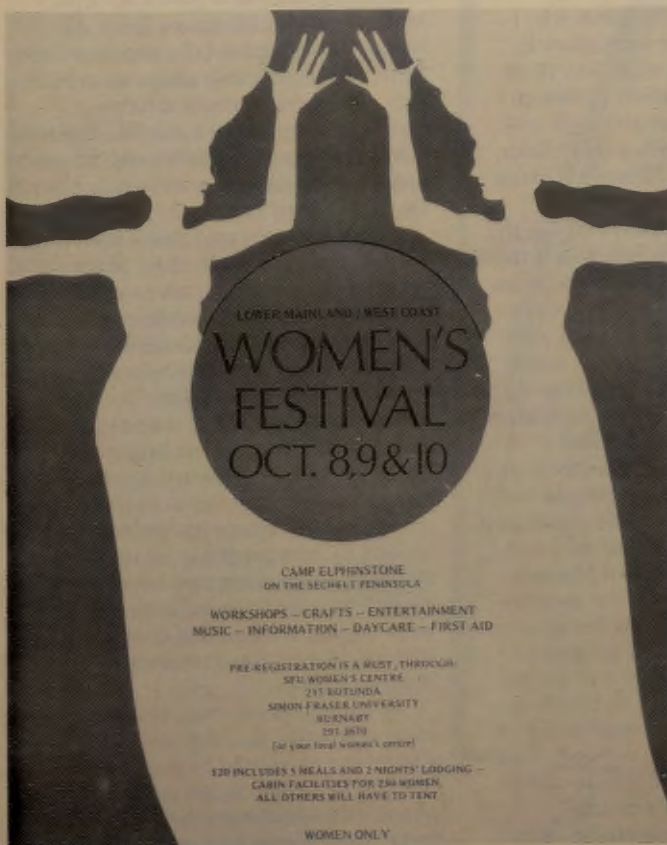
childcare. We have seen little attempt to make the fundamental changes that have been called for, in matrimonial property laws, in equalization of wages, in improving the pay and working conditions of women in segregated jobs. Economic crisis falls particularly heavily on women. We know something about the numbers who are single parents. We know that women are discriminated against when they seek UIC. We know that women immigrants are intensely exploited and are exposed constantly to the threat of arbitrary deportation because of their enforced dependence upon men. Cutbacks in welfare and social services directly increase the weight of domestic labour. Unemployment rates among women are higher than the rates among men. We see that the media reinforces the image of women as dependent and subservient and that in general women's dependence on men is more crudely and rigidly enforced — as in the practices of welfare agencies — just at a time when men also experience the effects of economic crisis.

So the problem of absorption is an issue of how our struggle becomes controlled and organized by the other side. It is a problem which can't be solved by thought and discussion alone, though they are also essential to its solution. More central generally is how that thinking and talk link us back to the women's movement. The two aspects of the women's movement are necessary to one another — the practical limited specific work and struggle, and the networks and arenas of our meeting and our talk. The women's movement is an active linking of multiple bases of resistance against oppression. This forms the social and political relations of our consciousness as women of women's oppression. The class location of our practice sets it at risk. Class limitations on our practice limit that consciousness in concrete ways. Feminists in Canada have not yet developed organization reaching actively into the working class. In France socialist feminists have developed neighbourhood based groups of women concerned to struggle for women's issues and to confront sexism in political organization. In England there is extensive development in relation to women's struggles in the workplace. There is, for example, *Women's Voice*, a magazine which creates a network among working class women by interviewing and encouraging them to write, by reporting women's actions and organization, as well as serving an informational and political function. The process is in place here in Canada but the development of bases beyond the institutional structures is only in embryo.

But the process *is* in place. The women's movement actualizes in practical form our consciousness as women of women's oppression. We have come here together not in a unitary organization, but in forming a society among women of conflict, challenge, criticism, anger and action. It is here that our special experience, particular consciousness, and separate work is raised to the level of a general struggle against women's oppression.

If we work as socialists and as Marxist feminists, our political work links us to the general struggle against oppression, and our relation to the women's movement stretches our grasp of women's concerns. Through the women's movement our diverging and separate work is knotted back into the single fabric. As our struggle develops so that the mass of women in Canadian society take it up as theirs, the real possibilities of women's liberation will come into view here.

*Dorothy Smith is the author of the books, Women Look at Psychiatry and Feminism and Marxism. She worked in Vancouver until a year ago and now teaches at Ontario Institute of Studies in Education in Toronto. Another book, Women and Class is in progress.*





# Seventh

by Jane Rule

Literature and politics have never been easy bedfellows. The one great political work we have, *The Divine Comedy*, was written by Dante in exile against nearly everyone. Though many good and even great writers have revealed strong political biases in their work, they are not remembered long for the way they voted or revolted. Literature is the citadel of the individual spirit which inspires rather than serves the body politic. Those movements which have shunned their writers or required them to follow the party line have got the literature they deserve.

The women's movement in Canada, if it were able to dictate to writers, might have made that mistake, but, except for the gallant small publishers like Daughters, Inc., Moon Books, Naiad Press, Dianna Press, Women's Press, all but one in the States, the literature of the movement is published by a press women don't control. If writers are dictated to, it is by male publishers in New York who decide what they think women will buy. In nonfiction women have been served remarkably well with such excellent books as *Sexual Politics*, *Women and Madness*, *Literary Women*, *Beyond God the Father*, *Of Woman Born*, but in what is called literature, the audience has done much less well. I think there is an unhappy conspiracy between women and the establishment press in the States, which has encouraged writers to concentrate on a confessional literature of masochistic defeat. Publishers are convinced that the mass of female readers can and will identify. Writers feel absolved of the accusation that they are leaders, elitists. Writers who began with intellectually adventurous and disciplined works are now anecdotal and personal. Kate Millett who could beard Norman Mailer must redeem herself by showing us that, in real life, she loses her lover to a man. Phyllis Chesler who taught thousands and thousands of women to turn away from psychiatry to health is now selling profiles of the men in her life. Those writers who have been fostered by women's presses are suffering a different but equally deadly limitation of political correctness. Rita

Mae Brown, whose *Rubyfruit Jungle* was too didactic but marvelously alive, gives way to a wooden second novel where characters are nothing but political stereotypes: the young radical and the middle-aged career woman. Only in poetry are there women associated with the movement who haven't been reduced by it. Adrienne Rich, who was well established before there was a movement, speaks with a voice which will never neglect intelligence or passion for party line. Her newest book, *The Dream of a Common Language*, does inspire rather than serve the cause.

The literary circumstance in Canada is different. Aside from periodical publications like *Branching Out*, *Emergency Librarian*, *A Room of One's Own*, and the one publisher, *Women's Press*, the women's movement has no press of its own to encourage or require conformity to certain political views. Most of our establishment press are branch plants which take direction from New York or London and tend to be very conservative about anything homemade, and even bona fide Canadian publishers like McClelland and Stewart know how to exploit writers only after the fact of their books.

The women's movement arrived in Canada at a time when most of the country's respected writers were women, on whom the movement belatedly tried to put its stamp. Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro bridled; Margaret Laurence tried to be polite; Dorothy Livesay, an old hand at politics, took it as one more arrow in her quiver. Gradually nearly everyone agreed that in one way or another the women's movement in Canada had helped women writers by being a newly honouring audience, by making men nervous enough to want to know what women were saying. Canada still does not have writers either created or controlled by the movement.

I want to argue that, no matter how inadvertent this development, it is something we should be profoundly grateful for, much as we are for our abundance of natural resources and small population. For our women writers, not

**Our literary writers are our tall waves, more able than others to 'shape the dreaming shore' but speaking the same messages.**



# Waves

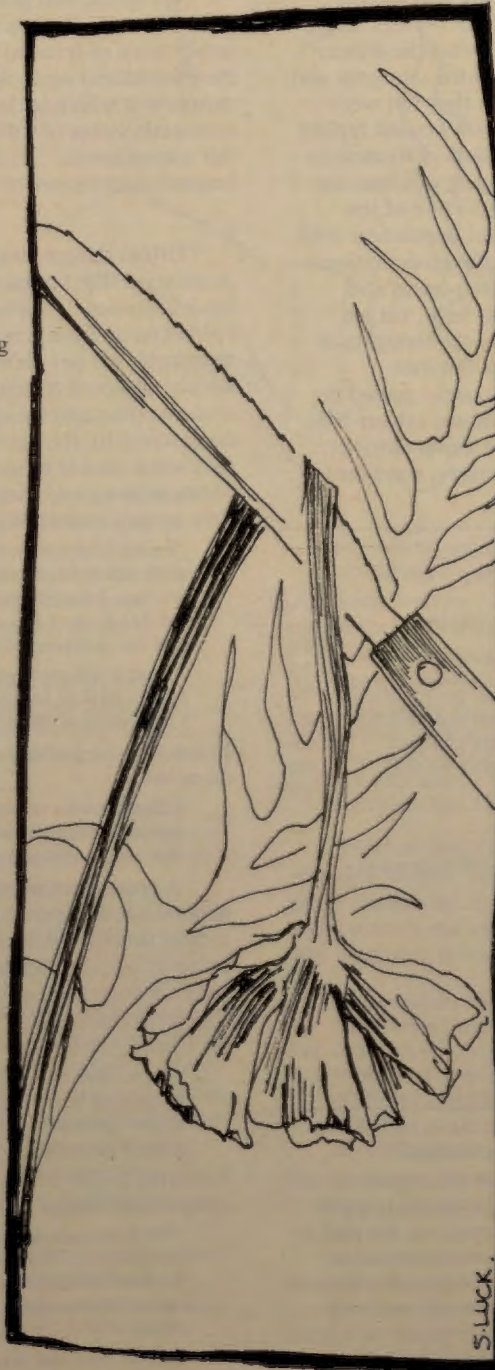
early curbed into narrow didacticism or personal confession, have developed voices which do accurately describe for us the climate in which we live. They are our historians, sociologists, psychologists. With their testimony we have an opportunity to make more informed political judgements because we have an understanding of our complex and particular culture only a real literature can give.

In a report on her trip to Australia, Margaret Atwood mused on Australia's lack of honour for its Nobel Prize winning writer, Patrick White. When she commented on it to an Australian, he explained. "We cut tall poppies down." It is a mark of colonial mentality to be envious and mistrustful of excellence, to feel exploited and betrayed rather than enlightened by the articulate and intelligent. Canadians less brashly and more sullenly hack away at what is growing tallest in their own landscape, and women, a colonized group within the colony, can be the most frightened and hostile of all, having borne the exploitation of the exploited. That mistrust is an inevitable part of the experience, but it is too often labelled a strength rather than a weakness and allowed to minimize if not destroy the finest specimens blooming in its own soil.

Margaret Atwood is one of our tall poppies. Too many women complain of her success, the number of times she appears on television and radio and on the covers of magazines. Too few take time instead to read *Lady Oracle* as a survival handbook for that wily underdog, woman, who among the pretensions and pressures of the male world secretly leads her own dubious life. Margaret Atwood is not too good for us. She is, like half a hundred others, good enough.

Elizabeth Brewster — who is never, to my knowledge, on television or magazine covers — says of herself and other poets, "I think we are being given the same messages." It doesn't matter if the words repeat themselves from poet to poet,

as long as what is said  
rises like the tide in all our separate waves  
and beats upon and shapes the dreaming shore.



She is our seventh wave, taller and therefore more able to shape that shore but speaking the same messages.

A political movement which defines equality by its lowest common denominator will reject the very power it needs to shape tomorrow. In Canada we have a remarkable number of gifted and articulate women who will not be reduced to what New York or feminist presses think women want to read. They will not be made into political leaders or scapegoats either. They will be our voices if we live up to their intent, severe, humane visions, if we learn to grow with rather than cut down those who have so much to offer us and in our name. It is not a question of whether Margaret Atwood or Elizabeth Brewster are feminists but whether the women's movement is confident enough to claim their power without reducing it to any sort of narrow political correctness. That confidence is found in much of what is being written by women in Canada, even for instance in the small parenthetical statements of Atwood's *Susanna Moodie* poems:

(each refuge fails  
us; each danger  
becomes a haven)

or in Brewster's quiet talking to herself about her failure twenty-four years ago to kill herself:

... you're still here  
And Sylvia Plath isn't.

The poet we have lost, Pat Lowther, didn't kill herself, she was murdered. Our politics must have as one goal an end to that kind of killing. Our collective voice must grow stronger for the singers in our midst, learning both to deserve and to defend our gifts, our gifted.

Author Jane Rule recently completed a new novel, "Contract with the World." Other novels include "The Young in One Another's Arms", and "Desert of the Heart". She has also written a book of short stories, "Theme for Diverse Instruments" and the nonfiction book, "Lesbian Images". She lives on Galiano Island, B.C.

illustration by Sheila Luck



# Our Readers on the Women's Movement

by Thora Cartlidge and Sharon Batt

Illustrations by Sheila Luck

As part of our fifth anniversary issue on the women's movement, we sent a questionnaire to 650 of our readers across Canada asking them their views on feminism: what the women's movement meant to them, how they perceived the strengths and weaknesses of the movement, particular issues they felt were important, their own involvement. Just over 300 women replied — a remarkably high rate of response. As readers of *Branching Out* they are, as several of them pointed out, part of a specific group — certainly more familiar with and supportive of the women's movement than women in the general population (84% said they considered themselves feminists, although definitions of feminism varied widely). We do not claim to portray the views of all Canadian women in the comments here, yet we consider the comments a fair representation of the thoughts of women living in Canada who identify with the feminist movement. In selecting our sample, we deliberately mailed the questionnaire to all subscribers with a rural address (about 300) because we wanted the perspective of women living outside urban centres. One in four of our urban subscribers were sent the questionnaire.

## Profile of Respondents to Survey

Age		Living situation	
under 21	4%	live alone	19%
21-30	38%	live with parents	2%
31-40	33%	live with spouse/partner (no children)	33%
41-50	14%	live with spouse/partner and children	32%
51-60	8%	single parent living with children	6%
61+	3%	live with other women or woman	6%
		other	2%

Region of Residence		Population of home community	
B.C.	14%	rural	14%
Alberta	24%	less than 10,000	18%
Sask/Man.	10%	less than 50,000	12%
Ontario	30%	less than 100,000	8%
Quebec	12%	less than 200,000	7%
Maritimes	8%	less than 500,000	6%
NWT/Yukon	1%	less than 1 million	14%
		1 million or over	21%

Reading through the replies, we were sometimes overwhelmed by the volume of information: most women accepted our invitation to elaborate on their replies in margins or on the back of the questionnaire. For this issue we decided to concentrate on those parts of the questionnaire related to the impact of the various geographical locations and social milieus of women in Canada on their level of involvement and personal association with the feminist movement. In later issues we intend to follow up on other ideas, such as the differences in attitudes as reflected by different age groups, and to look in more detail at the way particular questions were answered.

We found that geography doesn't have much effect on the faith or strong feelings expressed by women about the importance of feminist thought. Women from the Territories to Newfoundland agree it's in their best interest to support a movement which seeks to improve the social, political and economic status of Canadian women. As one woman explained her commitment, "... as long as one part of humanity is given second class treatment, all of society suffers."

## ISOLATION

Often, though, it's an ongoing battle to convince the general population that feminists are anything other than "a group of braless hussies . . . who have no dignity as women." (This epithet came from a reader whose perception of feminists is less than kind, yet her view is all too familiar as a negative and widely accepted stereotype of a feminist.) Not surprisingly, some women commented that they felt isolated in their community by the prevalence of such attitudes, particularly if they were unable to meet others who had the same concerns. Many women said they had not found other women with whom they could comfortably share their commitment:

"I wish there were some way of making it easier to get together with others of common interest for improving the status of women. I feel intimidated joining in discussion groups. Those who are much more knowledgeable resent being bogged down by trivia and the unbusinesslike approach of others."

"People tell me there are women's groups in my town. I have been a radical feminist for five years — if they are there why have I not heard of them?"

Some women pointed out the need to compromise, rather than do nothing:

"The feminist movement here is too narrow and conservative for my inclination, however, you work with what you have. Perhaps this area could not cope with radical activity at this time."

A special environment in which women feel particularly dependent, and particularly constrained in taking action to reduce their dependency, is the armed forces base. A woman living on a Canadian base abroad returned her questionnaire with a 9-page brief outlining specific problems of those women classed as "dependent wives" of servicemen. An example, from the brief:

"I am often asked my husband's rank and unit. I am told that this is because he is responsible for my behavior and actions. I would prefer to be held responsible for myself. I also feel it unfair to be ranked according to his rank."

Referring to the difficulties she had encountered in trying to bring about change, she said:

"Most women are concerned but will not admit to being so publicly . . . Women do not speak up for fear of harming their husband's careers or being sent home. Since we are all dependent on our husbands for status, we must be careful not to offend them either."

About half the women who replied said they had never been a member of a feminist group, the most frequent reason given for this being, "I'm not a joiner" (52%). Twenty-two





percent, however, said there were no feminist groups in their area, and all but two of these women were in rural areas, or towns of 80,000 population or less. It is the feminist living in rural and small town Canada who may, literally, be the only person for miles who holds feminist views. Such women sometimes even hesitate to voice their concerns in the community:

"I consider myself a fairly 'militant' feminist and try to live within that context. As a teacher I attempt to put forth the ideals I hold with subtlety and sensitivity since in a farming community one does not wish to come across as a raving feminist and alienate people."

"Rural women are discriminated against, as are those in small communities. One administrator (male) said R--- was so small a community to provide a birth control information centre for the people." (This in a town of 32,000.)

"Company towns" like mine reflect all the 'men's world' features more sharply — grotesquely sometimes. Establishing a co-op daycare centre proved unbelievably difficult and is the extreme of possibilities for local action at the moment."

We read dozens of unhappy comments from those women who deplore the real isolation they experience living away from contact with other feminists and, even more frustrating to them, the apparent lack of interest women in their communities had in feminist concerns. Feminists in small towns are disturbed by the reluctance of other women to accept the positive challenge intended by the movement to rethink their self-image and attitudes. The movement implies change and so carries the threat of confrontation:

"But for a few exceptions, women in the country are back where our mothers used to be: under the thumb of their husband."

"There are no feminist groups in my area. The rest of the women that I've met are either drunk and unhappy, or barefoot and pregnant."

"How do you reach the unconverted? Especially women who accept their demeaning status and pass on their limited outlook to their children? . . . Where do you break the cycle of teenage

pregnancy, abortion, welfare, single parents without skills or education?

Some women have taken very definite steps, either to escape their isolation or work within it.

"I will move to another community where there is a strong women's movement. This is a priority for me."

"I would be making more use of present facilities and my own abilities were we not on a farm in a community that supports the status quo and labels me a disturber. My own personal victory this year was the land being put in joint names after 29 years of marriage. And I have a good and generous husband."

Discouraging though it is to read these testimonies of the minimal support for the women's movement in rural Canada, some readers felt even the 'unconverted' had been affected by the women's movement. They are the 'silent feminists' to whom one woman referred:

"I can hardly see the woman's movement do anything but gain momentum. What was once not understood by women as oppression is now being recognized by a broader segment of women. Women are becoming more knowledgeable, more articulate and thus more powerful."

"Women avoid any involvement in what they scathingly refer to as 'women's lib', but they are changing in spite of themselves."

From a woman in the Territories:

"Some women, although not involved in women's group's *per se*, are living examples of what these groups preach. They refuse to accept the traditional, passive role that society has been forcing on women for centuries . . . They choose their work accordingly despite daily confrontations with traditional values. I have met many such independent women, from carpenters, self-reliant Arctic nurses, even a woman bush pilot. These women don't say much but they are pioneers, fighting for women's place in the world. Their numbers will keep on increasing until women achieve their rightful place in society."



## FACTIONS

In larger centres where some form of organized women's movement does exist, factions may disrupt the functioning of these groups or make interested women reluctant to participate in them. Slightly over one-third of all the respondents (37%) said they were aware of factions within feminist groups in their community. Some women listed as many as six dimensions on which divisions had occurred or, as one said, "almost anything you could name!"

The reasons most frequently given for the divisions were political in nature, although a "lesbian-straight" tension was noted in many communities as well. Politically based divisions covered a wide range, from "allegiance to a political party" to such distinctions as "Marxist vs cultural", "conservative vs radical", militant vs non-militant" and "socialist vs fitting into an existing man's world." One woman, who gave her age as 39, stated "the far left radicals are too fast for many women, especially those over forty."

Half the women from Quebec who commented on local factions cited a division between Anglophone and Francophone women in the province. This was the only frequently-mentioned basis for divisions which was confined to a single geographical region. One Quebec woman interpreted the division as "attributable more to different stages of development and attitudes than language", while another underscored the importance of language *per se* with her comment that she didn't know if there were factions within the feminist community where she lived because "the groups were Francophone and I'm not in contact with them." Some Quebec women mentioned the Quebec independence issue as a source of division between women, though this was not listed as often as the question of language/culture.

Personality conflicts, disagreement on strategies and social class distinctions were other obstacles to unity that were mentioned by more than a few women. Other comments, not necessarily typical, seemed to reveal the dynamics of a local group:

"a core group evolved which built up expertise and skills and this alienated many other women."

"There is a division between those who have immediate practical/economic needs and those who are concerned with the long run in art, entertainment, research, legislation, creative work."

"Often those who are not employed are resentful of those who are and seem to feel we are cop-outs because we are not 'radical enough.'"

These points of conflict are not necessarily destructive and, in many instances clearly reflect the diversity and vitality of the feminist community. One respondent commented, "I don't believe all women should be expected to be together all the time." Only a few women showed bitterness in the way they commented on the factions, for example, characterizing other women as "dogmatic" or "petty," and only a small proportion said they had themselves left a group because they disagreed with its goals (4% of the total) or because of disagreements with other members (1% of the total).

## THE ISSUES

Two thirds of all respondents said they were aware of issues that had sparked the concern of women in their community in the past few years. Examples given reflected both specific, local incidents and issues ("the attempted suicide of one young mother," "drownings," "waterfront development") and such ubiquitous problems as day care and the lack of equal pay at work. A number of women lamented the absence of organized efforts by local women to bring about change: "It seems we have all gone back to sleep"; "Awareness of nontraditional women's concerns is minimal here."



As a gauge of regional variations in the way women's efforts were directed, we counted the number of times different issues were mentioned in various provinces. These observations were most revealing in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, the provinces from which we had enough questionnaires to discern trends.

The two issues most frequently cited as having mobilized women in British Columbia were abortion and rape, with job discrimination and wife-battering also receiving high priority. Many readers cited specific advertising campaigns and lobbying efforts by pro-life groups which "brought out the pro-choice women." Although abortion was mentioned as an important local issue by readers in all provinces, only B.C. women emphasized the pro-life movement as an organized political force which had prompted an active counter-movement. The highly publicized Pappajohn rape trial in Vancouver and the denial of funds to the Victoria Rape Relief Centre (see *Branching Out*, Vol. V, No. 3) were two incidents that turned the attention of B.C. women to rape. Employment problems often reflected the work climate in the interior of B.C.:

"girls were not hired for summer jobs which involved field work, including camping out."

"women often find it difficult to obtain work in the orchards."

"equal work opportunities are of concern, especially in the forest industry."

In Alberta, the matrimonial property issue was the one cited by most readers as having generated local concern. Interest in this issue stems from the Murdoch case in 1974. In 1977-78 the issue was the focus of an intensive campaign by the provincial status of women action committee (ASWAC). Information on matrimonial property law was widely distributed by ASWAC prior to the introduction of legislation by the provincial government in the



spring of 1978. Two other matters of high priority to Alberta readers were the shortage of daycare facilities in the province and the high incidence of rape. Statistics on rape showing Edmonton to have the highest number of rapes per capita of any city in Canada contributed to local concern and the coining of the label "rape city."

Almost every woman in Manitoba who replied to the questionnaire mentioned family property rights. The change of government in 1977 and the subsequent repeal of new and fairly progressive legislation on matrimonial property obviously was the background for the concern. This extraordinary case of 'now you have it now you don't' seems to have left Manitoba women more dissatisfied than women in provinces where matrimonial property laws have always been wanting.

Concerns of Ontario women covered an especially wide range, but the issues of rape, assault against women, and violence in the media were noted most consistently. "Snuff" and other violent pornographic films have prompted Ontario women to organize on the broad issue of violence against women. Replies from women elsewhere in the country often mentioned rape and wife-battering as serious community concerns, but in no other province have women formed an organized lobby integrating these violence-related issues.

In Quebec, replies to the question on local issues showed no specific focus. Of equal concern were rape, abortion (including the reluctance of the Parti Quebecois to adopt a pro-choice position), day care, and the "kidnapping" of Dalila Maschino.

Throughout the country women were concerned about funding cutbacks for women's centres and projects, Anita Bryant's tour, pensions for women, health related matters (birth control, improved maternity care) equal pay and the apathy of other women. Despite the existence of common underlying currents, it appeared that concerted, organized lobbies had taken place only at the local level or, on occasion, provincially. Women in different regions tend to mobilize their energy around specific issues as a result of provincial legislation, dramatic events such as court cases, or deliberate action initiated by a particular women's organization.

## LAWS

Most women (85%) said they did not think federal and provincial governments were doing enough to introduce legislation that would improve the status of women. Nonetheless, a majority (61%) did think specific laws of importance to women had been passed in the last five years.

*Are federal and provincial governments doing enough to improve the status of women?*

Yes	6%
No	85%
Don't know	9%

*Have any specific laws concerning women been passed in the last five years that you think are important?*

Yes	61%
No	11%
Don't know	28%

The laws most frequently mentioned as important were changes dealing with rape (federal), human rights legislation (federal and provincial) and matrimonial property laws (provincial). (Provision for legal abortions was mentioned by some respondents and would undoubtedly have been mentioned more often had the law not been passed more than five years ago.) Many individual references were made to laws dealing with other matters such as pensions, change of name, and citizenship. However, only legislation pertaining to rape, human rights and matrimonial property were widely regarded as significant. Even the approval accorded these laws was qualified:

"Laws concerning equal pay (human rights) are important however they are not enforced, even in government service."

"The new reformed family law (Ontario) is important, but it just is not good enough."

"Changes in rape laws are good, but not enough."

Since matrimonial property and human rights legislation differ from province to province, some regional contrasts were apparent. Ontario women seemed to be the most satisfied with their matrimonial property legislation, Alberta residents less so, and Manitobans most disgruntled. In Quebec alone, human rights legislation prohibits discrimination against homosexuals, and most respondents in this province praised this amendment.

Confusion about what is and isn't law was fairly common. One woman who said she did not know if any important legislation had been passed added the comment, "this answer shames me. I'm glad this questionnaire revealed my ignorance." A woman who cited as important the amendment "rape victims do not have to reveal past sexual history" then asked, "Is this law?" (It is, unless a pretrial hearing determines that the sexual history is relevant to the case.) Recent proposals that rape be regarded as a form of assault are *not* yet law, however, but some respondents seemed to believe this legislation had been passed.

## PROGRESS AND PREDICTIONS

Most respondents had a fairly optimistic view of the women's movement as an enduring, vital force although they saw change occurring slowly. Few believed that important changes related to women's status would be accomplished in less than thirty years.

*Has the level of feminist activity changed in your community in the past five years?*

Increased	42%
No change	14%
Don't know	32%

*What proportion of changes needed in the status of women do you feel have been achieved so far?*

0-20%	49%
30-50%	45%
50-75%	5%
over 75%	1%

*How long will it take before most important changes have occurred?*

No changes needed	0%
Within 5 yrs	1%
Within 10 yrs	17%
Within 30 yrs	33%
50 years or more	49%

*What is the future of the women's movement?*

Will gain momentum	29%
Will achieve some goals	48%
Will lose strength but not die out	16%
Will die out	1%
other	6%

*What do you see as your future involvement in the women's movement?*

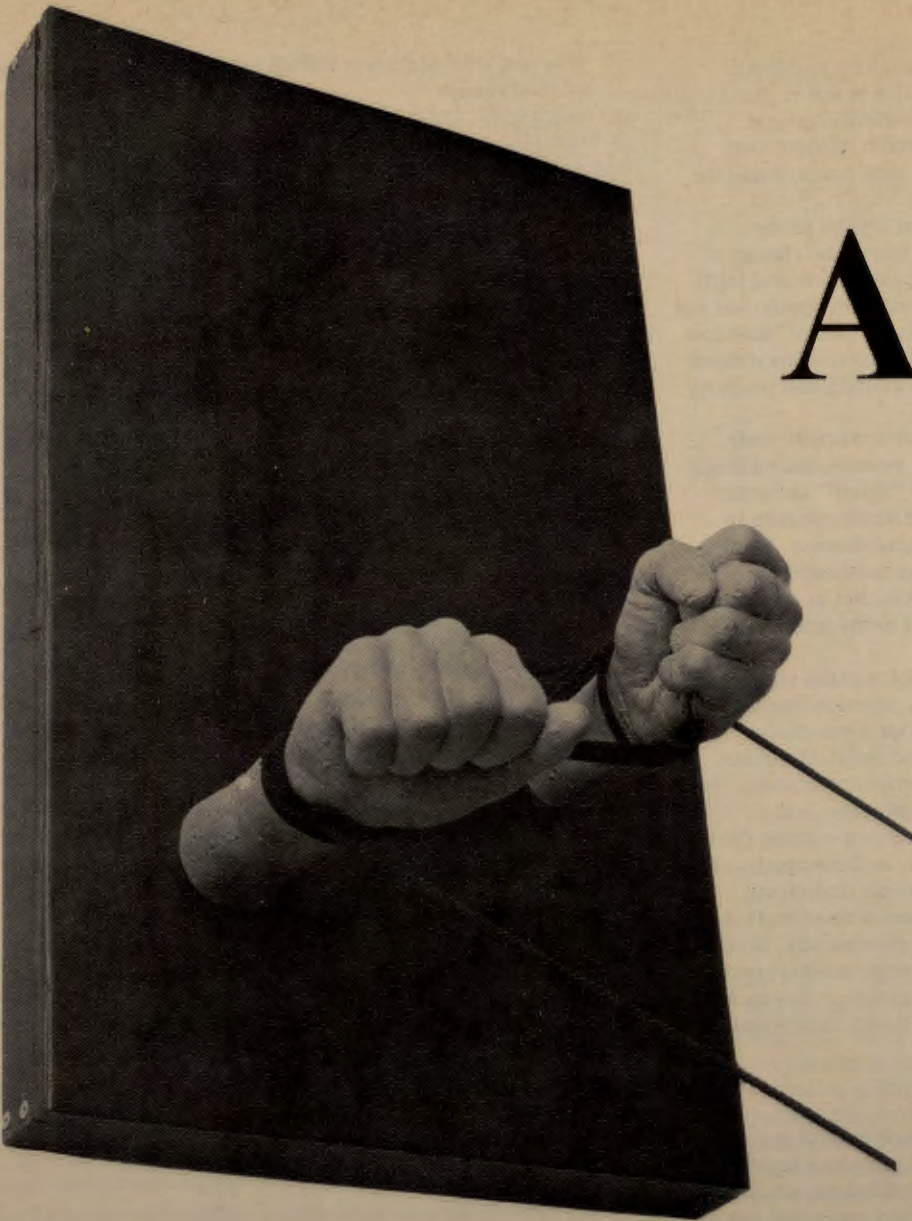
No involvement	2%
Periodic involvement	27%
Involvement through lifestyle/awareness	50%
Periodic inv. & life style & awareness	19%
other	2%

Referring to the last two questions above, one woman concluded:

I hope you get a lot of positive response on these two questions. Attitude is critical here. It is our own will that is going to accomplish and affect change.

*Sharon K. Smith, Janice Michaud, Dallas Cullen and Diane Gilchrist also contributed to the development and analysis of the questionnaire.*





# Art for

capable of working successfully in such a broad range of media, the skill demonstrated in Maureen's work at the age of twenty-eight is remarkable. Her accomplishments are all the more noteworthy since she began to work seriously and systematically only five years ago.

Maureen started drawing at the age of seventeen, but she stopped for a period around the time her son was born, when she was living in what she terms an "inhospitable environment" for creative work. Her freedom was restricted by poverty, a newborn, and an oppressive relationship with her son's father. She was geographically isolated in the country outside Guelph, Ontario, and had only minimal contact with other artists. Under these conditions she found it impossible to work, and it was only after escaping from this situation that she was able to begin again. Now her work has become central to her existence. "I really need to work every day" she says. "I need my fix" — and getting her fix means that she will often do some illustration, preliminary drawings for sculpture, writing and painting all in the same day.

Maureen says that a recurring theme in both her visual work and poetry "deals with bringing together so-called polar qualities — mind and body, intellect and emotion, so that they meet in a kind of equilibrium." She deliberately makes her work visually appealing so that her audience will want to look at it long enough to explore and understand it. She wants her work to communicate. Vibrant colours or dynamic forms grab the eye and hold it there until the image is fully absorbed. She is currently working on plans for new sculpture which will explore what she feels are vital universal concerns — power, fear and human defenses. "But I can't go near it yet materially" she says, "because I have to deal with my own fears before they can find some kind of exegesis through art. And I don't want the art to be seen by anyone as being solely therapeutic, . . . or anything other than a constructive investigation and

by Cathy Hobart

When Maureen Paxton speaks you have to listen carefully. She is so soft-spoken that at times her voice is barely audible, but the intense tone of her whisper demands that you sit forward and strain to hear every word. The appearance of her sparsely furnished flat indicates an ascetic existence, an extraordinary concentration on her work. In most rooms there is evidence of work in progress; a table covered with sketches, paints and brushes, canvasses piled against a wall. The walls themselves are bare of anything but layers of paint and peeling wallpaper. Here Maureen lives with her six year old son and works as a painter, sculptor, printmaker, poet and illustrator.

Her work is conceptually strong and finely crafted. Since only a few artists well advanced in their careers are



# the Audience

possible solution to some of those things."

In a piece called *Man Eating Animals* Maureen says she started to explore some of these concerns. The work consists of three pairs of hands, each pair emerging from a plaque on the wall. Leashes, wrapped around the wrists, reach to harnessed black animals on the floor. The hands are as much bound to the animals as the animals are to the hands. There are human bites out of the hide of each animal. When a viewer enters the room, he/she is caught in the web of reins, surrounded by the hands and animals. As startling and powerful as the piece is, Maureen feels that it falls short of her current goals. She says that instead of presenting an existing condition, she "was talking about an idealized situation between male and female, mind and body, enjoying reciprocating influence through the leashes." Regarding her future pieces she says "I would really like to talk about reality in my work, not fantasy."

Maureen's desire to reach her audience is especially evident in a piece called *Find the Needle* which "becomes complete" only with viewer participation. Two semi-circular benches face a velvet pin cushion on a stool. The cushion, about one foot square, is filled with thousands of pins and, we presume, one needle. A magnifying glass is

provided to assist in the search. It sounds easy, but it isn't. It sounds like fun, and it is. Under the magnifying glass the pins sparkle against the black background, they seem alive. The search is a very absorbing and sensual experience. (I didn't find the needle.) While the piece was on exhibit Maureen says she checked several times a day to make sure that someone had not found and removed the needle, thereby changing the piece completely and deceiving the audience. She was delighted to discover that some of the people who had found the needle had extended the artist/viewer participation by moving the needle to a new place on the pin cushion. *Find the Needle* was exhibited at a show while Maureen was a student at the Ontario College of Art. One of her instructors challenged her on it. "He said that what I was doing was not art. It was not art because I should not have been considering what other people should be feeling in response to that work, that I shouldn't ask for involvement from people. But after making something it is really necessary for me to feel that there is some correspondence between myself, my artwork, . . . and the people who see that work."

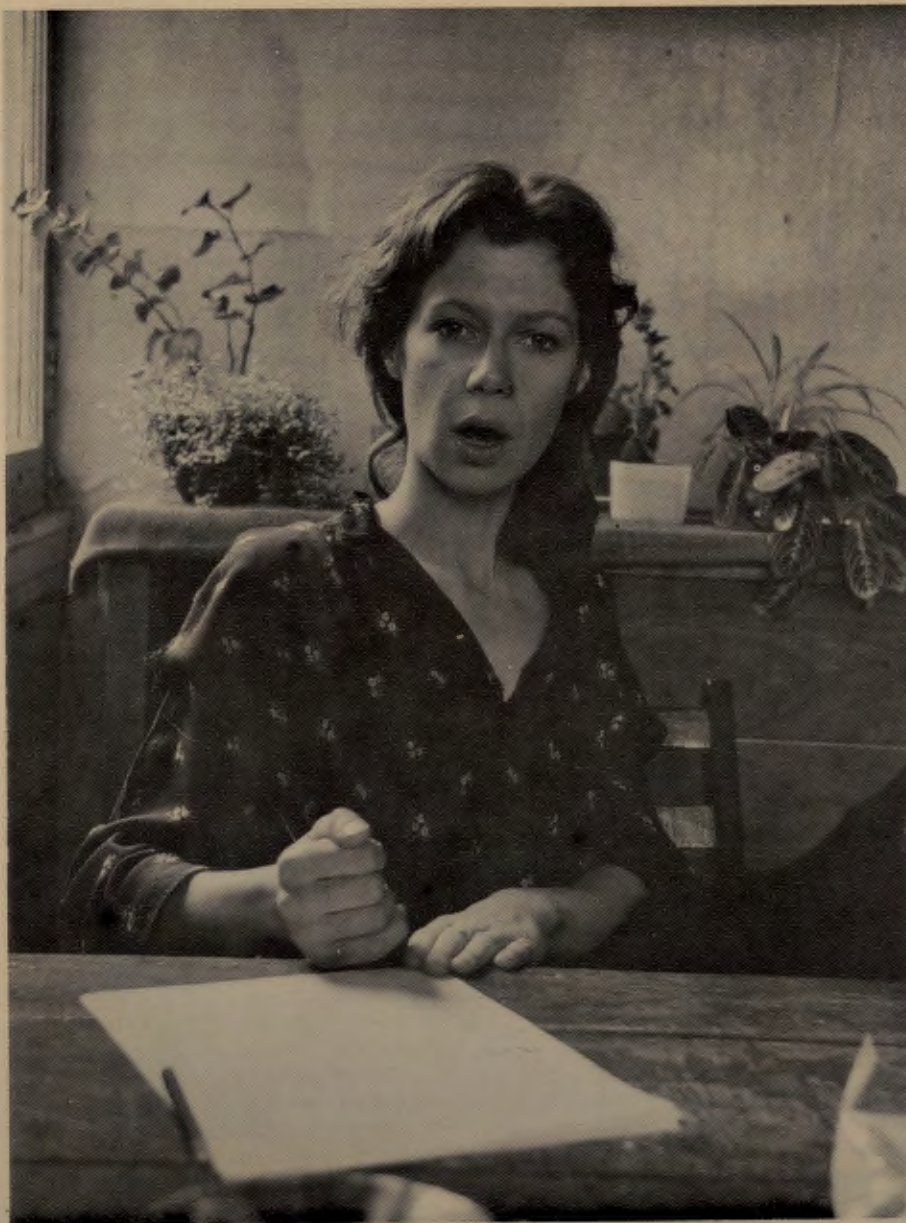
That conversation with her instructor was typical of Maureen's encounters with many people at art college, and she felt isolated from many of the faculty and students because her views were so different from their ideas about what art and artists should be. She says they seemed to think that "artists are exempt from the laws that govern all other human beings. They don't see themselves or their work as being responsible to other people on any level at all." This attitude of indifference to the audience makes her angry. "These are the people who support us!" she says in an uncharacteristically loud voice, "we are not self-contained bubbles floating in a vacuum. That is not enough to feed me emotionally or intellectually."

Maureen's ideas about an artist's role in society are closely interwoven with her feminist views. This is not surprising, since her introduction to feminism and subsequent activities in the movement determined her return to creative work. She became a feminist after being rescued from isolation by a group of women from Guelph. They were motivated to help her simply because she was a woman in trouble. At that time she had stopped doing artwork, but the women in Guelph encouraged her to start again, and to put her abilities to work for the movement. The women's



detail from *Man Eating Animals*





Maureen Paxton

photo by Cathy Hobart

movement provided both a purpose and an audience for Maureen's work, and she began to write and illustrate material for women's publications and produce posters for local groups. She hoped that through her work she could also express her gratitude to the women who had helped her. She stayed in Guelph for two years developing as an artist who was receptive and responsive to her audience.

Her efforts were fulfilling but demanding, and in 1974 after designing eleven posters in one week, Maureen decided to leave Guelph to attend art college in Toronto. She felt limited by the kind of work she had been doing, and needed to further her development as an artist by opening some new doors. She explains "I realized that I had developed my own independence enough that I wanted, if possible, to do my own work as well as contributing work to the movement."

At the Ontario College of Art, Maureen's work developed rapidly as she began to explore new media, and in 1975 she exhibited a body of work — paintings, prints and sculpture — that represented her first year in Toronto. Some of her friends from Guelph attended the show and expressed disappointment in the new work. They had come expecting to see more posters and overtly political drawings exactly like her previous work. "They saw me as a defector, and I was hurt, because I was speaking about myself. I feel that I am still talking about the movement in my work. I am working out of a desire for change." She adds "I had intended to work out some kind of hybrid art between what I felt were grass roots political concerns and my response to things that affect me personally. I still haven't completely resolved that."

Cathy Hobart is a Toronto printmaker and a graduate of the Ontario College of Art. She is presently expanding a collection of art by Canadian women begun in 1975 (see *Branching Out*, V, 2) and is art editor of *Branching Out*.

*Opposite page: clockwise from top, left Noble Profile #1 (ink and coloured pencil), Shifting Skins (graphite), illustration from "Gertie of Tarbotvale", illustration "un serphant verte qui marche!", illustration "un hibou brun qui dort", illustration (untitled), Noble Profile #2 (ink and coloured pencil).*







## Equal Opportunities for Women in the Federal Public Service

The first two female public servants were hired as matron and deputy matron at the Kingston Penitentiary about 100 years ago. By the turn of the century, about 13% of public servants were women, and already a pattern was developing that was to continue unchanged for decades: women were confined to low level positions, nor was there any attempt to disguise discriminatory practices. Although the Civil Service Act of 1918 provided for equal pay for equal work, deputy heads of departments could limit positions to one sex or the other. Women (what else is new?) were hired as "stenographers and typewriters", dead-end jobs, and men as "general clerks", the bottom rung on the promotional ladder.

In 1921 married women were barred from the public service unless they were self-supporting or there were no other qualified candidates available. These restrictions were relaxed during World War II, reinstated in 1947 and remained in effect until 1955. Regulations concerning the employment of women were made, and exceptions granted, only in the light of public service requirements; no policies were based on the concept of women's right to work or equality of opportunity or advancement.

### The 60's: a time of change

The 60's were a decade of foment and agitation as women took stock of their position in society and in the workplace and demanded that injustices and inequities be remedied. Kathleen Archibald noted in her report **Sex and the Public Service** (1969) that 83% of the women in the public service were secretaries, typists and clerks, many of them with little opportunity for advancement within their category or for transfer out of it. One of her recommendations was that an equal opportunity program be set up within the Public Service Commission to ensure equal opportunity for all. She spoke of the concept of equity:

"If an employer requires more evidence to decide a woman is capable than to decide a man is capable, the fundamental idea of equity is transgressed just as it is if a jury were to require less evidence for a verdict of guilty against a non-Caucasian than a Caucasian." (p. 5)

### Equal Opportunities: a slogan and a program

In 1971, the Office of Equal Opportunities for Women was set up in the Public Service Commission. Some of the objectives of the Office are:

- \* to provide and analyse statistics concerning the employment of women in the public service
- \* to assist the Public Service Commission in identifying and removing employment barriers
- \* to assist departments in developing strategies to increase employment opportunities for women
- \* to provide information about the EOW program to employees and the public.

The federal government's policy on equal opportunities for women was restated and expanded in 1975: "The government wishes to ensure that, within a reasonable period of time, representation of male and female employees in the

Public Service in each department, occupational group and level will approximate the proportion of qualified and interested persons of both sexes available."

Actions speak louder than words, however, and in order to make sure that these good intentions were carried out, a program was developed to implement the policy.

### The Action Plan in action

Each department was required to develop a five-year action plan to promote equal opportunities for women. They first undertook a situation review, collecting data about the number of women in each occupational group. Generally, women were clustered in certain job ghettos (for example, administrative support) and at lower levels of management and professional categories. The departments then analysed their own data, trying to identify the reasons for this clustering. Perhaps there were women whose lack of experience in more responsible positions could be remedied by new training programs. Perhaps there were barriers to the advancement of women because the terms of eligibility to compete for positions were unnecessarily high; strategies to eliminate such barriers were planned.

Departments submit yearly reports on their action plans, showing progress to date and evaluating the success of programs and strategies undertaken.

### The role of the Office of Equal Opportunities for Women

The EOW office monitors the departmental action plans for the Public Service Commission, assists departments in developing and implementing programs, and promotes special training plans of particular interest to women.

Changes are being made. Women made up only .4% of employees in the executive group in 1972, but 3% in 1977; they made up 14% of the administrative and foreign service group in 1972 and 22% of the same group in 1977. Yet change is slow. Current cutbacks in budgets and staff years make change even more difficult, but EOW continues to be a priority. We look forward to a time when equal opportunities for women can cease to be a goal because it has become a reality.

The following publications are available free of charge from the Office of Equal Opportunities for Women, 1559 West Tower, 300 Laurier West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0M7:

Interaction: A quarterly publication for women in the public service

EOW 77: an annual publication highlighting EOW activities.

These Days, Everybody Works: a series of booklets for high school girls about some non-traditional careers in the public service

Filmography: information about films about, by and for women

Legislation Review: an outline of federal and provincial legislation affecting female public servants

All of these publications are available in both French and English.



# *Rocky Mountain Fish Stories*



*Karen McDiarmid*





*Andy Sylvester*



*by Alison*

*Alison Rossiter is a photography instructor at the Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta. She has studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology as well as the Banff Centre. Alison's photographs were included in the portrait show "Sweet Immortality" at the Edmonton Art Gallery and in the "Manitoba - Saskatchewan - Alberta" show sponsored by the National Film*



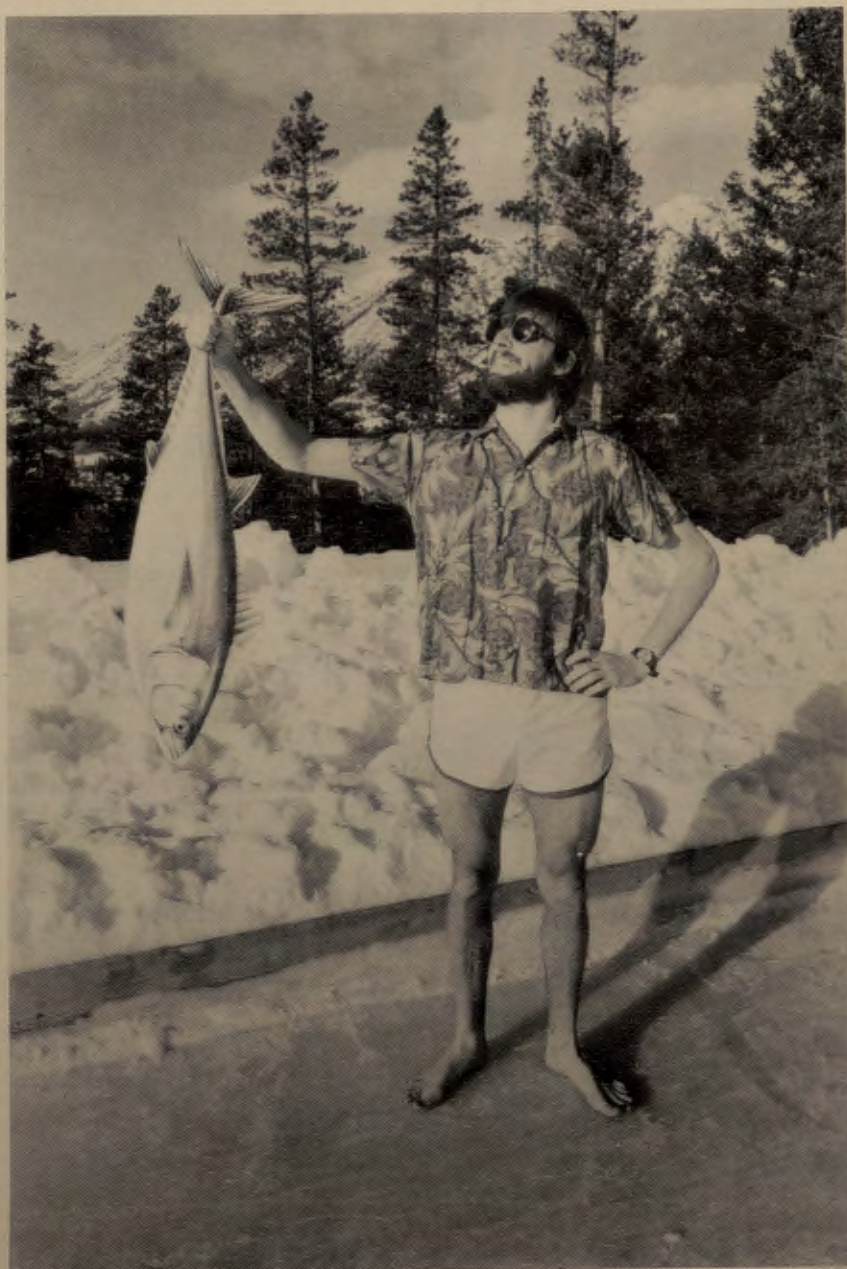


*Alison Rossiter*

# Rossiter

*Board (both in 1978). Her work is in the permanent collections of The Peter Whyte Foundation, The Alberta Art Foundation, and The National Film Board of Canada.*

*In the original black and white photographs the fish cut-outs are in color and jump out (so to speak) from the background. In reproduction this quality is lost.*



*Chuck Murray*





# A Ticket to the Symphony

fiction by Marion Thom

illustration by Sylvia Luck Patterson

My mistake had been to think of him as a pianist. This evening he had offered me, had offered us all, that rare feeling of being attached to something greater than our small and separate lives. It was a much older version of the feeling I got when I was at school and the flag was lowered after the mysterious deaths of important persons, or the memory of seven hundred voices singing together in the auditorium, beautifully committed to the moment. Even though we had not understood as children why the occasions had been so solemn and significant, still we had understood the feeling of being connected to something outside of ourselves. I wanted to tell him of this feeling before the brief sense of history provided by the Saskatoon Symphony, the pianist, and the many people milling in the intermission, conscious of their own excitement, should fade into the departing cars of an audience going home. But instead I said something offhand about the elderly woman with pearls and brocade sitting next to me, who had said throughout the performance, "there's something of promise in that young man". He was not young, and I did not want to focus on him as a man. I wanted only briefly to be part of this black and white backstage world of musicians in their formal dress stopping to congratulate him.

When the door closed all other sounds fell away. I could



feel my earnest attempt to appreciate his talent and show gratitude for my ticket being scrutinized. His restless walking around my chair, then the almost violent way he removed his jacket, fascinated me while I talked on energetically about the fact that farmers living far from Saskatoon had come to hear him play the Tchaikovsky concerto, the one called the "blind beggar's tune". Mopping his knotted brow with a large white handkerchief, still breathing heavily from his performance, finally he stood looking down at me. With a long, ragged sigh, and a look that went somewhere beyond me, he said, "I feel tonight that I have finally been recognized". An image of his playing returned to me, his posture before the piano, the way his arms in flight over the keys made his shoulders, the straightness of his back, the most perfect silhouette.

Suddenly I notice, as from a great distance, like that of a back row seat to the stage in a concert hall, that he has picked up one of my hands, still warm from applause, in his own. I can sustain the feeling that we are somehow old friends, celebrating his success, only for a moment. I find we are slowly slipping away from the sound of a symphony to the quiet sound a man and a woman make waiting in a dressing room. I try to review the situation — the pianist on tour confronting the young Canadian woman promoting books for a New York publishing firm. They have met in the middle of the prairies, unsuspectingly. They have known each other briefly, for one day, and she has listened to the pianist play. She is in his dressing room now, a room filled with expectation. His voice exhales again, sounding tense, sounding old, "With them, with the audience, it's different. But with a woman like you, one look is recognition". My part in the nervous system of two thousand people has fallen back to the proportion of one woman feeling suddenly small and trapped in this pale yellow room with a pianist intent on a different kind of recognition. I have realized too late that he is imagining me.

Yesterday morning at breakfast in the hotel, even then he thought I had contrived our meeting through some aura of my eating and my drinking and my reading, like some personal act for him to see, to invite him. We were reading the same book, our twin copies of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* rising above our coffee cups in the Holiday Inn atmosphere of orange cheerfulness. I can see now that the book signalled our meeting, that idyllic cover picture of a black-haired woman standing in a field somehow extending to him the promise of knowing me. That was before I knew he was a pianist. And before I knew, as I do now with fifteen minutes left before the symphony begins the Overture D'ys, that it doesn't matter that he is a pianist. That something else matters. That somehow I have become a witness to the life between the performances. That more important than the concert ticket is our meeting in the bar last night. That meeting has made me somehow responsible.

I try to recall whether we seemed like potential lovers then, sipping cocktails in a corner, he murmuring dark stories about a pianist who fell in love with his student and suffered for the unreality. I remember that his voice, even then, was strained and awkward, had the sound of expression used far less frequently than the piano. I also remember that I recognized the name of his lover in the story. She was the daughter of an older friend of mine, a lawyer in Winnipeg. Even that painful connection to his past made me familiar to him, and somehow necessary.

And so now I remember, too late, the danger of small details that make strangers risk a kind of intimacy in unfamiliar cities. Now I remember, when his first words after the applause have separated my face from the thousands of other listeners who rose from the seats to admire him. I look away to the bareness of the dressing room, seeing a bathtub through a doorway and hearing oboes somewhere in the distance. His voice is becoming gentle, accusing me, "You knew when you came backstage tonight. You knew what I wanted, didn't you?"

These last few words — they sting like the most terrible misunderstanding of childhood.

I suddenly recall the bitter sensation of having been betrayed by events in a story much earlier, when I was eight or nine. We, my brother and I, had taken this small boy who was always sick, on a picnic. We had fed him grapes in ceremonial style on a red blanket, and had told him make-believe stories of our lives. I still remember the feeling of that afternoon in the sunshine, the three of us somehow sitting free in the universe. Then the small boy had been stung by a bee, and he had grown huge and red and screaming, his whole body swollen. Our small found freedom had come abruptly to an end, and we were left with the incomprehensible rules of living. And I remember, we had been punished, not for the accidents of time and place, but somehow for the intentions of the picnic. The face of my earlier guilt reminds me of the slightly soft profile of the pianist who is bending so close to me now. His hands, so certain on the keyboard, are moving unpractised and unsure on the wool of my sweater, on the arms, on the shoulders, shyly on my breasts.

I stand abruptly and open the door, letting in the tentative sounds of musicians waiting for the stage call. A needless weapon — millions of empty seats stretch out over Saskatchewan in my angry imagination. Where is the pianist? He is backstage being a man. I am confronted by a man who gave me a complimentary ticket to his concert, a generous and touching gesture, I had thought. I am confronted now by his pale blue shirt shadowed with sweat from his playing, smelling of his music and his desire now which is more fixed in his hopes than the second half of his concert. Why can I not be gentle with this man, who looks a little tired suddenly, his eyes confused, who is leaning precariously toward the act of love?

As I walk stiffly through the door out into the corridor of light and noise I feel cheated of an explanation. I feel as though I have just now cruelly distorted a kind of intangible and delicate commitment made sometime before the concert, that my ticket was the unspoken contract. With a clarity possible only when a woman is about to cry, I turn in the bright frame of the doorway, saying, "I have always thought that making love is somehow wanting to change your life. I don't need to change my life right now, with you". The flesh on his cheeks seems to sag, and his eyes betray a little of that story of the pianist and his student. I can see there is no better way to stop him seeing a certain vengeance in me, self-righteous and smugly secure. He cannot see how sorry I am that I have passed this way again with a man.

Awake in my hotel room I imagine the people moving out of the concert, full of the musical imagery which has held them suspended in their own stories. He had not wanted to change their lives as much as he had wanted to change mine. He has given me the torn ticket stub that will conjure up the perky signs of the hospitable Holiday Inns from coast to coast, and make me think always of the very white concert hall with the sloping floors and floating galleries in Saskatoon. I lie awake much longer than it takes to remember a pianist sitting so straight before two thousand people. Something in me, some small moment in my past which has been leaning toward an explanation, will not allow me to sleep. I hear the pale sound of a note being played over and over again, and am more than ever frightened by the thought of sleeping with a middle-aged pianist who had asked me for compassion.

*Marion Thom lives in Edmonton and is currently writing a novel on madness. While living in Winnipeg a few years ago she wrote for several newspapers and was editor of a learning disabilities journal.*

*Sylvia Luck Patterson studied fine arts at the University of Alberta for two years. She has been painting and drawing for as long as she can remember. She now lives in Kenora, Ontario.*



# Confrontations

Most of us avoid conflict and the women's movement suffers

by Patricia Preston

There's a struggle underway. It simmers inside me, occasionally bubbling over into warfare. Most times, though, I quell the conflict. Today I feel the force of its surreptitious advance. It is stealthily eroding many areas of my involvement with the women's movement. I suspect others feel as wary and frightened as I about confronting the conflict which, if ignored, has the potential to divide and destroy a movement so vital to our society.

Combining personal goals as a feminist with the political goals of the movement sounds workable, even desirable. Yet the blend of feelings with business is often explosive. Conflict weaves its way through every area of my involvement with the women's movement, in fact, seems an integral part of the movement to me. The clash of feminist ideologies with those of our society gave birth to feminist organizations. Yet conflict and ensuing confrontations between members of these organizations are also what divide the groups. Differences over issues can be productive, but in most instances they become ammunition for personal battles which are rarely brought to resolution.

My decision to fill a spot on the board of the local status of women action committee was impulsive. Had I stopped to question why the spot had been vacated part way through the year, I might have suspected conflict and refused. But I didn't and was involved quickly in issues confronting feminists at a local level.

On the surface our board struggled with feminist concerns: day care, equal pay legislation, matrimonial property law, human rights legislation. At the same time, there was a tacit grappling with conflict among ourselves. We were torn by the feminist belief that no one woman should have more power than any other. Although we had a chairperson, we insisted she relinquish her position at least every six months so others could equally share responsibility.

I supported the concept that board members should learn about all aspects of the structure, but I felt frustrated. We were putting tremendous energy into



Pat Preston photo by Russell Pritchard raising funds, lobbying government, and publicizing our concerns. I resented having to expend additional energy to combat underlying fears that one of us might want more power than another. I felt fraudulent. Yes, I wanted equality for women but I felt that same egalitarianism unworkable in board meetings.

The business at hand was slow because we inevitably had to return to the nurturing-understanding process when one of us (usually me) felt her views weren't recognized by the group or when some members felt threatened by another's assertiveness. Everybody assumed minority positions. Run-of-the-mill decisions took forever to make because all board members had to have equal time to express views on issues as insignificant as the purchase of a piece of office equipment.

I felt uneasy, as did most other board members, about our inability to truly represent all the women on whose part we were acting. It wasn't because we didn't actively seek support from all segments of the community. We wanted our membership to be representative, yet we were reticent to assume individually or collectively any position which could be construed by other women as too powerful. I suspect we equated power with a negative form of control, which

we all rejected except, of course, when we tried to use it as a weapon with which to combat the enemy.

"Fairness to all women, no matter what" was our unspoken 'golden rule.' We sought to represent everyone and offend no one. We encouraged everyone to join actively in the battle for legislative change. Despite our attempts at recruitment, our troops were few. Lots of names on the membership roster, but few at the meetings. Scores at the conferences, but few to do the organizing and fewer to confront the politicians. Ironically, board members were still charged with elitism.

I'd never thought it elitist to lick stamps, write letters, organize meetings, write briefs and answer phones. Elitist I wasn't, but my need for achievement and — yes, I'll say it — recognition in the group, were catalysts in my volunteering as chairperson of the local group.

During the sixteen months I was chairperson, we still encountered conflict. Plenty of it. We searched for funding, organized conferences, challenged government and we still suppressed anger that I'm certain resulted from my acting "like a boss." For many women at the local level of the women's movement, acting like a boss is a concept they resent and reject, and any indication that a sister is putting herself in a "boss" position is tantamount to betrayal.

Many maintain that the group must be a collective with no structure, vague agendas and, all too often, nebulous goals. I don't believe it's possible to have an effective structureless group, particularly when working toward legislative change. Although it may be hidden or casual, some form of structure exists. Such camouflaged structures foster covert agendas, promote wary allegiances and lead to potentially divisive actions.

I should have realized I could no more be acceptable to all members of the board than the board could be to all members of the community it represented. I wondered if working at the provincial level would be different. I had, after all, noted with admiration an





**"At my first annual meeting of the national organization, I decided to be on the lookout for conflict, all the while hoping solutions would be evident."**



*photos from National Action Committee annual meeting  
by Moira Armour*

impressive 75-page brief outlining goals for women and government that was the result of the cooperation of hundreds of women from a wide range of groups.

Some of these women were among the 200 from rural and urban areas of the province who attended the first status of women conference sponsored by the newly-formed provincial steering committee. The conference was exciting and exhilarating, but I recall an underlying mistrust by some women who questioned whether the well-intentioned steering committee, whose members were located mainly in urban centres, could legitimately represent the needs of all women in the province. I listened carefully to debate over regional representation and recalled similar conflict at the local level.

An attempt at regional representation on the steering committee proved frustrating. One rural representative resigned, leaving that part of the province unrepresented. Contact with others was difficult and travel to

meetings was costly and inconvenient. Tension mounted at the next conference when conflict arose again. This time it grew mainly out of the members' varying ideologies. Lesbian versus straight. Pro-choice versus pro-life. Egalitarian versus structure. The membership voted to support some groups and not others, an unworkable situation. (A recent decision not to endorse any group has proven equally unworkable.)

I began to feel that, despite an increased awareness and involvement in women's issues, I had not moved at all. I was anxious to see the variety in provincial members enrich the group, all the while wondering how disagreements could be minimized. I began to feel as I had when I pushed to chair the local group. I longed for leadership.

As we agonized and argued about our expectations of the group, conflicts with the 'outside' continued. We joined forces with other women's groups on the prairies to protest the inadequate funding and treatment we were receiving from the federal government. We felt our energies diffused as one group was pitted against another for the pittance the government allotted to women's programmes. We met in Regina to consolidate our complaints and forward them to the regional director. Discussion was heated. Needs varied. Some feminists charged that others within the government had no allegiance to the women's movement. Co-optation: the word was whispered around the table. Out of the conflict came anger. Stifled anger. Out of the meeting came a demand that the regional director meet with representatives of the women's groups and that sustaining grants be issued to stop the groups from fighting one another for funds. Neither happened. Our energies had been diverted from issue-fighting to in-fighting. We confronted neither the government nor each other.

Once again I questioned the structure (or was it the structurelessness?) of women's groups.

At my first annual meeting of the national organization, I tried to keep my naivete under wraps. I would, I decided, be on the lookout for conflict, all the





while hoping solutions would be evident.

Women from all parts of the women's movement and as many sections of the country were in Ottawa to sort out national issues. Discussions on what to do about equal pay, maternity leave, power for women outwardly overrode the growing concern that the national group be true to its mandate. When, the delegates muttered to themselves, would this group be truly national in scope? I detected conflict as women from the east and west demanded input into the executive decisions. The conflict was suppressed but only because we were again faced with inadequate funding to support the concept of regional representation.

The following year such funding was secured and I was elected to the national committee's executive. I joined the nineteen-member group along with eight other "regional" representatives from such cities as Vancouver, Edmonton, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Halifax. My euphoria at this new regional representation was brief because I soon realized there was no way I could legitimately presume to represent, let alone speak for, all prairie women.

Additional conflict at home followed my election to the national executive. I'd decided to run for the executive at the last minute. I acted mainly on my own and presumed I had the support of local sisters. Later I sensed that my assertiveness created resentment. I had been audacious enough to seek more power than most members of feminist collectives deem acceptable. No one ever confronted me with the issue but some of my sisters at the local level "wrote me off." I was hurt and puzzled. I wondered then, as I do now, why egalitarianism tends to be equated with anonymity and silence.

Life at the national level is not without conflict. My stress level is high, often bordering on acute. My family is supportive but often resents my monthly out-of-town trips. My body often cries out for attention when the only sleep it gets is on planes between Toronto and Calgary. I feel torn between fatigue and wanting to be more actively involved in the workload that the Toronto-based members must handle. I'm frustrated because my contact with women in my province is limited. I am disappointed that more local women don't show an interest in national issues. My presence on the executive falls far short of regional representation. I call myself the "non-regional" regional representative.

Because out-of-towners can travel to Toronto only on weekends, executive meetings stretch for hours. The day after these meetings is crammed with committee work. I often feel isolated — from my

sisters at home who may feel I'm too preoccupied with national issues, from the provincial committee, whose meetings I'd like to attend but can't, and from others on the national committee whose awareness of issues and whose rapport with one another is possible because of their proximity. I'm convinced that the best I can offer is a link in a growing network across the country, a network which provides vital support and continued strength for all women.

At a recent national meeting, discussion shifted from how to handle national issues to insinuations that some of us were too narrow in our views — that we were misrepresenting our membership by letting our personal political preferences surface. Conflict and anger hovered, yet confrontation was averted. Our energies were sapped by maintaining control and avoiding necessary confrontation.

Confrontation, conflict, anger. They can all be healthy. Each has its place in the women's movement as in our own lives. Yet we avoid confronting all three and that avoidance fosters divisiveness.

I'm weary of constant criticism that we volunteers in the women's movement should do more, do less, do the job better, do it differently.

I'm weary of the fight within myself and within the groups to "keep control," to stifle and subjugate conflict.

I'm weary of hearing critics tell us it's time we get our act together. Yet, in my heart, I know it is.

*Patricia Preston is a former chairperson of the Calgary Status of Women Action Committee, a member of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee and an executive member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.*

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QUEBEC FEMINIST WRITING



# Women in Conflict

photographs from Jean Genet's "The Maids"

taken by Halszka Fijalkowska



This play depicts the relationship between two maids who are sisters. At the core of their relationship is a conflict with the mistress of the household, which has been enacted so many times that fantasy and reality are interchangeable. These stills are from a 1973 performance of the play in Guelph, Ontario with actresses Barbara Muir and Lynn Green.

*Halszka Fijalkowska has a B.A. in Fine Art from the University of Guelph. She studied filmmaking at Sheridan College in 1974-75 and worked as assistant director at Yaneff International Gallery, Toronto from 1975-1977. She has exhibited her paintings and photographs in various group and one-woman shows.*



## Legal Notes

### EQUAL WAGE GUIDELINES

In September, the Canadian Human Rights Commission issued guidelines pursuant to section 11 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. Section 11 prescribes that men and women performing work of equal value shall be paid equal wages. That section also provides for exceptions to the rule. The guidelines specify when the exceptions can lawfully arise.

The federal government deserves credit for its attempt to legislate equal pay in the work place. The Act was carefully drafted to provide equal pay for "work of equal value", rather than for "similar work", as is the case in most provincial legislation. This wording was intended to avoid difficult comparisons between dissimilar job tasks. While the roles of office workers and warehouse staff cannot be seen as similar, one could defend the jobs as being of equal importance to the continued operation of the enterprise. In the Act, value is defined as "the skill, effort and responsibility required in the performance of the work, and the conditions under which the work is performed".

While the legislation states an intended "basic equality of opportunity and pay for men and women", careful examination of these guidelines reminds one that pay scales will likely still be subject to employer attitudes. Consider, for example, the following factors which the guidelines find warrant differences in pay to men and women:

- 4(1)(c) "red circling", where the position of an employee is re-evaluated and, as a result, is down-graded, and the wages of that employee are temporarily fixed, or the increases in the wages of that employee are curtailed, until the wages appropriate to the down-graded position are equivalent to or better than the wages of that employee;
- 4(1)(e) a demotion pay procedure, where the employer reassigns an employee to a position at a lower level because of

- (i) the unsatisfactory work performance of the employee caused by
  - (A) the deterioration in the ability of the employee to perform the work.

- (B) the increasing complexity of the job, or
- (C) the impaired health or partial disability of the employee or other cause beyond the control of the employee

What factors or controls govern how an employee will assess the relative value of various jobs and responsibilities? More than likely existing attitudes. Who is monitoring those?

Given that work performance is, in most cases, evaluated solely by the employer, attitudes will play a dominant role in deciding who is to be demoted. Clause (B) appears somewhat unjust where an employer is left with the option of increasing job responsibilities, providing no upgrading training, deciding the employee is incompetent and then

demoting her. Both Clause (A) and (C) could be extremely abused if pregnancy is considered to come within those definitions. If that is the case, will the decision as to the woman's continued capability to perform be left to the employer's discretion and attitudes about pregnancy?

The concerns raised may be groundless. The exceptions to the rule of equality may do little to lessen the impact of the Act. My senses tell me that women who are working for the federal government would do well to put pressure on the Commission to get out and re-educate those employers and monitor to gauge the effects of these guidelines.

*continued on page 44*

## SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

The Women's Studies Program expects to make a two-year full-time visiting appointment at the assistant professor level beginning September, 1979. Candidates with substantial teaching experience in Women's Studies will be considered and preference will be given to candidates with qualifications in anthropology, Canadian history, or possibly health care. Ph.D. or equivalent is required. University policy specifies that candidates having Canadian citizenship, or eligibility for landed immigrant status, Canadian education or academic experience be given first consideration. All appointments are subject to budgetary restraints.

Send applications with a curriculum vitae, any relevant publications and the names of three referees to: Search Committee, Women's Studies Program, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6 by February 1, 1979.



# Feminism, Down on the Farm

by Linda Z. Schulz

Leda Jensen's hands are plain hands. The kind that would look at home up to their elbows kneading bread dough or doing umpteen loads of laundry for a house full of hired help — warm, strong and maternal. The same hands are equally comfortable grabbing a microphone at the CJDV station in Drumheller every Saturday morning or at the wheel of a dusty Chevy logging the back roads of Alberta. They belong to a farm woman who is also the small, wiry president of Alberta's Women of Uniform (WU).

Another farm woman's hands come to mind . . . this time much older and more worn-looking. Hands once unceasing in their labour. They belong to 70-year-old Betty Pedersen who has been called everything from "the most forward-thinking woman on the board of Women of Uniform" to "incredible" and a "go-go grandmother." These hands have met the challenge of early rural life in Alberta unflinchingly.

In both these women, however, it is the eyes that you notice first. Eyes that mirror a belief in rural Alberta's "woman-power". Their conviction comes from spending a great deal of time listening to farm women's grievances and fighting to improve the quality of their life. Together Jensen and Pedersen represent over 60 years spent battling the prairie to eke out an existence, then civilizing the land for the others behind them.

Pedersen was named to the Alberta Agricultural Hall of Fame in 1976 for her tremendous organizational skills and distinguished service record with Women of Uniform (five years as president), the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Now retired and living in Calgary, she has not retired her vitriolic feelings about rural women's ongoing struggle for the recognition of their contribution to the farm. During her term as WU president, she forcibly led rural women in the direction of what she terms "activist feminism". But in expressing feminist ideas, she said she sometimes felt like a "freak."

Jensen, still actively farming with

her husband on some 3000 acres near Hussar (about 70 miles east of Calgary), has chosen not to follow Pedersen's lead and has a much more compromising approach. "I don't think you ever gain when you get radical . . . just sort of ranting and raving. You just have to keep striving for the things that you believe in," she said.

Stirred by a vision of prosperity, opportunity and the desire to own a piece of land, immigrants from eastern Canada, the U.S. and Europe surged into the west with great enthusiasm. About 900,000 people made the move between 1900 and 1911. Two-thirds of these people were men. Economic necessity, however, made the farm family a unit that was indispensable to a viable operation. A man would find it hard if not impossible to homestead without a farm family. And farm families meant women. Women were invited, cajoled and enticed by immigration programs to discover the promise of the golden prairies. But long hours and exhausting physical labor for little or no recognition and reward weren't what women's dreams prepared them for. Although somewhat disillusioned, they managed to survive.

Well, in 1978 the golden glow of the prairies has tarnished. Not just from the toil and sweat of yesteryear but from the bitter realities of today. Rural women have had a long and frustrating wait for tomorrow . . . and change.

Pedersen relates the work she did in the early thirties on a farm near Standard, "Oh the work, you just wouldn't believe it. You became stronger. The more work you do . . . the more you can do. You got up at 5 o'clock and you worked like a horse until 10 o'clock at night . . . we had no option if we were going to survive."

The power of a farm woman's hands has long been underestimated and Jensen says in light of her travels throughout Alberta, "No, women are not equal partners on the farm . . . not yet."

Pedersen resolutely argues that women are full partners and must be recog-

nized as such. "Absolutely! Maybe there are women who simply because they have large families and other things limit themselves to the house and the meals and so on. *Nevertheless they're putting their energies in that farm, in a different way than their husband is.*"

Reforming the matrimonial property law has been a clearly stated priority of rural women since the creation of Women of Uniform, back in 1916, when the group was called United Farm Women of Alberta and Irene Parlbay, its first elected president, recognized the need. WU remains a vital organization in rural Alberta through its connection with rural women who have a marked effect on agriculture in the province. A branch of Uniform, the Alberta farming organization, Women of Uniform is the only direct membership farm organization for women in Canada, with a present membership of 8,000. WU has responsibility in the areas of education, health and social development as they affect rural people, which can include problems ranging from road safety to the matrimonial property issue. "The Murdoch case flared us into real activity" says Pedersen.

"I could see these women who had worked for years on these farms, worked like horses — worked very hard to achieve a viable farm operation. And when it comes to marriage breakdown, they've got nothing. It just really upsets me," Pedersen says.

And in spite of the new ruling favoring "judicial discretion" in Alberta's matrimonial property law passed in the spring Legislature, the end of the fight for reform is still not in sight. Because of this WU has made the education of farm women paramount . . . no woman today can afford ignorance of her situation.

An unhappy Jensen says, "we have to be terribly careful that we don't have something that the lawyers and judges are going to have a real heyday with."

The more militant Pedersen who has spent thirty years of her life "screaming" about this issue says the government has let rural women down. She was dedicated to getting a policy of "deferred



sharing" introduced which recognizes that most people consider marriage to be a partnership. Such a law would require that any property acquired during the marriage be shared equally between husband and wife. Pedersen was able to get the necessary support from the predominantly male Unifarm executive for the equal sharing position — "though it took some talking" — only to see the Lougheed government opt for judicial discretion.

Jensen adds that this new law is a setback which will mean farm women once again have to grit their teeth and wait. And, in the meanwhile, make sure that they have a legal partnership with their husband. "Unfortunately, I could probably mention to you seven or eight farm wives who have been waiting for some type of definite matrimonial property law that will give them 50 per cent. And they're waiting for this so they can leave . . . It's frightening."

Women of Unifarm means women working together. Pedersen calls the team spirit, "a lovely, warm feeling." At one time, she says, it was the strongest voice of women in Alberta. From her Calgary living room she sees an increasing urbanization affecting the community and social life of rural women. "It used to be that there were very strong lines dividing urban women from rural wo-

men. That line has almost vanished completely." She would like to see more women become involved in farm management and sees improved education as the key to changing women's roles. Pedersen still believes that it is difficult for rural women to wholeheartedly accept the "independent" concepts of feminism. They have a different approach towards it than do urban women. Rural women have a strong belief in the farm unit in which each member of the household makes a strong contribution. What keeps rural women on the land despite the disparity and hardship is a belief in the land itself. Both Pedersen and Jensen agree that there is a sense of security and pride in owning your own land. A feeling of permanence.

"Farming is not just a matter of scratching the dirt, putting the seeds in and harvesting. If you're going to ask for partnership on the farm you'd better be aware of the complexities of that business. And so I think the more education the farm wife has the better," says Pedersen. She adds, "It used to be that you just needed a strong back and hard-working hands. It's not that way at all anymore."

*Linda Z. Schulz is an editorial assistant for Canadian Ethnic Studies at the University of Calgary.*



*Betty Pederson*

*Leda Jensen photos by Susanne Rhyason*



## Old Bear February 2nd

*One night half-moon smoky  
when aurora was doing her arabesque,  
a flare went up to mark the end of winter*

*galoshes wilted; thermometers jogged in retreat  
and then the wind got up  
and talked in Cree to old Chinook  
explaining that when old Bear exited  
and saw his shadow  
the bargain was that he would reign  
despite hiatuses of spring*

*Reluctantly we knuckled under,  
white-lipped, to the polar imperative  
cursed the shovel and the snowbank  
while waiting for winter to release us  
from his freezing claws*

*by Diane McLaren*

*Diane McLaren lives in a renovated grain elevator in Castor, Alberta, and is a teacher of French and English. She has an undergraduate degree and M.A. in French from the University of Windsor. She has taught in a variety of rural and urban*

*schools since 1960 and worked as an executive assistant at CIDA in Ottawa a few years ago. Her poetry has appeared in Quarry, Dalhousie Review, Stuffed Crocodile and other magazines.*



# The Evolution of the Women's Movement in Canada.

**Canada's moderate, fairly unified women's movement has contributed little to feminist theory, but has been as successful as movements elsewhere in seeing the demands of women progressively met.**

by Lynn McDonald

## The First of Two Parts

The distinguishing features of the Canadian women's movement and the advantages and disadvantages of these features can best be seen by comparing the Canadian movement with others. What follows is my impression of our women's movement, based on comparisons with the women's movements of four other countries: Britain, France, Germany and Russia. In the next issue of *Branching Out* I will describe the evolution of feminism in these four countries and draw some further comparisons with the Canadian situation.

The distinctive characteristics of the Canadian women's movement, for better or for worse, I take to include, first, a *political position slightly left of centre*, progressive/reformist, revolutionary in certain respects, but with little questioning of capitalistic institutions. European movements, on the other hand, have typically been divided into conservative and radical wings, the conservative being further to the right than Canadian groups, and the radical further to the left. The same holds, although with qualifications, for the American situation.

Second there is in our women's movement, *solidarity across class lines*, and, to a lesser extent, across ethnic and religious barriers. European women's organizations, by contrast, have sometimes fought each other as much as the prejudices and practices that kept them down. The backlash 'femininity' movement in the United States has no Canadian counterpart.

Finally, there is a *commitment to the ordinary political process*, public education and persuasion of politicians

and parties within the system; conversely, avoidance of partisan politics and radical political theory. Here the contrast is strongest with certain European movements, where theory on the oppression of women was developed as part of overall socialist theory. We have not had women's parties in Canada.

On the question of basic political position I believe that the women's movement in Canada has been remarkably progressive. It has not been inordinately concerned with the demands of middle class women, but neither has it gone so far as to challenge such basic institutions as private property. The roots of the Canadian women's movement go back to turn-of-the-century reform work. Many of the important suffrage leaders had been involved in reform movements, turning to the vote as they discovered politicians declining to act on their proposals. One of Nellie McClung's first political acts, for example, was to take the premier of Manitoba on a tour of Winnipeg sweat shops.

I wish to argue as well, that the movement has remained a progressive force. It has been more radical in its criticism of social institutions, and less hide-bound in its espousal of remedies than would be expected given the social class distribution of its adherents. As a consequence, there has never been a revolutionary women's movement in Canada (as opposed to a few small radical groups) as there was in Germany and Russia. The reformist position has largely meant advocating greater state intervention (short of state ownership of the means of production) by way of pro-

ductive legislation, equal pay, and the creation of a broad range of social services for families and individual working women.

The issue of equal pay for work of equal value provides an excellent example on both the points of a progressive position and solidarity across class lines.

It was labour which devised the concept of 'equal pay for work of equal value', to replace the older 'equal pay for equal work'. This latter working means effectively equal pay for the 'same job' or, variously, 'substantially the same', or 'substantially similar' work. The difference in wordings is not idle semantics, but has rather serious social class implications.

'Equal pay for equal work' gives adequate protection for those in the professions and the better middle-class jobs, where women do, in fact, substantially the same work as men. Or, if they do not, there is no physical barrier to their moving into such 'men's' jobs. The situation is entirely different for working class women. In manual jobs, and the lower-paid white collar jobs (for example, typists) women seldom have the *same* jobs as men. They may have highly skilled and onerous jobs but, since they are not the same, the women remain unprotected. Labour was first to recognize the problem, eventually obtaining recognition for the 'equal value' approach in United Nations' Convention 100 to 1951. The point is that in Canada middle-class women's groups have taken up the cause. Acceptance of Convention 100 was a recommendation of the middle-class, and government-appointed, Royal



Commission on the Status of Women. The issue is a priority concern of the National Action Committee, the federation of organizations concerned with women's rights. It has been supported by such other organizations as the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women and the Nova Scotia Women's Action Committee as well as by unions. The second president of the National Action Committee was a labour organizer, Grace Hartman, while the first was an upper middle-class housewife, Laura Sabia.

Interestingly, the closest any Canadian province has come to implementing the broader 'equal value' approach has been Quebec, which also has the most pro-labour legislation. Quebec's wording is of 'equal pay for equivalent work', but is clearly directed to the Convention 100 meaning. The Quebec Human Rights Commission has already processed claims which the old "same job" provisions would not have covered. The federal government, in 1977, passed the 'equal pay for work of equal value' wording, but it is not yet clear how comprehensive the application will be.

Other provincial governments have tried to entice women's groups away from the 'equal pay for work of equal value' issue, offering in its place an import from the United States, 'affirmative action'. So far they have not succeeded, any more than has affirmative action, even in the United States, where monetary sanctions are much stiffer than what is envisioned for Canada. Under an affirmative action program an employer devises a plan with quotas or goals for the employment of women at various levels. A few well educated women may attain vice-presidencies, as a result, and consulting firms, often women's, collect fees for devising plans. But the scheme has not affected wage levels or job opportunities for the mass of women workers, nor does it seem likely to. Women's groups in Canada have opposed it for precisely this reason. It is clearly inimical to the tradition of inter-class solidarity.

I do not know of any country where cross-class solidarity is this well developed, despite the fact that the inadequacy of the old 'equal pay for equal work' approach is well known. Further, the problems of the old wording obviously appeared earlier in countries which industrialized before Canada. German women socialists, for example, pointed out the limitations of 'equal pay for equal work' in the late nineteenth century, arguing for 'equal pay for equivalent efficiency' or 'use-value' as the alternative. The criteria for assessing equivalence were almost identical with the present

skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions: 'ability, responsibility, efficiency and environmental factors'. This, however, seems not to have been taken up by bourgeois groups although they did, later, come out in favor of 'equal pay for equal work'. It was a German proletarian and socialist, August Bebel, who argued for a measure of inter-class collaboration among women, in *Woman Under Socialism*, first published in 1883. While he held that women workers would have also to struggle with their men fellow workers, there were many issues on which all women could join — 'although marching separately', to 'strike jointly'. German women, however, have shown themselves much less keen to take this advice than Canadian. In the United States the focus is still on 'affirmative action', which can never be as effective for working-class women as middle-class.

As an early Canadian example of cross-class solidarity consider the case of B.C. suffrage societies. In B.C. there was a separate working women's suffrage group, with its own publication. On petitions and delegations to the government, however, it joined forces with the middle-class groups. These middle-class organizations, for their part, gave support to the labour group on issues of concern to working-class women. The University Women's Club notably gave the working women much needed broad community support. At this same period, pre-World War I, middle and working-class organizations in Germany and Russia were actively denouncing each other. In Britain there was not such overt hostility, but co-operation across class lines was uneasy.

In Canada women's organizations have been content to confine their tactics to use of the ordinary political process: the persuasion of politicians to adopt measures favourable to women, the threat of negative public opinion if they fail to do so and, ultimately, loss of votes. The actual mechanisms have been speaking campaigns, petitions, and letter writing. The public is given the facts, along with the politicians; the women's positions are well-documented, presented with good will, and often with good humour.

There have been a lot of briefs in Canada, but remarkably little *theory*. Theory is implicit, of course: adjustments of existing institutions to make them work better. Canadian women have not so far used 'militant' methods, either in the sense of tactics that are illegal, or even shocking. So far they have not had to, in that they have seen their demands progressively being met. Women got the vote in Canada, except for Quebec, with much less struggle than in Britain, the

United States, France, Germany or most anywhere.

The position of the political parties on suffrage in Canada has received very little attention, possibly because there is no obvious pattern predictable on the basis of ideology. Cleverdon's *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* provides the basic data — the source for the discussion here — but without much comment. Liberal governments 'gave' women the vote in the first four provinces it was attained: Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. In the case of Manitoba and British Columbia the promise was made while the party was in opposition. In both cases the liberals were seeking popular new issues with which to oust long-entrenched Conservative governments. Women suffragists worked openly in the election campaigns and were given much of the credit for defeating the government. In Alberta and Saskatchewan the rising farm organizations put pressure on their Liberal governments. The United Farmers of Alberta only a few years later actually replaced the Liberals as the government. When first approached about suffrage the Liberals had declined, but left the door open. They were won over with relatively easy campaigns. The record indicates opportunism rather than small 'l' liberalism. It was through Liberal governments also in the three Maritime provinces that women, a little later, obtained the vote. In the case of Nova Scotia, the Liberals had earlier refused, while the Conservatives, albeit as late converts, had come around to support suffrage. In New Brunswick a minority Liberal government accorded the vote, in 1919, after Conservative and Liberal governments alike had turned it down, repeatedly, and with ill grace. In Prince Edward Island suffrage was granted in 1922 with little fuss. The Liberals had incorporated it into its platform in 1919, but it took several years before there was sufficient demand from the women (this organized by the Liberal Women's Association) for them to legislate it. It was the Liberals also who gave women the vote in Quebec, in 1940. Previous Liberal administrators had refused women's enfranchisement as late as 1935. Defeated in 1936 by Duplessis' Union Nationale, the Liberals underwent a change of heart while in opposition. Apparently pressure from federal Liberals was instrumental in the conversion.

Where Conservatives conceded the vote, expedience again seems to have been more of a factor than commitment to an ideological principle. In Ontario the Conservatives had vigorously opposed woman suffrage up until the beginning of 1917. When the Liberals put the vote formally on their platform early in 1917





### The use of ordinary political process

Above, the Grain Growers' Guide, 1913, satirizes government attitude to suffragists. In the prairie provinces the suffrage movement enjoyed official endorsement from powerful farm organizations and had a voice in this influential publication. At left, women of the Village of Unity, Saskatchewan petition the government for full franchise for women. It was granted in 1916.

the Conservatives changed their minds, rushing a bill through in March and April. The Ontario Liberals had been supporting private members' bills on suffrage fairly consistently since 1912. The Liberal leader N.W. Rowell was himself a committed suffragist, and later was the lawyer for the women on the Senate 'persons' case. Pressure from the federal Conservatives seems to have been the reason for the provincial government's reversal. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, was then preparing the Conscription and Wartime Election Bills, and presumably saw in the predominantly British women of Ontario potential supporters. (He was right.) Borden had earlier been a staunch opponent of suffrage, as had the Liberal Opposition Leader, Sir Wilfred Laurier. Both changed their minds in the course of the war. The Liberals actually made suffrage a plank in their platform, but only shortly before the Conservatives legislated it. Borden's Wartime Elections Act, despite his unconditional promise, gave the vote

only to women with close relatives in the Armed Forces. Full enfranchisement was not passed until after the 1917 election, which, with their carefully chosen electorate, the Conservatives won. Finally, it was the Conservatives who legislated woman suffrage in Newfoundland, in 1924, when it was not yet a part of Canada. The preceding Liberal government had voted it down.

There is a lack of a clear-cut ideological pattern when other aspects of suffrage are considered. In the early years the strongest supporters of woman suffrage were neither Liberals nor Conservatives but Socialists, whose introduction of private members' bills in British Columbia and Ontario was important. The first politician of the major parties to take up the cause was a Conservative, Sir John A. MacDonald. The franchise bills he introduced in 1883, 1884 and 1885 would have allowed unmarried women meeting the property qualification to vote. Apparently Sir John A. MacDonald viewed the vote as a prerequisite of

## TO THE GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATURE OF THE PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN

Gentlemen:—

We, whose names are hereto subscribed, being British subjects of the full age of twenty-one years, and having lived in the Province of Saskatchewan one year, or will have so lived by December 1, 1914, and would be by the first of December, 1916, entitled to vote at the Provincial elections but for the fact that we are women, hereby humbly present your honorable body, that it will at the next session of the Saskatchewan Legislature introduce and pass into law a bill granting the full franchise to women upon the same terms as those upon which it is granted to men.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray,

No.	Name.	Address.	Date.	Witness.
1	Jessie Voshen	Unity	Sept 1	Mr. J. Voshen
2	Jessie Voshen	Unity	Sept 1	Jessie Voshen
3	Jessie Voshen	Unity	Sept 1	Jessie Voshen
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49	Jessie Voshen	Unity	Sept 1	Jessie Voshen
50	Jessie Voshen	Unity	Sept 1	Jessie Voshen

archives of Saskatchewan

I, *Jessie Voshen*, do hereby declare that I am personally present, and did see the persons whose names are above set out, and I certify that each of them is of the full age of twenty-one years, and possesses the other qualifications above set out.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it is of the same force and effect as if made oath and by virtue of "The Canada Evidence Act."

Signed in her presence at *Unity* on the *1st* day of *Sept* 1914.

*Jessie Voshen*  
Witness  
*H. Hamilton*  
COMMISSIONER OF JUSTICE OF PEACE.

property, so that the sex of the owner was irrelevant. The clause on women's suffrage was not, however, made a party issue, so that Conservatives were free to vote against it, which they did. When the extent of opposition became clear Sir John A. himself deleted the offending clause.

A comparison with suffrage in Britain is dramatic, and is particularly instructive. Suffrage societies date from the 1860's in England, while the vote was not obtained until 1918 for women 30 and over, and not until 1928 for those 21 to 30, or the same age as for men. In the first few decades efforts were directed to having private members' bills introduced into the House of Commons, but these, even when majorities were attained, were not given time for third reading. By the first decade of the twentieth century there was massive public support for the vote. Governments (Liberal) continued to refuse time for suffrage bills, and even reneged on compromises they had agreed to (for partial enfranchisement), as late



as 1911 and 1912. The move to militant tactics must be seen in the light of this tremendous frustration. The reaction of the authorities was brutal suppression: imprisonment of suffrage leaders, forced feeding of hunger strikers (the women were denied the status of 'political prisoners'), temporary release (to avoid the embarrassment of respectable women dying in gaol), and subsequent re-arrest on recovery. The Women's Social and Political Union, the main militant organization, had to go underground, and effectively abandon work on building a mass organization. WSPU leaders became secretive, elitist and embittered. When the vote was obtained, shortly before the end of the war, suffrage leaders were grateful not to have to take up the cause again. None of the British suffrage leaders were elected to Parliament. The WSPU turned itself into the Woman's Party in 1918, but disbanded after its unsuccessful showing in the election.

In Canada, by contrast, some suffrage leaders were elected to legislatures, (notably Nellie McClung), and others attained such appointed positions as judgeships (Emily Murphy, the first woman judge in the British Empire, and Helen Gregory MacGill). McClung was able to work with the second woman Cabinet minister of the British Empire, Irene Parlby, herself a leading organizer of the United Farm Women of Alberta, one of the groups to work for suffrage. The first woman Cabinet Minister in Canada was Mary Ellen Smith, who had run initially as an independent, uncontested by the Liberals, on a strong reform platform. Smith's success made reform measures safe for the Liberals who then proceeded to legislate much of her platform. Women did actually see progressive legislation passed, notably in Alberta and British Columbia. This included the first mothers' allowances, minimum wage, limitations on hours of work, safety standards, the rights for women to control their own property, and equal custody rights.

It is clear, though, that many women did not like party politics. Irene Parlby was a practical, direct woman who felt awkward even in as loose a party alignment as the United Farmers of Alberta. Nellie McClung was able to work with great enthusiasm for the Liberals to defeat a Conservative government which denied women the vote. Yet as an elected Liberal member she resented party discipline. Mary Ellen Smith was unhappy as a Liberal in British Columbia, even with personal recognition in a Cabinet post, and the fact of many of her proposals being adopted. Political parties in Canada generally, and the Liberal and Conservative particularly, have little ideological coher-

photo from the Glenbow Museum Archives



**British suffrage leader Emmeline Pankhurst (left) with Nellie McClung in Edmonton during the prohibition campaign in 1916.**

*British suffrage leaders turned to militant tactics in the face of continued government stubbornness and after the vote was obtained, none were elected to parliament. In Canada the fight for suffrage was not nearly so bitter and McClung was one of several suffrage leaders who gained a legislative seat.*

**Below Suffrage cartoon from the Grain Growers' Guide, September 21, 1910.**



archives of Saskatchewan

**The Door Steadily Opens**



ence compared with parties in other countries. Women activists have typically entered politics with well worked out objectives, fitting no party. The necessity of supporting one's party right or wrong must accordingly rankle. Further, there has been almost no opportunity for sheer self-interest to have encouraged party loyalty, for women have been almost entirely excluded from the rewards held out for men: government contracts, and appointments to the bench, Senate, boards and commissions. These features of party politics may well help to explain the low participation of women in elected politics.

In Canada, after the vote was obtained, women turned to other tasks: the realization of personal goals (higher education, and entrance to the newly opening professions) and, at the collective level, organization building. Women's organizations were not explicitly feminist in outlook, but stood generally for a better status and role for women in education, business and the professions, as farm wives and mothers of families. They gave scholarships to women students, and defended the women pioneers in their various difficulties as the first woman geologist or whatever. They were only minimally concerned in this period with *rights* for women, but the women's movement has historically been more concerned with duties than rights. The question of eligibility for the Senate, decided in 1929, was the main rights issue for English-speaking Canada. In Quebec, of course, rights remained an issue into the 1940's. Few concessions there were made gracefully, but women had to fight in turn for the vote, for representation on school boards, and the right to enter the various professions. The continuities between the old and new movements are most obvious for Quebec, where the gap was the shortest. Only 26 years separate the granting of the provincial vote in 1940 and the re-emergence of the rights movement, which can be dated with the founding of the Federation des Femmes du Quebec in 1966. The federation, a grouping of major women's groups grew out of the meetings held by the suffrage leaders marking the anniversaries of attainment of the vote. Therese Casgrain was the main organizer of both, and the featured speaker of the founding meeting was Claire Kirkland-Casgrain.

What is important is that when the need for action became evident, in the 1960's, the organizations were relatively well prepared for it. It should perhaps be stressed here that the setback women incurred after World War II was not as great as popularly believed. Day-care centres were closed down, married women in the civil service lost jobs, and other injustices were committed. The

Therese Casgrain



setbacks in the labour force, however, were brief. The clerical and service sectors grew immensely in the post-war period, so that the proportion of women in the paid labour force was greater in 1951 than it had been in the war. The 1950's were the real disaster period for women. Overall labour force participation increased, but women's share in the professions and higher education declined. Women had to go out to work, increasingly, as the sole earners of their families. By the 1960's it was obvious that few women could depend on being supported in their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Then, despite all the rhetoric of equality, they found themselves confined to the lowest-paid categories of clerical and service work and, in manual jobs, to the unskilled sector. The protection women had earlier enjoyed in the 'women's professions' disappeared, as men increasingly became teachers, librarians and social workers, quickly rising to the top in those professions. The contradictions became obvious, and the 1960's was the time to voice them.

The main impetus for the revival of the women's movement came from the mainstream women's organizations, such as the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Federation des Femmes du Quebec, the Young Women's Christian Association and the Voice of Women. There were radical feminist groups in Canada in the 1960's as well, but these were small, and not so successfully vocal as their counterparts elsewhere, notably in France and the United States. Many of them did not survive into the 1970's, so it is particularly difficult to evaluate their effects. When the Royal Commission on the Status of

Women held hearings across the country, in 1968, it was mainly women in their forties and fifties who attended. Again there was little theorizing, but these women spoke of their experience of unequal pay, difficulties with divorce laws, child care provisions and so forth.

The characteristic tactics at this stage were again persuasion, public education and meetings. In true Canadian fashion, there was a Royal Commission, the result of pressure by the mainstream groups, led by Laura Sabia, president of the Canadian Federation of University Women. The Royal Commission turned out itself to be a significant mover of events, a result no one, least of all Lester Pearson, who established it, expected. The Commission created its own supporters, who then organized to press for implementation of its recommendations, again through these same mainstream women's organizations and provincial-level 'action committees'. The national federation (the National Action Committee on the Status of Women or NAC) includes the most committed feminists, abortion groups, the mainstream women's organizations, and such superficially unfeminist groups as the IODE. In sharp contrast with women's federations in other countries it also has unions. It has its problems (and one group, the Catholic Women's League, left) but probably in no other country is there as much harmony across such a diverse range of interests and styles.

If the strength of the Canadian women's movement has been its organizations, its weakness has been in theory. Canadian organizations produce excellent briefs, with analyses of particular problems, and detailed recommendations for change. In this I do not believe it is surpassed anywhere. But there has been nothing comparable to de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in Canada. Historically, the writings of Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung are no match for those of Clara Zetkin (Germany), Alexandra Kollontai (Russia), John Stuart Mill (England), or Flora Tristan (France). Nevertheless, the Canadian women's movement has been no less successful than those of these other countries. An elaborate theoretical perspective is not necessarily better than a simpler, implicit one, nor necessarily more likely to be put into practice.

*Exactly how Canada compares with these other countries in organizations, ideology and achievement will be the subject of an article in the next issue.*

*Lynn McDonald is a sociologist now writing a book on the methodology of social science. She lives in Toronto and is a member of the executive of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.*



## CUTBACKS IN UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS: A POLICY OF DISCRIMINATION?

Feminist organizations across Canada are protesting Bill C-14 which proposes cutbacks in unemployment insurance benefits and training programs. The proposed amendments would make benefits less available to part-time high-risk workers, the greatest percentage of whom are women. Maureen O'Neil, the newly appointed co-ordinator of the federal Status of Women office, is concerned that the Bill reflects the mood of society that women are working for fun and luxuries and do not need jobs.

The Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women expressed in its brief to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, serious concern with the provisions of Bill C-14 which would deny benefits to anyone working less than 20 hours per week. A considerably larger percentage of women work part-time. Contrary to the opinion expressed by the Federal Review, women are not consciously abusing the system. The Council quotes statistics from the 1978 Labour Force Survey which show the majority of women work part-time, "because of personal or family responsibilities, because they were attending school or because they could only find part-time work." The Council cites this Bill as discriminating against two classes of workers — young women just entering the labour force and older women attempting to re-enter the labour force.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis, a Federal NDP women's organizer, views the cutbacks as a policy aimed at forcing women to leave the work place and return to the home. This, she expressed, is indirectly being enforced by the move to deny benefits to those workers who cannot find long-term employment. "Women", she states, "the last hired and the first fired, will be hurt more than any other group in Canadian society by these changes". She bases her concern on the 1977 government review of the Unemployment Insurance Program which stated "women misuse the UI programme through non-availability and refusal to work and . . . secondary earners generated unexpected increases in UI benefit expenditures".

According to Ms. Wasylycia-Leis, the new regulations will not only reduce training allowances but also prevent their availability to anyone collecting UI benefits. In her opinion single parent mothers will, under this new policy, be denied the opportunity to upgrade because of transportation and child care

costs. "This provision specifically deprives women of employment opportunities and, therefore, appears to contravene the Canadian Human Rights Act."

In this vein, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women has called for special job creation programs for women workers, continuance of UI benefits to women participating in these programs and an assurance that married women not be excluded from compensa-

tion.

Bill C-14 clearly seems to be taking a regressive step in improving the status of women in Canada. Fifty years after being declared persons, women are being told to take a back seat. To quote Ms. O'Neil "To say that the economy can't absorb women is ludicrous". I would like to suggest that it is also blatant discrimination.

by Linda Duncan

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### In Vancouver . . .

*These two important new mini-festivals occurred within a month and seemingly without knowledge of each other. Made up totally of films by and principally about women, the impetus for both was to provide a vehicle for the filmmakers to exhibit and discuss their work with a select, ideologically partial audience – again, almost exclusively of women. Despite a widely shared feminist predisposition, emphasis and approach varied distinctly from West to East; and as the following reports indicate, resulted in two very different events.*

JM/Editor

### WOMEN IN FOCUS

by Sara Berger

"As producers of the visual images we see, we have until recently been non-existent. As subjects of video and film our lives have been mainly reduced to images of passivity and powerlessness that do not represent our experiences in the world.

"Therefore it is necessary for us to take control of the process of production that reflects and forms the visual images that present our lives and actions . . . The purpose of the festival is to show women-produced films and video and other works of art that represent strong images of women in their day-to-day life and fantasies, that begin from a feminist consciousness, ie. that women are a political class and that this political class is repressed." (Quoted from brochure soliciting media submissions).

With this philosophy as a foundation, the Vancouver Women's Video and Film Festival (September, 1978) presented a variety of works that not only reflected women's real experiences, but sparked intense discussion among a diverse group of feminists.

Part of the credit must go to festival co-ordinators, "Women in Focus," for organizing more than just a marathon viewing of tapes and films. They divided the festival into five thematic sessions: Motherhood and Marriage; Legal, Health and Violence against Women; Alternatives; The Women's Movement; and Changing Relationships between Women. They then allowed time after each session for an audience-panel discussion dealing with issues presented in the productions — like madness, health, lesbianism and work.

The panels gave impetus to the discussions because they were composed of the film and video producers themselves (from California to Quebec), along with feminist activists from various organizations in Vancouver. These people were accessible and open, committed to sharing their experiences and supporting other women in their attempts at self-expression through media.

Apropos their philosophy of feminist control, the festival organizers were extremely sensitive to the viewing environment. In every room they set up displays of women's art, from paper mache sculpture to photographs to weavings. I particularly liked the hangings in which artist Jean Kamins skillfully sewed pieces of old material into scenes depicting our everyday lives: a welfare mother waiting by a bus, a woman in a big flowered dress taking a pie out of the oven.

My favourites, though, were about 25 larger-than-life stuffed cloth figures of women — all ages and races — created by a group of people in the art committee. Some sat with the audience in the film room, one in a wheelchair with a camera slung around her neck. Another played the piano in the video room. One spliced film by the panel and one shot a video camera at the entrance. They all had big, happy, attentive faces. A member of the art committee Elizabeth Shefrin said, "We thought it would be nice to have people here when women arrived. We wanted to make them feel comfortable. The figures represent as many different types of women as might be coming to the festival."

"Women in Focus" has also given



some thought to the environment of the video and film screening rooms. The arrangements in each reflected the difference in nature between the two media.

Set up in the centre of both video rooms were four monitors arranged in a circle facing outwards, so that we could watch the program from all sides of the room. The floors were covered in gym mats and cushions. The film room had a large screen at the front and rows of chairs for an audience.

Video — an intimate, informal medium — is smaller than life, so you sit close to the screen and it addresses just you. Because it's closed circuit, it is different from T.V. The viewer can control what she sees by simply choosing the tape she wants to play. There is no indiscriminate barrage of programs and commercials by a profit-oriented T.V. station. The use of video makes a lot of difference to the producer, too, because it's portable, flexible and cheap. She can take a portapac that immediately records sound and image, tape an event and play it back. And shooting can be as informal as desired with a crew of one. Because equipment and crew can be kept at a minimum, it's also a lot less intimidating to the people being taped.

Form dictates function. Because videotapes are cheap relative to the high cost of film stock (\$25 to \$30 per half hour tape) and easy to copy, they can be widely distributed and used for a variety of purposes: e.g. for organizing people, as training aids, to capture history in the making (demonstrations and conferences) or as springboard for discussions.

On the other hand film is larger than life and can have video. Because of its flexibility in manipulating light and colour, film has greater scope for producing more dramatic and aesthetic images. However, it is much less a grass roots medium than video. Extremely expensive to produce and distribute, it's also technically more formal, requiring complex lighting, separate sound recording, more planning and a bigger crew.

I was drawn more to the video entries than to the films during the festival. This might have been because many of the films were National Film Board productions, some of which I'd seen before, but also because the videotapes related to me more personally and hence were more absorbing.

"Take Her She's Mad" (Marta Segovia Ashley, Femedia), for example, is a gripping drama about a middle-aged woman in a mental institution. She sits in a barren room waiting for a visit from her husband. Her monologue is a cry against the kind of womanhood society has imposed on her. Through her monologue

— one of anger, bitterness, but also humour — we learn how her husband and society have slowly eroded her sense of self. The psychological destruction she has endured divides her identity into two warring selves — one passive, obedient, socialized; the other raging, bitchy, irreverent. It's the latter that's resulted in her being put away. "Henry Miller says 'fuck' and he's applauded. I say it and I'm called neurotic, maladjusted."

When we become old, she says, we become "used up cunts." But when she looks in the mirror at her own aging, she sees how a woman's lines can be beautiful: "They are the lines of your life, your joy, your sorrow." The camerawork is simple but sensitive, playing from different angles on the

face by a male photographer while she was covering a woman's liberation demonstration.

When Barbara begins to talk about her pleasure wrinkles, the video image becomes lyrical. Her face and body turn into a negative image of her silhouette and filmed or photographed images move within the outlines illustrating the things she's telling us. It's an incredible effect. Most moving is the film scenario of laughing, nude women dancing in a field, still within the silhouette of Barbara's body. She points out various women she's loved and the wrinkles of concern and happiness they've given her.

"Marianne and Moya" (Liz Mersky, Ohio Local Vision Woman's Sexuality Collective, 1977) is a fine portrayal of



actress's expressive face.

Barbara Hammer's production, "Stress Scars and Pleasure Wrinkles" (Berkley, California, 1977) was one of the most appealing tapes at the festival with its incorporation of whimsy, optimism and self-love. Basically the tape is Barbara, in a double image on the screen, telling about the scars and wrinkles life has imprinted on her face. She's probably approaching forty, but her mischievous face, with almond-shaped eyes and cropped hair, was ageless — brimful of humour and delight in life. She talks to us somewhat in the style of Lily Tomlin — matter of factly: like the time she mounted a horse while smoking a cigarette and jumping on the horse, "I tossed my cigarette on the horse and threw myself away."

As we learn about Barbara's scars, we also discover something about her life: from the still of her high-school prom where she's impeccably and fashionably swathed in off-the-shoulder chiffon, to her motorcycle accident in Afghanistan, to being smashed in the

a lesbian relationship. Producer Liz Mersky said the tape was created specifically to trigger discussion in workshops on sexuality. She interviewed women in the context of their daily routines, showing them together, apart, discussing their kids, their work. The women talk to the people behind the camera — they laugh, joke and admit their self-consciousness. There is a particularly funny scene of a woman in the kitchen of a small restaurant. She's nervously charging around looking for a pot. Behind the camera, the interviewer asks her rather delicately if her co-workers know she's gay. She hesitates, then yells out, "Hey, Ellen, did you know I was gay?" There is a distant "yes" and the woman looks directly into the camera and says with a straight face, "I guess they do." As an educational tool the tape is excellent because its very openness counters the somewhat titillating, underground images society perpetuates about homosexuality.

"C'est Pas Ma Tete Comme Mon Corps" (Diane Heffernan, Suzanne



Virtu, Réseau Video De Femmes, 1978) is an absorbing documentary about four women — two strippers, a go-go dancer and a topless waitress. The interviews take place in their homes and are interspersed with scenes of the stage acts some of them perform, one actually taped live. The tape also incorporates marvellous film clips from the '20s and '30s, one of a hawker selling tickets to a burlesque show, another of a curvaceous blonde giving a sample of what's to come and the male audience bug-eyed in anticipation.

The tape had integrity because the producers took the women and their professions seriously. There was no sense of judgement. In essence it was the women's own show. They were free to



discuss why they stripped and how they felt about themselves and the men who paid to watch them. They felt little else but bitterness and contempt for the men who came to ogle: "Men are stupid, obsessed . . . they do not have much in their heads."

Hefferman said the production had a profound effect on these women. Two quit the business altogether and one found it very difficult going back. The topless waitress also had compunctions about her job: "I don't like the sale of alcohol as the basis of my salary. People aren't friendly these days. You feel like a cunt; it's not a good feeling." Why did the women do this kind of work? "Survival. When you're up to your neck in debts, you need the money." By the end of the tape the waitress had also quit. She had paid her debts and was now a member of an artisan co-op. "I'm putting my energy into wood, not prostitution."

The stripping sequences were an interesting contrast to the interviews. The dancing was erotic and provocative,

a little confusing to the viewing feminists. Hefferman explained why these sequences were included: "At one point all the women talked about was their dancing. It was their work. They loved to dance. At first we weren't going to have scenes of the women naked, because the videotape wasn't going to be just for women. But as we were producing it, it became more and more undressed. And we realized we could only show it to women."

However, according to Virtu, "A lot of women who watch the tape take a distance from it. Especially professional women. They can't identify with it. We're trying to show that we're no different from the stripper in the compromises we make in society. By



talking with a stripper we were trying to show that they are just like you and I, that it's not what you've done but who you are that counts. It's to make women understand that the basis for women to survive is their bodies."

The tapes produced by the festival organizers, "Women in Focus", dealt with women and events in "herstory". Although well-researched, some tended to be too print-oriented and academic, relying heavily on narration in the studio without enough visuals to communicate the content. The best of them was "Fashion as Social Control" (1976), a documentary about how clothing throughout the last four centuries has mutilated and deformed women's bodies. The narration, accompanied by good graphics and photographs, was light and witty, but the message serious. Not only have the stays and ties that produced 17 inch waists ruined the body, but they've affected women's behaviour, making them passive, docile and flighty. Fainting fits were very feminine and women fainted in droves but mostly because

they were unable to breath properly.

Fashion in the earlier centuries was the prerogative of the upper classes but today restrictive fashion affects everybody. High heels, girdles, tight jeans all restrict movement. As someone in the panel said, "You can't do much if you don't move. It's easier for someone to rape or beat you." But, concluded someone else, "It's one area where we can cease to co-operate in oppressing ourselves!"

"First National Lesbian Conference" (Vulva Video, 1973), an example of on-the-spot video coverage, was exciting because it captured the passion and intensity of various battles as they erupted during the conference. For instance, a man who has undergone a sex-change operation created a tremendous controversy by being allowed to speak at one session. The camera is there when irate lesbian mothers march out of the conference complaining that it is neither meeting their needs nor their children's. As can be expected the film had technical flaws (not enough lighting in places, uneven hand-held camera work), but because of its immediacy, it was more refreshing and interesting than some of the other planned documentaries.

The videotapes that worked best at the festival, no matter what the content, were those that were the most creative, usually in terms of dramatization, or on-location action shots. The works that relied on "talking heads" (long narration on-camera or close-ups of women being interviewed) tended to bore after five or ten minutes. Nevertheless, the unevenness of the productions was valuable for the purposes of comparison and learning workable techniques of communication.

Of the films, those that conveyed the personal expression of the filmmaker or the ones in which the subjects had some involvement with the production appealed most. In the latter case the resulting production was less "objective" and formal, but was more successful in conveying the integrity of the subject. I'm a little wary of documentary film-makers who impose their ideas on their subjects without spending considerable time with them or accepting their influence in the direction the film takes.

The people in "Healthcare from our End of the Speculum" (Jane Warrenbrand and Denise Bostrom, Women-Made Movies, 1977), for example, had a great deal of interest in having a film made of them because of their strong feelings about feminist health care. The film's focus was the concept of the self-help clinic and the struggle women had in areas such as inadequate contraception, over-prescription of





*Soft sculptures by Persimmon Blackridge and Elizabeth Sheffrin. Photo this page, detail from photo by Catherine Brunelle. All other festival photos by Marion Barling. Prints by Penny Arrand.*

*Sara Berger has done freelance work for the National Film Board in Winnipeg and wrote the film script for Louis Riel and the Battle of Batoche. She now lives in Edmonton and is doing research and editing for Athabasca University.*

drugs, abuse from male doctors, use of paramedics, community outreach and consumer control of healthcare.

Some of the film centred on a discussion between a female gynecologist and her daughter. In one scene the mother does a vaginal self-examination, very matter-of-factly. Talking about her vaginal mucous, she sniffs her finger, saying, "You can smell it," but then laughingly admits she hasn't reached the point of tasting it. The film ends with women from the clinic singing a rousing song with the refrain "We stand here freer and stronger. We refuse to suffer any longer." In the panel discussion, the film was touted as a positive reaction of women to their oppression. Feminist psychologist Sara David said that for women to be healthy they had to get into their own anger. "I am struck by how much depression is turned inward, how we, the victims, are blamed for what happens to us."

"Anastasia, Oh Ma Cherie" (Paule Baillargeon, 1978) was perhaps the most controversial film at the festival. It is a dramatic vignette of a young woman who spends her time happily locked in her room surrounded by the things she loves, like her pet bird, and whimsical decorations she has strung on the walls and ceiling. However, her frustrated husband soon sends the police in to get her out. There is a "rape" scene in which the two bumbling cops do nothing but dress her. They do it so clumsily, though, and with such insulting forcefulness that we feel she is being violated the whole time.

From there she is driven to a psychiatrist who turns out to be a complete nut and who nervously rattles on at her about how badly he needs a holiday. Throughout the entire film Anastasia says not a word. Women in the audience were perplexed about this. Some took the silence as passivity, acquiescence. The producer of the film, Paule Baillargeon, said each time Anastasia was being attacked, she wanted her to talk. "But somehow words were never as strong as her silence."

Barbara Hammer's films were as artistically exciting and as personally expressive as her videotape, but more surreal, coming "from her gut." "Psychosynthesis" (1975) is, according to Hammer, "a product of her sessions with a Lesbian feminist therapist who opened a door in her mind." Hammer describes the film as "a multi-layered collage poem of the artist's sub-personalities of baby, athlete, witch and energy or creative spirit." I especially liked the effects created by the double exposures — "vulvic" images throbbing to the soundtrack of a heartbeat.

Throughout the festival, it became

clear from what the film-makers stressed that their struggles reflected those of all feminists. In order to produce most of the independent films and videotapes shown at the festival, these women had to scrounge, beg, borrow and steal. Paule Baillargeon, for instance, dreamt up her movie "Anastasia", one night in five minutes. An actress without means, she managed to complete it using borrowed NFB equipment, but was unable to pay her crew or actors. The underground film distributors that Barbara Hammer had been using folded, so now she does her own distribution under the name of Goddess Films.

As Toronto film-maker Barbara Martineau pointed out in her presentation on the history of women and film, "We can't ignore the brutal reality of the commodity nature of film." Feminist film-makers have little access to the means of production — to the capital and expensive equipment it takes to make a film and to the markets dominated by monopolistic distribution companies. For a film-maker to sell her work she has to prove herself commercially or aesthetically by arbitrary standards. This usually means producing a film that reinforces the status quo.

These are themes that seem to re-emerge continually in the feminist context. What has changed is that now many women film-makers have the technical training and expertise, but ironically there's no funding now that International Women's Year is over and done with and the golden age of grants is ending.

Some women in the panel discussion said we can't expect the system to support radical ideas, to pay for the revolution. We have to prostitute our integrity in order to survive. We can only expect to work with women's groups on our own time. On a more optimistic note it was emphasized how women, by working collectively sharing skills and resources, can help each other produce films.

If I learned anything at the festival, it's that video and film, as communicating media, are crucial to feminist self-expression. We sometimes feel the women's movement is less dynamic because we are so out of touch with what other women are doing. But video and film are tremendous vehicles for drawing women together, triggering discussion and informing one another about struggles elsewhere. Video itself is particularly exciting, because we don't have to be experts to utilize it, and the equipment is widely available, through the National Film Board, schools, government departments and community groups.



from "Lady from Grey County" NFB Film



## POWERHOUSE

by Vivian Prost and Nell Tenhaaf

For five full days in October of '78 the Powerhouse Gallery in Montreal presented a festival of "Some Women Filmmakers" at the Cinema Parallele. According to their program notes, the gallery itself was set up mainly "to provide a center which reflects the trends of women artists," and the festival was a non-competitive event, a forum, designed to expand upon their regular programming.

Almost all of the films shown fell into one or the other of two distinct cinematographic forms: first, animation; and secondly, documentary, a vast category encompassing non-fiction filmed narrative, reporting, inquiry into various points of view on a given subject (alternative energy, feminism, the daily life of women in Quebec, etc.).

Consider the differences implicit in these two approaches to filmmaking. Animation must condense a theme into approximately one to ten minutes, an extremely short time for development. The final laugh or punch-line, often double-edged, follows hard upon the

initial statement. It is a form requiring real partnership with the audience — which, in the case of this festival was very much present. The women filmmakers used animation with great freedom (a graphic freedom in the case of Veronika Soul's films: *A Said Poem*, 1977; *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, 1974, and *How the Hell Are You?*, 1972). The technique enabled them to evoke a dream world — utopia is really pushed to the Nth degree — or to reveal through humour, even derision, certain clichés, taboos or feelings of alienation in our society.

In a package of eleven one-minute films produced at Studio D of the National Film Board in '76 for International Women's Year, Diane Beaudry explored themes of commercialism, solitude and homosexuality. The TV commercial was one special target in which usual roles were reversed once the women, normally the object/subject of consumerism, said what they really thought. Called *Just-A-Minute* (Quebec, 1976), this package was produced to

investigate the roles of women in society as seen by eleven different women filmmakers. Marie Chamberland's animated fantasy of an erotic bird dance, *A Vol d'Oiseau* (Quebec, 1976), deals freely with woman's sexuality in the form of a voracious mouth.

By comparison, the documentary form suffers less restriction in time and may thus become more reflective. Films such as *D'abord Menageres* (Luce Guilbeault, Quebec, 1978) and *Patricia's Moving Picture* (Bonnie Klein, Quebec, 1978), by interviewing one or several women, propose to glimpse into their very lives. The duration of their conversations is exactly that of the film, which adapts to their internal rhythm. The directors follow the conversations with extreme attention and discretion, abstaining from imposing their own scenarios. The very commonplace of the women's personalities carries conviction.

But let's examine certain films in relation to their themes or feminist content. Again, in *Patricia's Moving Picture* a woman looking at photo





albums of her married life thinks over the events of those twenty years. She's become involved in a woman's group which has made her reconsider her relationship with her husband and the way she has spent her time. The film records her attempt to articulate this change in outlook which has come out of a mid-life depression. *D'abord Menageres* deals with the everyday activities of about five Quebec housewives, shot predominantly in their homes with their families. One got the impression after the first exposure that the subsequent interviews could've taken place months or years later — the activities stayed the same.

Noticeable throughout both of these films was the evident warmth with which the women met and conversed in front of the camera, telling of days spent in shopping and cooking; of their roles as wife, mother and worker (in a supermarket or as secretaries) — an accumulation of mundane activities which wears away both body and time — and of time that eludes them, passing too quickly. Their condition is an endless succession of mundane detail which imprisons them. This is expressed simply in images framing their faces and their rooms; all visual details become significant whereas the soundtrack remains terribly banal. These women have nothing extraordinary to say — they all say the same thing; and this is the real strength of these films, this banality of days divided between housework, children and husband.

In *Sun, Wind and Wood* (Dorothy T. Henaut, Quebec, 1978) our social system is questioned in relation to benign energy sources. Sequences picturing an

enormous green house, its vegetable crop, and the people living this experience of harnessing natural energy alternate with others of individuals responsible for city planning. The director is concerned about the future of a society which at present is based on wasteful consumption.

*The Thin Line* (Holly Dale & Janis Cole, Ontario, 1977), a rather upsetting film, deals with repression through psychiatric treatment and police tactics. The subjects of the film are prisoners; those who are allowed to speak confide in us, expose their thoughts, and communicate with each other through gestures. The directors of this documentary felt implicated in the fate of these men through the fact that they shared a common social background. The camera focuses on closeups of the men talking and explores the prison in which doors open and close obsessively under a pervasive blue clinical light which itself confers a rare aesthetic quality to the film.

*An Unremarkable Birth* (Diane Beaudry, Quebec, 1978) recounts the preparation for birth and the labour of a woman in the company of her husband and a friend. The medical apparatus in the hospital is hardly comforting despite its precision; it is yet another ensnaring system, thwarted however by the appearance of the baby. This mother was conscious of and responsible for this birth — this is the important point of the film.

Women in an historical context — such is the theme of *Lady from Grey County* (Margaret Wescott & Janice Brown, Quebec, 1977), *Women on the March* (Douglas Turnstall, Nicholas

Balla, Canada 1958), *Some American Feminists* (Nicole Brossard, L. Builbeault, & M. Wescott, Quebec, 1977), and *Jill Johnson October 1975* (Lydia Wazana & Kay Armatage, Ontario, 1977). The initial struggles and their political implications — our history, though very recent, is extremely important. It is interesting to note that although *Women on the March* was credited to male producers, rumour at the festival had it that it was in fact made by a woman whose name does not figure in the credits, no doubt a question of decade and expediency.

The political figure of *Lady from Grey County*, Agnes Campbell McPhail, Canada's first woman elected to parliament, doesn't appear to be very exciting, simply an upright and just individual devoted to a cause. Not only is she not a national heroine but most people know nothing at all about her. Though she never presented herself as a feminist, the sacrifices required by her choice of profession and her devotion to it have much to say to us. It's unfortunate that the sparseness of her private life, in effect her foregoing of one, makes it difficult to identify with her or see her as a role model. Yet the film presents a effective portrait of a woman.

Jill Johnson, the central figure of the film by Armatage, according to the director herself, did not recognize her portrait in the completed version and would have preferred something in the tradition of cinema verite. It is true that the film is flawed by unnecessary complacency; party scenes give her personality a theatrical aspect in the sense that she seems to play her own role. However, the film projects the sound of her laughter and a certain sense of gravity which make one feel like reading her books.

*Some American Feminists* was the most complete, fully achieved, film of the festival, a convincing account of the important stages of American feminism in the '70's with Kate Millet, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Betty Friedan, Margo Jefferson, Rita May Brown and Lila Karp. It is important that feminism have the intellectual foundations that these women bring. They declare their feminism and live by it, a persuasive example for us. There is one question though: where is feminism where we live? We know what has taken place in the U.S., but what about in Canada?

In this country the women's movement seems to have become absorbed in the machinations of government and its agencies. This is to the detriment of a real feminist movement because the population assumes that some inadequate pieces of legislation or spending of large sums of money on International



Women's Year reflects real change. Feminist groundwork is scattered and it seems as if Canadians have an innate aversion to change. We quickly take successful women for granted before they are acknowledged as leaders in social change. We're comfortable with the Queen but not with heroines like Agnes Campbell McPhail. Less can be gained from acquiring political power for women than from infiltrating the national psyche on the cultural level, through filmmaking and the other arts, where we are searching for our place in the national identity.

The films screened during this festival did not, it seems, betray a particularly feminine sensibility in their style — a pity because it's possible. An example would be the films of French director, Marguerite Duras — *India Song*, or *La Femme du Gange* for example. Duras breaks the usual cinematographic time sequence. In an incantatory rhythm she disturbs our notion of present, past and remembered time, and thus of story described in a linear way, but in a film style which is still technically very sophisticated. Her writing in her novels also takes hold of you in the same way; the characters fixed in a present which hurls them seem to be pulled in by a past which pursues them. In contrast to the festival entries, she achieves in both her writing and filmmaking a distinct style which could be defined as feminine.

The audience who attended the festival didn't come for consciousness-raising; an interest in films made exclusively by women in a festival sponsored by a women's gallery already implies a certain level of feminist consciousness. Feminism is indeed not very obvious in the Canadian context. Those who are interested in it, or adhere to it as a philosophy, apply it to their daily lives, their work, their politics. Yet, while feminism can take many forms, its direction and purpose must be kept clear, and also its most basic tenet — that the will to act and change is the ultimate proof of women's effectiveness in the world. A sense of direction and purpose is derived from seeing where we have been, and out of that, taking what we want, discarding what we don't want. The films in the festival, particularly the historical ones and those dealing with housewives, offered this kind of insight. The more information-oriented ones supported the very human urge for control over our lives. And of course the ultimate statement of the festival is the strength and communicativeness of films being made today by women.

By their subjects, these films concern us all. Films by and about

women are all too rare in the usual commercial circuit and so it is necessary, even urgent, to present them elsewhere. In this context, a workshop was held at the gallery during the festival with the assistance of some of the participating directors: Bonnie Klein, Barbara Steinman, Kay Armatage, Holly Dale and Janis Cole. They projected their films and led discussions on feminist/feminine criticism and the direct approach in film.

The further success of the festival can be judged by attendance: the Cinema Parallele theatre was full every evening, the audience in majority but not exclusively female. The festival's success was made possible through a common agreement on ideas and aims between members of the gallery, the organizers

and the cooperative staff of Cinema Parallele.

*Viviane Prost is of French nationality. She received the Diplome National des Beaux-Arts (Nice) in 1974. She was professeur de Graphisme aux Beaux-Arts Bourdeaux, 1974-1977 and has exhibited in France and Montreal, where she has lived since Sept. 1977. She is doing a Masters degree in mixed-media at Concordia University on a Canada Council scholarship.*

*Nell Tenhaaf has lived in Montreal since Sept. 1969. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Concordia University in 1974, has exhibited in Montreal and is presently part-time gallery assistant at Powerhouse Gallery.*

### *Chiaroscuro, for Erik C.*

*Horses pull an ebony bonewagon  
through Perth county shadows  
& pass me, camped in a gravel pit*

*Why fear these horsemen  
by damped-down campfire  
& the eerie clomping past  
of a Mennonite carriage?*

*Dim at first,  
now it menaces  
death's drum  
A riderless horse's hooves  
prints audible tattoos  
on the gravel road*

*Black hat, boots reversed  
carbon horse sans plumes*

*I choke by the ashes  
and long for your light  
behind the driver*

*by Diane McLaren*



# books

## A NOVEL WORTH THE WAIT

review by Sylvia Vance

*The Glassy Sea* by Marian Engel.  
McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1978.  
\$10.95 cloth.

For some years, we have had a fair number of novels written by women, about women, and, basically, for women. They were welcomed too heartily in my opinion, but we wanted some recognition of ourselves in those novels, some knowledge that what we were becoming would be given an articulate form. In the last few years, we have been short-changed. We have not recognized the women given to us. Sylvia Fraser's *She*, in *A Casual Affair*, found her self by being hit over the head with a poker by her lover, driving a car over a cliff, and, while recovering in hospital, going through a mixed bag of Eastern and Western philosophy. By the end of the novel, she simply floated around, about as cognizant of her world and what she was doing in it as a plant. Marian Engel's *Bear* did somewhat better. Her "heroine" ended by knowing what she didn't want, but that seemed to be where most of us were beginning.

Marian Engel's new novel, *A Glassy Sea*, is what I have been waiting for. Stylistically and structurally, it is a treat — to be read in one sitting like a long letter from a friend. With the exception of short first and last paragraphs, it is a letter, a letter from Mary Pelagia, or Peggy Asher, or Rita Bowen (her identity has changed as much as many of ours has) to explain why she cannot become the head of Eglantine House. The House was an unrecognized convent of Anglican sisters, at which she had spent ten years. She had left unwillingly, married badly, and had borne a hydrocephalic child. When the child died, the marriage died with it, and Pelagia hit the bottle, the psychiatrist's couch, then, finally, was banned, by a husband who found her politically uncomfortable, to an abandoned farmhouse at which she does nothing much but straighten out her thoughts and feelings.

Nothing much? You might rightly ask. In this too-short summary of the story, the essence does not come through, for we are given a woman's mind in this novel, a mind with its warps and woofs, its darkness and light, all of its confusion — intelligent confusion. The reader must deal with many concepts of mind and belief here, puritanism, existentialism, Maryism, gnosticism, grace. It is a novel philosophically bound, and bound well. Marian Engel does not make it easy for the reader, although the novel can be easily read. We must consider ourselves in important terms, terms beyond everydayness. As her narrator comes to the "here-and-now" of things, so must we. The myths and structures, dreams and visions, particularly male oriented, must be swept away. With the possible exception of Ardrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, the resolution of the male/female dichotomy has not, to my mind, been as depressingly resolved:

Let them take it early. Let them breed on their women, but let every birth be a death. Then they will learn how women live.

And let every woman who had not given birth be gone at thirty.

They will bring the children up by themselves; they will learn the true quality of life from their children; particularly from their mistakes with children; especially from loving children, from weeping over children. The ones who are caring for children will learn the mercilessness of the ones who are not caring for children, who do not understand what living can be about, who have not seen love and hate and destruction and weariness in the nakedness of fear and exhaustion. Yes, let them do it. Let them get rid of us.

There will be no more mothers, no more grandmothers; no aunts, no female slaves. Nothing but good fresh fucks whose day is over on parturition.

They will have got what they want. And they will see what it is, their hunter's dream.

Pelagia is right — the war between the sexes is bad enough that we must recognize the possible results of that war. And we must find ways to survive, not in terms of society, or in a

male/female context, but as a species. It is that simple.

She resolves to re-open Eglantine House as a hospice, a place of respite for women battered by the war, a place to find strength and recognition. The resolution is well founded, and she does gather knowledge and power in the decision. At the same time, and how refreshing it is, she is plagued with doubts:

I don't know. I don't know. I'll never know. One day I'm sure my sanity lies on the seashore, another I want a lover, on the third I'm organizing a playground. I'm capable in one breath of dismissing union with the one as anti-intellectual claptrap invented to control the masses, in the next of repeating the Jesus Prayer twenty times. Hoping, too, that it's slid from head to heart like heavy water.



Marian Engel photo by Diana Pelting

At last, a woman who makes decisions, takes power, and doesn't become a wonder woman in the process, who still is human, who still is a woman.

*The Glassy Sea* begs for more. It seems to be the first piece of fiction about women; it puts other literature of the same ilk in a retrograde position, demanding more of other women novelists and readers. I seldom recommend anything without qualification. I do this.

Sylvia Vance teaches Canadian literature at the University of Alberta where she is working on an M.A.



## GOD'S PAWN GOES HOME

by Heather Pringle

*Where the Cherries End Up*, by Gail Henley. McClelland and Stewart, 1978. Cloth, \$10.95.

"It doesn't matter who you marry or how much money you'll make, you will never be able to run away from the fact that you were born in Hopefield" is the portentous warning given to Genia Luckosie, the protagonist of *Where the Cherries End Up*. Pressing this tattered, shopworn advice into service as the theme of her novel, Gail Henley does little justice to her story of a young Polish-Canadian woman who seeks escape from the brutal, impoverished world of her birth and acceptance into the mainstream of middle-class Canadian life.

And a good novel it might have been, for Henley's characterization of Genia as an unreconciled misfit is at times finely and sensitively drawn. Like the archetypal misfit in Canadian fiction, Duddy Kravitz, Genia has but one bald, overriding, simplistic ambition. She wants to get married. Her vision of marriage is informed not by childhood fantasy and fairytale, but by an unwavering determination to partake in the Good Life: the world of hairdressers, French restaurants, cocktail parties, and fashionable clothes. Genia's dream of life as a bowl of cherries (and the title of the book obscurely alludes to this metaphor) is in fact a naive correlative of freedom. It is in stark contrast to the dreary existence she leads in Jasno Gora, a Polish-Canadian farming community in Northern Ontario. Raised traditionally in a poor family, Genia is half-starved, belittled, and physically abused by father and brothers. Like her mother, Genia is denied power over her actions, her thoughts, and even her ambitions.

Worse still, there is a sub-text of violence which clearly suggests that Genia is unaware that she may exercise power over her own body. Sexually assaulted regularly as a child by her uncle, who is appropriately named Mauldoon, she does not understand that he is entirely without such rights over her. Her unwilling complicity, however, is modeled on the stoicism of her mother who is cursed and beaten nightly by her alcoholic husband.

While Henley's episodic text convincingly documents the misery of Genia's lot in Jasno Gora, and her

growing conviction that she is different from the other young women around her, the novel falters perceptibly as it traces her escape to Montreal and enrolment in McGill University. The carefully rendered and purposefully constructed scenes of Genia's childhood are replaced by roughly sketched and loosely developed scenes of city and university life. They fail to ring true and the reader uneasily begins to question the author's authority.

The reader questions, for example, the presentation of Genia's character in stasis during her years at McGill. While one might reasonably expect that a 1970s university education would have a liberalizing and radicalizing effect on Genia, she is portrayed in curious isolation from the political and social ideas circulating around her. Henley seems reluctant to suggest that Genia learns anything at university and we are offered few glimpses into her academic development. As it turns out it is an unfortunate omission for it seriously damages the credibility of the action later in the novel when Genia is readily admitted into graduate school.

Henley chooses to dwell, instead, on the pathos of Genia's attempts to win friends and a husband by lying outrageously about her background. She is chronically incapable of making female friends, however, and her deceitfulness is rewarded finally only by the begrudging affections of Jesse Finkelstein, a self-centred and insensitive lover at best. It is only his middle-class background which distinguishes Jesse from the earlier characterizations of Genia's exploitative father and brothers, and the reader feels a growing irritation at Genia's inability to separate herself from her past.

As disturbing as the relationship is, the reader may be thankful for the one truly outstanding scene it produces. The scene takes place when Jesse invites Genia to his parents' home for dinner. Pathetically ill at ease in this bastion of the middle class, Genia strains with her heart and soul to make a favourable impression on Jesse's parents. During the icy formality of dinner she cracks under the silent, disapproving scrutiny of Mr. and Mrs. Finkelstein:

I knew they saw the fork shaking as I lifted it to my mouth and once I missed my mouth altogether and the chopped liver fell off my fork. I wish they'd stop watching me. I never realized before how difficult it was to eat. To actually get the food on the fork, lift the fork without spilling the food, find the mouth without missing, and then trying to swallow the food without choking.

It's a heart-rending scene, one which is minutely and sensitively recorded, as Genia's rough bravado is matched unequally against the calm, smooth

surface of the Finkelsteins. It is a scene which insidiously plays upon respondent chords in the reader and one finds oneself flinching under Ms. Henley's powers of observation.

That there is to be no happy resolution to this novel is perfectly evident to the reader from this point, but Genia is once again incapable of drawing any lessons from her experience. Her naive faith in the Good Life is undiminished and she picaresquely sets out for Toronto determined to make her fortune. There she starves in the streets, is deceived by a con man, is hospitalized for malnutrition, enters grad school, and is denied the bursary she desperately needs to support herself. Her life in Toronto is the pure stuff of nightmares, and at the end of a year she is ready to return to the familiar world of Jasno Gora.

But it is there that Henley leaves her, sans spouse, sans acceptance, sans dreams, sans everything. Confused, distraught, and disoriented, she willingly embraces personal defeat, consoling herself with the belief that she has been God's pawn. She has become the stereotype of the unfulfilled woman, projecting her youthful ambitions upon unsuspecting siblings. It is a disappointing ending, and one that accords poorly with the characterization of a scrappy fighter which Henley has laboured over in the preceding 240 pages. Little is made of Genia's accomplishments — she has, after all, acquired an education despite enormous obstacles and has survived the horrors of the city — it is her failure which is so forcefully drawn to our attention. It is as if Henley is determined, at all costs, to make her point: that you can go back home again, and indeed you have no other choice.

The jacket blurb invites speculation as to whether this is, in fact, an autobiographical novel. Like Genia, Ms. Henley was raised in a small Polish-Canadian community in the Ottawa Valley, put herself through McGill University, and completed an M.A. in English Language and Literature at the University of Toronto. But Ms. Henley went on to establish her own cosmetic company in London, England and has successfully pursued an acting career. And one somehow wishes that her art had imitated life a little more closely. For if Genia Luckosie leads us finally to where the cherries end up, what has been the point of our journey?

Heather Pringle works for Hurtig Publishers in Edmonton and has been a fiction editor of *Branching Out* for two years. She has an M.A. in English literature from the University of British Columbia.



## FORTITUDE AND WRY HUMOUR

review by Pamela Harris

*Life among the Quallunaat*, by Minnie Aodla Freeman, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton. Cloth, \$9.95.

In this book an Inuit examines her childhood in the North and the transition to life in the South, life among the Quallunaat, the people who pamper their eyebrows. As the book itself makes clear through countless incidents, only the Inuit can correctly interpret themselves. Thus this book should be required reading for anyone working in the North or concerned with northern people (including Alex Stevenson who wrote the introduction and whose account of the author's early life differs in several details from hers.) In addition to its sociological importance, this is also a good tale, full of warmth and humanity.

Organized in three sections (her arrival in Ottawa as a young adult, her childhood with her family on the land, and the process of separation through schooling and work) the book is also divided into many small vignettes. At times it seemed rambling and too episodic. At the same time, I found the book very hard to put down, and the flow of it, the small vignettes strung together seemed a very Inuit way of telling the story. She can say quantities in a phrase, and the picture she paints of southern ignorance and exploitation of the Inuit is very vivid.

Although this is not a book focused on women's issues, it certainly shows us life in a traditional culture through a woman's eyes. The marriage arranged at her birth, her feeling about this, her grandmother's way of breaking the contract, her menarche, a cousin's unhappy marriage, these and other incidents offer rare insights into the life of an Inuit woman.

One inconsistency in the book troubled me as I read it: in the first, rather negative, section describing her coming to Ottawa, she gives the clear impression that this is the first time she had lived among the Quallunaat. Thus I was surprised in the last section to discover that earlier in life she had spent several years studying and working in Hamilton and Moose Factory. Certainly, going to Ottawa, even with the earlier time in the South, must have been a shock, but the integrity of the whole book would have been better served by indicating its real place in her experience.

There are two levels on which this book can give the reader new insight into Inuit experience. On the first level, the



author looks at our culture and ways through her northern eyes, and what she sees there is often negative. On the second level, she describes the difficult and very mixed experience of detaching from her traditions, of being moved into a new culture, and of feeling caught between the two. This is what the whole book adds up to for me — a description of this painful, though also rewarding, experience — its confusion, heartache, and growth. There is much sadness, much parting in the book, and though (in traditional Inuit fashion) she plays down her emotions and reactions to the separation from her family, one feels greatly for the child and young woman alone in the immensity of a new world. She strikes this same note at the very end of the book: "I miss my dear people who are becoming stranger, even to me, covering their familiar ways with another culture." And yet, this is not a sad book. Her spirit is one of fortitude, curiosity and wry humor. It's a book that celebrates human growth. Reading it, one begins to know a very special woman.

*Pamela Harris is a Toronto photographer. Her photos of Inuit women, taken in Spence Bay in 1973, appeared in Branching Out three years ago.*

## NOTHING TO LOSE

review by Diana S. Palting

*Doris Tijerino: Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution*, as told to Margaret Randall. Translated from the Spanish by Elinor Randall. New Star Books, Ltd., Vancouver, B.C. Canada. 176 pp., Paper, \$5.25; cloth, \$12.50.

Our thoughts, our opinions, our actions are shaped by our life experiences. Women reading this review have likely never been tortured by police. Parents reading *Branching Out* have not had to feed seven or eight children by peddling old clothes, or fruits and vegetables. Most of us have water safe to drink and enough food to keep alive. We may legitimately worry that we are underpaid for the work that we do, that we do not share equitably in the rewards of the prevailing economic system — but no one having the time and money to read this magazine has listened to the agonizing whimper of a child dying of gastro-enteritis or tuberculosis. We are sheltered from the cries of women and children engaged in this kind of daily struggle for life. We are sheltered by our comforts, and by our lack of experience. Is it possible then, to reach out to those who sleep in cardboard shanties and feed their children on scraps of food begged or stolen in the streets? Is it possible for us to hear the voice of Doris Tijerino, a Nicaraguan woman, a Sandinist who is imprisoned, and may now be dead?

I read this book, *Doris Tijerino: Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution* because I hoped to understand more about what was happening there.

So many people were killed in the recent revolt. And the resistance forces held out for so long against the far superior military strength of the dictator Somoza and the National Guard. Why did no international group intervene strongly enough to halt the killing? What popular support was there to allow the Sandinists to fight so determinedly? What happens to a country when so many families suffer the loss of a father, a brother, or a sister at the hands of the government? There must be a groundswell of anger and bitterness that could incite the whole population.

This book does provide some background for understanding the current situation in Nicaragua. It is the story, told by one woman, of her gradual radicalization and of the experiences in her life which led to her joining the Sandinist Front for National Liberation. Doris Tijerino grew up as the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner and "felt guilty that there were poor children." As



she grew up she became more and more aware of *why* there were poor children — and less willing to accept the Catholic Church's explanation that it was always so — that there would always be rich and there would always be poor — and that it was the responsibility of the rich to help take care of the poor. Doris did not think that sewing shrouds for dead peasant children was a solution for the country's problems, or even a satisfactory way of expiating her guilt. The Somoza family has been in power for more than forty years. 1971 statistics indicated that more than 70% of the people were illiterate (up to 97% in rural areas), only 16% of the population had potable water, 9% had inside plumbing, infant mortality was more than 100 per 1,000 live births — and there was an average of 6.2 persons per house (and house usually means 1 room). The situation today has worsened. People who can find jobs still cannot earn enough to feed and clothe their families. The problems for women are even worse than for men. According to Tijerino the children are "almost exclusively a concern of the mother." Yet "a male worker who picks coffee, for one container of coffee beans — there is no fixed price — earns up to four, five, or six dollars. For the same work a woman earn two dollars, a much lower amount than is earned by a man." It seems that the people in Nicaragua have nothing to lose. If they do not die at the hands of Somoza's troops, they or their children will likely die of malnutrition or disease from the unhealthy living conditions. A reasonable life (by North American expectations) is impossible for more than a tiny minority of plantation owners or government officials. Somoza refuses to step down — and some say that he is propped up by North American economic interests in Nicaragua.

In Canada our experiences would likely not radicalize us to thinking of revolution as the only solution. But for Nicaraguans there is no other recourse.

Doris Tijerino has been tortured, degraded, and perhaps now even killed for her decision to become a "fighting woman of the people," but she is not alone. "Nicaraguan women are waking up: as a people, collectively, and in growing numbers . . ."

*Diana Palting is an Edmonton photographer and mother of two. Earlier careers include anthropology and social work.*

## ALL VICTIMS, BUT FINELY DRAWN

review by Aritha van Herk

*Considering Her Condition*, by Margaret Gibson. Toronto: Gage, 1978. Cloth, \$8.95.

Margaret Gibson's characters in *Considering Her Condition* seem to suffer, not from a question of identity, but from a tendency to consider themselves too much. In an otherwise strong and powerful collection of short fiction, Gibson's women indulge in an excess of self-analysis that leaves the reader little room for conjecture. The ability to analyze ourselves has been a step forward for women, but it is now time to recognize that it could also be our doom. The narcissism involved in studying a constant mirror image cannot be denied; at the extreme it becomes a psychosis, a never-ending paranoia.

Certainly, paranoia is one theme that Gibson intends to project. Her characters always court insanity; they are overweight or starving or alcoholic. Mental institutions loom in the background. One character refers to her husband as "Rehabilitation Centre" because he has rescued her from her "reckless lethargy"; she finds peace only when she is locked into the "frozen edges" of sleep. Gibson's fine use of images contributes to this theme. Her stories are full of darkness and pain; one almost senses the smell of sickness, and violence is a constant presence.

These characters could almost be compared to Flannery O'Connor's grotesques, characters who move beyond the ordinary into the extreme. Gibson has a definite ability to etch situations in fine detail, but she sometimes fails to employ the useful tool of understatement: the stories are slightly marred by a tendency to overdramatize, to push everything to the furthest possible extreme.

Gibson skillfully explores the fine line between imagination and actuality through her characters' attempts to order or to deal with reality. Their repeated inability to do so, their constant slips across the boundry that divides real life and fantasy reveal to us more a writer's inability to separate the two rather than an insightful glimpse into human nature. Be that as it may, these are not the standard Canadian heroines we discover in Munro and Laurence, but distorted people, always slightly unbalanced, always on the edge of respectability.

Most of the characters in this collection are alone, victims or causes of failed relationships. The man/woman relationships portrayed are inevitably

destructive, situations where men and women succeed only in wounding each other, whether by chance or by intention. In "Dark Angel, Pale Fire" a black man and a white woman make a futile attempt to sustain a love relationship, with the ultimate result that both of them are further estranged from the human race. "Brian Tattoo, His Life and Times" is the shadowed and violent story of the effect a biker and ex-convict has on a numb and indrawn young woman. "All Over Now" is a circular story told in letter form. It explores a chilling triangle: a woman, a man, and the Vietnam war. None of the male/female relationships are sustained and most of them result in, or give rise to violence.

Four of the seven stories deal with the counterpoint between parent and child. Here too, the relationships portrayed are negative, the parent often smothering or warping the child. "Mother's Milk" is certainly the best story in this collection, technically flawless in form. It tells the parallel story of two mothers, a loving mother and a smothering one, and their sons. The point of view used is particularly effective; it highlights the story through an interlocking but deliberate contrast. "Still Life" explores the continuing degeneration of a 40-year old alcoholic dependent on her parents' indulgence. "Goldfish and Other



"Summer Days" is the weakest of these fictions, an incident rather than a fully realized story about a child who is wrongly accused of sexually abusing another child. The last story, "The Water Fairy", is the penultimate in Gibson's grotesque and distorted insights. A woman who is being raped invents a game of make-believe in order to prevent her four-year-old son from watching the rape; later, she herself can only deal with the experience by making it into a fantasy.



Although Gibson's bleak and unerring vision has much to offer, from a feminist point of view, this collection of fiction is frightening. Like the picture on the cover of the book, Gibson's characters are rag dolls, bonelessly unable to deal with the events in their lives. Instead of acting, they passively allow themselves to be acted upon by circumstances or by other people, and can only then react with grief, with fear, or with helplessness. That sense of helplessness is an indictment of our situation as women; as long as it emanates from us, we will continue to be victims. Although I consider Gibson a good writer, I cannot accept this aspect of her world vision.

As a collection, *Considering Her Condition* proves Margaret Gibson to be one of Canada's most promising short story writers. Her style is smooth and coherent and her awareness of form as a creative tool serves the unity and strength of these stories well. Only occasionally does she lapse into over-emotionalism, into too-careful explanation. There are those who maintain that the short story is the most difficult genre to master, but I wonder if Gibson's relentless approach and distorted subject matter could withstand the length of a novel. Nonetheless, I look forward to her next book.

*Aritha van Herk is a writer currently living in Calgary. She is book review editor for Branching Out.*

## AND MORE BOOKS

*At Peace*, stories by Ann Copeland. Oberon: 1978. Paper, \$6.95, cloth \$15.00.

Women's roles have come under close scrutiny during the past decade of consciousness-raising and self-examination. Even the Roman Catholic Church has made efforts to adapt to the social changes. But the social and spiritual community of the convent remains very much a mystery. A deep curiosity is aroused by the cloister, the veil, the vows. Convents have provided the setting for satire and even situation comedies, but rarely is that mystery penetrated. We still tend to regard all nuns as Everynun.

Ann Copeland presents her readers with more than a superficial glimpse into convent life. Each of the seven stories in *At Peace*, her first collection, is rich with details that could only have been written by someone whose experience is first-hand.

The characters in these stories struggle with their faith as they try to preserve their individuality while living up to the precepts to which they have devoted their lives. The central conflict throughout is between duty to oneself and duty to the community.

While the setting and subject matter are interesting in themselves, it is the sheer elegance of Copeland's writing that makes these stories really special. With magnificent control she uses contrast to develop a variety of well-defined characters who must interact with each other on both the personal and community planes. Throughout, Copeland writes with a sense of deliberate purpose as she depicts the frustrations, fears, and life-denying hypocrisies inherent in the closed community, and of the spiritual peace that is there for those who can accept it.

**Barbara Novak**

*Tangle Your Web and Dosey-Do*, by Helen Levi. Queenston House, 1978. Paper, \$4.95, cloth, \$10.95.

*Tangle Your Web and Dosey-Do*, the second volume in a proposed trilogy, gets off to a fast-paced start with the now-widowed Dorothy Stuart about to leave the prairie town of Plum Bluff for a week-end at a friend's cottage. She spends the first night there alone, and is surprised by a late-night visit from a stranger who has climbed in through the cottage window. Nervous because of news reports about a series of unsolved sex slayings in the area, Dorothy tells the stranger that her jealous husband is asleep in the bedroom. For added effect, she explains that he's a retired wrestler who was barred for wrestling for life because he crippled three opponents in display matches.

By the end of the third chapter it is clear that the book will have an utterly delightful, predictable twist: the real murderer will prove to be Dorothy's brother-in-law and she will marry the stranger. I was frankly disappointed that this was not the case. The question of the identity of the real murderer is solved most undramatically in the early part of the novel and the book proves to have a rather unpredictable ending — unpredictable by nature of its very blandness.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the small-town antics of the people in Plum Bluff do have a certain charm. If the situations are trite, then at least the author presents them in a light, casual

style which is both easy to read and quietly comic.

Judging from this novel, however, Helen Levi has a natural flair for writing mysteries — light, comic, solid mysteries. So far the promise remains unfulfilled, but I wouldn't be surprised if the third novel in the trilogy finds her moving in that direction.

**Barbara Novak**

*Barbara Novak is a freelance writer and editor in Toronto.*

*When Lovers Are Friends*, by Merle Shain. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1978. Cloth, \$8.95.

Merle Shain's new handbook on friendship reads somewhat like a pabulum digest of rather well-worn clichés. In three parts, "Trusting", "Connecting" and "Touching" she outlines for us the problems facing friends today. It seems we are all guilty of isolation, insecurity and self-love but the solutions posed in *When Lovers Are Friends* left me somewhat dissatisfied.

This book is by no means an artificial "Joy of Friendship". One cannot discredit the gentleness of Shain's approach, and the sincerity of her quiet tone is indisputable. That sincerity is certainly the most attractive aspect of the book; Shain can almost make us believe that there are foolproof ways to engender love rather than simply consume it. Her argument that we gain necessary knowledge even from bad relationships and thus benefit, is a good one. I found her way of looking at friendship itself simplistic, however; friendships are far more intricate and complex than this book would seem to suggest. Secondly, the suggestion that friendship should be ever-enduring, that as a true friend one should never stop giving, should never expect, leaves little room for the constant give and take that friendship does demand. While recognizing that this book is not intended as an exhaustive exploration of personal relationships, its panacea-like approach is nonetheless unsatisfying. I would have liked more detail, less generalization, and a stronger recognition that friendship is something that we will always desire but will never be able to control.

**Aritha van Herk**



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