Branching Out

canadian magazine for women

Volume VI
Number4, 1979
$1.75

WHAT PRICE CENSORSHIP?

IRENE PARLBY
LADY POLITICIAN

MARGARET ATWOOD
CONTEST

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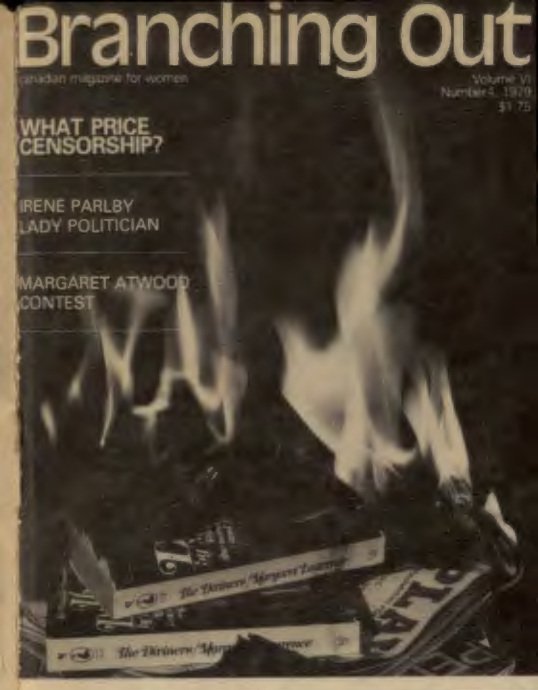

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LETTERS

I am extremely upset at Cathy Hobart's review of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Her biased and negative attitude completely misrepresents Chicago's intentions and underestimates the impact such a project could have. I have seen the project at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I was moved to tears and went back a second time, as did many others, to absorb totally its overwhelming impact.

If Cathy Hobart were to read Chicago's *Through the Flower*, it might alter her attitude toward the artist. Chicago's intentions as a feminist artist are to bring a truly female experience into a traditionally male dominated art world in which phallic symbolism is widespread. Thus, the vaginal imagery becomes a necessary part of representing the female experience.

Regardless of Chicago's alleged egocentricity, (many a male artist has also overestimated his importance) the importance of the entire project should in no way be underestimated.

Through works like The Dinner Party, women will have a coherent body of women's history, which will give us some identity and a point to move forward from.

If Hobart does not understand that the masculine-feminine imbalance is fundamental to the world's problems, I am disappointed that a feminist magazine would print such an unfeminist viewpoint.

Corrine Knowles,
Jasper Alberta

I was offended by the tone and spirit of the review you printed of *The Dinner Party*. The Dinner Party is a major and innovative work that challenges the structure of traditional art while simultaneously restoring and making visible the contributions to society of an overwhelmingly large number of women ordinarily ignored. In its three months at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art it broke previous museum records for attendance at the exhibition of a living artist. It has already been a source of inspiration to many who worked on the project, thousands who visited the exhibit, and others who have only seen the book or slides. As such, it deserves to be treated with some care and respect. As a major magazine speaking to and for Canadian women, *Branching Out* has a responsibility to engage in constructive criticism rather than taking cheap pot shots at a major feminist work as is reflected both in the review and the headline "Vaginal Hype."

Judy Chicago *photo by Cynthia MacAdams*

"Hobart dismisses Chicago as 'disagreeably egocentric,' a messiah and a cultist . . . Nothing could be further from the truth. [She] is a hard-nosed realist."

Specifically, the review reports the negative experiences of one person who left the project after four days, without presenting Judy Chicago's version of the events described or mentioning the range of experiences of the 400 women and men who worked on the project over a longer period of time.

Next, the reviewer takes offense at the use of vaginal imagery not seeing the validity of acknowledging and celebrating women's genitals as *a* base and important centre which in no way implies they are "the most important aspect of her as a person". Nor is there any discussion of Judy's tranformation of these symbols and how her use of such imagery differs from that of patriarchal artists who objectify women. Incidentally it is misleading to reduce the plates to "thirty-nine vaginal forms" and to use the Georgia

O'Keefe plate as illustrative. The images on the plates begin abstractly, becoming more explicit as one moves around the table. The Georgia O'Keefe plate is, in fact, the final one in the series and there is much groundwork to build up to it.

"(Chicago) and all the others were operating not in some utopian future which validates work collectively done but in the here-and-now."

Hobart dismisses Judy Chicago as "disagreeably egocentric," a messiah and cultist. This is substantiated, in part, by a photo from the book of artist Juliet Myers at work with a sign in front of her saying "Don't talk to me — I'm working. If I stop Chicago will kill me". In fact, Myers, an unassertive woman, had trouble asking people not to interrupt her. The sign was made in good humour to assist her in dealing with the situation. Taken out of context and juxtaposed with selective "facts" it builds a case against Chicago.

Chicago is further berated for exploiting volunteer labour. She received none of the profits made by the exhibit — standard treatment of artists in this society. What they get is honour. Within such a context, the bulk of the work had, of course, to be voluntary. Wherever possible minimal payment was made to those with specialized skills who worked regulary and/or had some major responsibility. Criticism of that aspect of the project should be addressed to the patriarchal art world and museum structure, not Judy Chicago.

Judy does receive much of the recognition (and attack, which sometimes far outweighs the former). This is not entirely inappropriate since she did provide the overall vision and impetus. All the others worked, albeit cooperatively, under her artistic direction. More important, the fact of the matter is that she and all of the others were operating not in some utopian future which validates work collectively done but in the here-and-now where the name of an individual who had already made a mark in the art world was necessary if the project was to get any support and have any hope of being shown. A project of this scope would not have happened at all at this time in history without just such a foot in the door — which Chicago had and willingly used.

Finally, your reviewer incorrectly presents Judy Chicago as some naive idealist who imagines "that once women are aware of their (sic) heritage the world's problems will take care of themselves." Nothing could be further from the truth. Judy Chicago is a hard-nosed realist. Her earlier book *Through the Flower* and interviews with her make abundantly clear her understanding of the extent and complexity of the task facing the women's movement.

"We see The Dinner Party as having the potential to move people deeply, as a vehicle for sparking debate out and inspiring the next steps to be taken in reclaiming women's artistic authority."

Despite the popularity and demonstrated profitability and The Dinner Party, museums in the United States and Canada are declining the opportunity to show it. The classist and sexist art world clearly recognizes the threat that The Dinner Party poses. In the face of this resistance, a group of women in Vancouver, inspired by The Dinner Party and a recent visit and workshop with Judy Chicago, have formed a steering committee to bring the piece here. We see The Dinner Party as having the potential to move people deeply, as a vehicle for attracting audiences who can simultaneously be exposed to the works of Canadian women artists and as a vehicle for sparking debate about and inspiring the next steps to be taken in reclaiming women's artistic authority. By arranging the exhibit outside the museum structure we can assure that profits go back into the women's movement. I encourage those interested in responsible criticism and in-depth discussions of The Dinner Party to obtain the July and August issues of *Kinesis*, The Vancouver Status of Women newspaper obtainable from 1090 W. 7th Ave., Vancouver. Women interested in learning more about attempts to bring the project to Vancouver and/or joining us in bringing it elsewhere in Canada can write to The Dinner Party steering committee, Box 286, Delta, B.C. V4H 3N7. I also encourage *Branching Out* to do another article doing greater justice to Judy Chicago, all those who worked with her, and The Dinner Party.

Sara Joy David,
Galiano Island, B.C.

Cathy Hobart replies:

It is incorrect to assume that my review of the book entitled *The Dinner Party* is necessarily a review of the exhibition. It is quite likely that seeing Judy Chicago's Dinner Party art piece will make women feel good, because the announced intention of the piece is to praise women.

Returning to the book, however, my main objection is to the author's equation of feminism with mysticism, and the implication that goddess worship is the key to understanding and solving our problems as an oppressed group in the 20th Century. Chicago enjoys a position of respect as an artist and feminist, but not everything she does or says necessarily serves the interests of women and feminism.

Nearly one quarter of the Dinner Party book is exerpts from Chicago's diary, describing the making of the piece. The author's description of the spirit of cooperation in her workshop is contradicted by reports of exploitation and sweatshop conditions, from a woman who worked on the project.

I admire Judy Chicago as an artist, but I don't feel that her book presents a case for accepting her as a political leader, or as a leader of a quasi-religious cult for women.

How fine *Branching Out* is looking — and reading. The book review section is really outstanding. The reviewer of the Judy Chicago book, which I love, had some new information and asked some very important questions, even though I disagree with the reviewer's premise that the vaginal art is insignificant.

And Marian Engel on Adele Wiseman's book about her mother was beautiful.

Sherrill Cheda, Toronto

Regarding Sylvia Bowerbank's letter (Vol. VI, #3): the fact that *Branching Out* is a magazine with a non-radical feminist perspective is not a good enough reason to put it down. Although I prefer more radical views myself, I think a magazine such as yours does serve a *certain* need, just as long as you remain honest with yourselves. But when feminist publications begin to work on rules like, 'We'd better be careful not to offend our readers' *then* the Movement is heading for big trouble. Ms. Bowerbank is absolutly right though, about the stagnation *Branching Out* is sinking right into because of the dialogue gap between you and us. Think about it! The editors on one side and the readers on the other. Now where does *that* lead us?

About your pornography feature: it's important to point out that all that vomit is just *concentrated* women-hatred; we must all recognize its connection with less violent and less obvious porn, the foundation from which all the hardcore 'artists' suck their inspiration. This principle is accurately illustrated in a quote from Mary Daly in an inteview with *Off Our Backs:* "When I go past bridal shops, I think that's porn. Theology is porn. Psychology is porn. It's all porn."

I'm afraid it might be a little late to fight back. Where *was* the passionate feminist outcry against the extremely successful gems of phallocracy: *Looking for Mr. Goodbar, The Last Tango in Paris, A Clockwork Orange, The Rocky Horror Picture Show, Story of O, Pretty Baby?* This morbid reality makes my adrenalin flow and I take this opportunity to call all women for *another* boycott (or girlcott, rather). "Lois Jeans & Jackets" has put out a poster that praises misogyny with the discretion of an elephant in a porcelain shop. The action takes place in a luxurious apartment where our hero, all dressed in Lois (he deserves the best!) is fighting with a terrified woman (actually, a male's idea of her terror — she manages to look both terrified *and* sexy) and to add to the exciting atmosphere, a few broken objects are lying on the floor (that bitch is playing hard-to-get!). Well, girls, don't we all?

Still, one thing is true, we *are* beautiful when we're angry. *Let's show it!*

C.B., Boucherville, P. Quebec.

I thought you might enjoy examining these stamps. Two different hands — right? One is thick with a broken thumb nail and a piece of binder twine on the index finger. The other is slim with shaped nails and a piece of black and red ribbon — ribbon? Typewriter ribbon!

Yep — you can always tell a female worker by that typewriter-like growth attached to her fingertips. Good grief Posties — get with it!

S. Poohkay, Edmonton

I find your magazine more isolated in its ideology than liberated. It is depressing to know that so many women are so out of control as far as their lives go that they must blame it on "Society".

I, a poet and artist, would not even think of some of the things you publish as being very inspirational — they are space fillers.

The extreme anti-male position your magazine takes leaves little room for enlightenment.

Jo Lynes, Edmonton

It is fortunate for the women's movement, in my opinion, that *Branching Out* included in its 5th Anniversary issue an article with the intriguing title, "Where there is oppression, there is resistance."

My God, these are precarious times, when we think that what we will be able to do in the future depends on what we do now. How many women in the women's movement are taking this seriously? It appears to me that we get completely absorbed in reacting to the immediate needs of women. This article makes one think that part of our energy should go into theoretical thought and discussion so women can analyze and clarify our activities in regard to the future. Otherwise we will be in this business of patching-up the present inequities in our society ad infinitum — that is if the women's movement doesn't find itself going down the drain first.

We need more of such articles in *Branching Out* to help in stimulating dialogue among women active in the women's movement.

Sally Davis
St. John's, Nfld.

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what price censorship?

illustration by Sheila Luck

Can feminists win the battle to control pornography? Three of our readers say no.

In the last issue Eleanor Wachtel expounded on what she called one of the newest battlegrounds for feminists — pornography. According to Wachtel, the feminist stance on pornography as obscenity must begin with a differentiation between pornography and erotica. Wachtel was critical of the majority of attempts to date to resolve the issue. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, she claimed, recognized the problems but failed in its recommendations to deal with this important distinction. She expressed serious doubts about a committee which considered "anything but the missionary position wholly evil."

Wachtel disagreed with those who call for a strict redefinition of pornography as violence, removing all references to sex. Pornography, she said, can only be tackled when we admit to its cultural roots in misogyny.

As for research on the topic, Wachtel contends that we must recognize its inherent male bias and ambiguous results. Studies have supported the conflicting arguments that pornography acts as a safety valve for aggressive impulses and that it is a catalyst for sexual aggression.

For Wachtel, the issue is political. The solution lies in a careful redefinition of obscenity laws and constant monitering of its judical interpretation and enforcement. Feminists, she stressed, must become involved in the drafting of censorship and obscenity laws lest they continue as a force against us.

Wachtel's stand provoked considerable response. Following are comments on the article by writers Marian Engel and June Callwood and sociologist Thelma McCormack. Wachtel accepted our invitation to have the last word.

Linda Duncan

photo by Diana Palting

photo by Norman Chamberlin

Marian Engel
June Callwood

I must, however much I dislike disagreeing with my good friends in Edmonton, register the strongest protest against the article on pornography by Eleanor Wachtel. Her piece is good, but it leads the women's movement in as dangerous a direction as the Temperance element did fifty years ago.

I'm not arguing that some pornography is not dangerous and disgusting. I have two points to make: one is that all attempts to suppress pornography have hitherto led to the suppression instead of literature — aim at the Marquis de Sade and you'll get Margaret Laurence every time — and I hate to see you joining hands with Renaissance International, who'll have you barefoot and pregnant in ten minutes. The other point is, given the complicated nature of our attitudes to sex, it's impossible to make clear-sighted arguments. Even Wachtel shows her ambivalence when she complains of male misogyny and then makes the misanthropic comparison of girlie magazine stands with urinals. There's nothing wrong with urinals, surely.

I don't know, frankly, what you do with some of the disgusting stuff available now; but I don't want you to go out and ban it. Too many other good causes will go down the drain. I very much doubt pornography leads to rape. The only documented case I've seen of Sadeian corruption was Swinburne's: he felt he'd at last found a friend, but the only person he destroyed was himself. More to be pitied than scorned, the poor man.

I don't see how you can go after pornography without being Mrs. Grundy, in short, and I think that's a waste of both dignity and energy.

Marian Engel,
Toronto

"Aim at the Marquis de Sade and you'll get Margaret Laurence very time."

I read the Eleanor Wachtel article carefully and there is nothing in it with which I disagree, except the conclusion. In my view we have two forces for good which collide. They can turn and run a parallel course but one of them must give way on all occasions when they meet. I have great respect for the argument that pornography degrades women and debases society; it is a fact. Racism degrades minorities and debases society. Mercantilism degrades the unskilled and debases society. Nuclear power is obscene, so are deodorant commercials.

My point is not that the world is full of depravity so we have to endure it. My head is covered with lumps because I endure nothing. But it is a dangerous road to isolate out the depravity which offends feminists, say, or blacks, and declare that particular species illegal. It is necessary then to declare illegal that which offends anyone in the society or else we are not being fair. It is then necessary to define obscenity and pornography, to pinpoint where it ceases to be against the law and becomes law. If it could be done — without catching Margaret Laurence or the genitalia of Greek statuary in the net of vigilant morality squads — we could maybe proceed on that course. I don't think we can.

Even if this country did decide on tough pornography laws, and prosecuted booksellers mercilessly, and searched luggage at the borders, and all the consequences of a determined effort to purify the nation, would it really mean that pornography would disappear (look at the Victorians) or that rape would cease?

I sound more positive than I really feel. I am trying to grope my way toward my own answer to which of two evils is the greater. I guess we're all on that path.

June Callwood, Chairman,
The Writers' Union of Canada

Eleanor Wachtel does such a fine job of clarifying some of the issues that I'm reluctant to make any comment at all on her article, but I can't resist.

The Alternative to Pornography

First, I'm not convinced by the distinction between erotica and pornography, etymology notwithstanding. In practice the distinction has concealed a class bias: the educated can read *Well of Loneliness, Ulysses, Lady Chatterley's Lover* as well as

the works of Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and others, while the semi-literate whose tastes run to tabloids and pulp magazines are denied their erotica. If erotica is "love-making, implying equals" I have yet to see this wonderful material. Are Lina Wertmüller's films *Swept Away* and *Seven Beauties* erotica, or pornography? Frankly, apart from Ursula Le Guin's sci-fi bisexuals, I haven't seen "love-making, implying equals."

The alternative to pornography is, I believe, a feminist aesthetic which would include language, style, and other structures which convey the nature of women's experience and sexuality as it has been and as it might be. It is difficult to define exactly what is meant by a feminist aesthetic, but I think it involves considerably more than measures of equality. And only when we have clearly in our minds a feminist aesthetic can we begin to understand the depth of betrayal involved in pornography, especially that created by women. (I assume it was a woman who wrote *The Story of 'O'*; it was certainly a woman who produced *Snuff*. And then we have what's-her-name, the editor of *Cosmopolitan* as well as Xaviera Hollander and others.)

I don't envy my colleagues in the Humanities and Fine Arts trying to work out a feminist aesthetic. Imagine having to deal with Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*! But I'm convinced they are moving in the right direction to provide us with a new type of literature, film, dance, poetry, and drama, and a new type of criticism which offers a serious alternative to pornography or erotica.

Related to this, of course, is a feminist social science. I'm troubled, for example, by Nancy Friday's book, *My Secret Garden*, which alleges to be real reports of women's sexual fantasies, many of them sado-masochistic. Friday gives the impression that being able to have such fantasies and being able to express them without guilt is the true measure of liberation. It is going to be hard to argue against pornography if women's imaginations are more hardcore than you would normally find at an adult bookstore. A more serious book is Robert Stoller's *Sexual Excitement* which argues that hostility is a necessary constituent of sexual excitement. He cites sado-masochistic pornography as evidence of this universality. If we don't have a good culture-free understanding of sexuality, we're going to find ourselves with a professional legitimization of pornography of the most offensive possible kind.

With a new feminist aesthetic and a new feminist social science must go a demand that government subsidize the distribution of these works through feminist bookstores, theatres, movie houses, and journals. I have no objection to picketing *Snuff*, but I think our long range strategy should be to get ourselves seen and heard. I also want to call the bluff of my civil libertarian friends. If they believe so strongly in the John Stuart Mill model of the forum of ideas, let them work toward it becoming a reality. Lawyers who defend *Hustler* should turn over part of their fees to a fund for feminist studies. Yes, pornography is "hate literature," but if we're told by civil libertarians that this is the price we pay for cultural democracy, I want them to make certain we have this cultural democracy. For every bookstore on the main street, a feminist bookstore beside it so that the rational person can make the free choice.

Censorship

My second concern has to do with censorship. Wachtel cites many reasons for distrusting censors. Let me just add a few others. Censorship contributes to a law-and-order atmosphere, and, God knows, after

"Lawyers who defend *Hustler* should turn over part of their fees to a fund for feminist studies."

the War Measures Act we don't need more of that. But, censorship also empowers men to look after the interests of women. It seems to me that this replicates the kind of paternalism we're struggling against. How do you weigh this against banning *Pretty Baby* in Ontario?

Pornography and Rape

Finally, I was glad that Wachtel made the point that pornography is a point on a continuum of misogynist culture, and I think there is some danger of over emphasizing pornography by waving the red flag of

"There is some danger of overemphasizing pornography and forgetting in the process that sexist textbooks may be more insidious."

rape and forgetting in the process that sexist school textbooks, which have a captive audience, may be more insidious. As Wachtel says, the evidence that exposure to pornography causes rape is thin. I'm unhappy with Susan Brownmiller who says, in effect, "So what?" If I'm being asked to give up a basic civil liberty like freedom of expression, I want something more than appeals to "common sense."

Wachtel quotes Robin Morgan saying, "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice." This is a good example of an inflamatory statement that doesn't bear close analysis. One could just as easily say, "Christianity is the theory, flagellation is the practice," or "Marxism is the theory, Stalinism is the practice," or "Evolution is the theory, genocide is the practice."

Minimal Conditions for Censorship

Here are what I think are the necessary minimal conditions for censorship:

1) There must be some hard evidence which shows a systematic connection between rape and pornography. Along with this there must be some hard evidence which shows that media which are not ordinarily thought of as pornographic — advertising, TV sit-coms, popular magazines, movies — do not contribute to rape. If the latter case can't be made, then we must be prepared to censor all or nothing. I know this is a harsh test but, remember, we are being asked to trade off a very important political freedom, and I don't want to give it away cheaply. If there is a "clear and present danger," o.k., but let's be sure of it.

2) I want some evidence that the law enforcement agencies that

Eleanor Wachtel

are going to be laying charges against bookstores and movie theatres are just as enthusiastic about prosecuting rape. In the same issue of *Branching Out* you have Janet Bliss's excellent discussion of how these great protectors of our minds regard rape. The people who are now so zealous in censoring books and films are the same ones who have been closing their eyes to rape or blaming women. In short, if rape is the issue, let's see some proof that law enforcement agencies are really concerned and are not just manipulating us for their own careerist ambitions.

3) Finally, and this is the most important condition, final authority for decisions must be put in the hands of the Women's Movement. The Movement is the only group whose members can be trusted not to freak out over discussions of lesbianism, who can be trusted to know the difference between obscenity and sex education, who can be trusted to distinguish between *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* as a feminist novel and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* as a sexist film. But another reason for this is that it gives us political control which we have not had in the past.

What do you think of these conditions? And what do you think is the probability of them being met?

Thelma McCormack,
Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
York University

Eleanor Wachtel replies:

It is always curious to discover, when one has chosen an almost irritatingly tentative approach, airing out sheets of argument along the way, that one is still perceived as having thumped out conclusions. I would have faulted my article for its failure of nerve in calling for no more than (i) feminist involvement in drafting cautious, minimalist legislation (the duty of any good citizen); (ii) a rationalization of the multiplicity of laws effecting censorship under a single acceptable definition of obscenity, and (iii) a need for more feminist-informed social research to counter sexist bias. Only this, gleaned from more than 4000 words! So wary am I of censorship that more space is filled expounding *its* dangers than decrying the ugliness of pornography.

Yet I remain troubled by what Engel calls "dangerous, disgusting," and Callwood "degrading, debasing" — namely, pornography — and what to do about it.

"The practical effect of McCormack's conditions is to preclude all action."

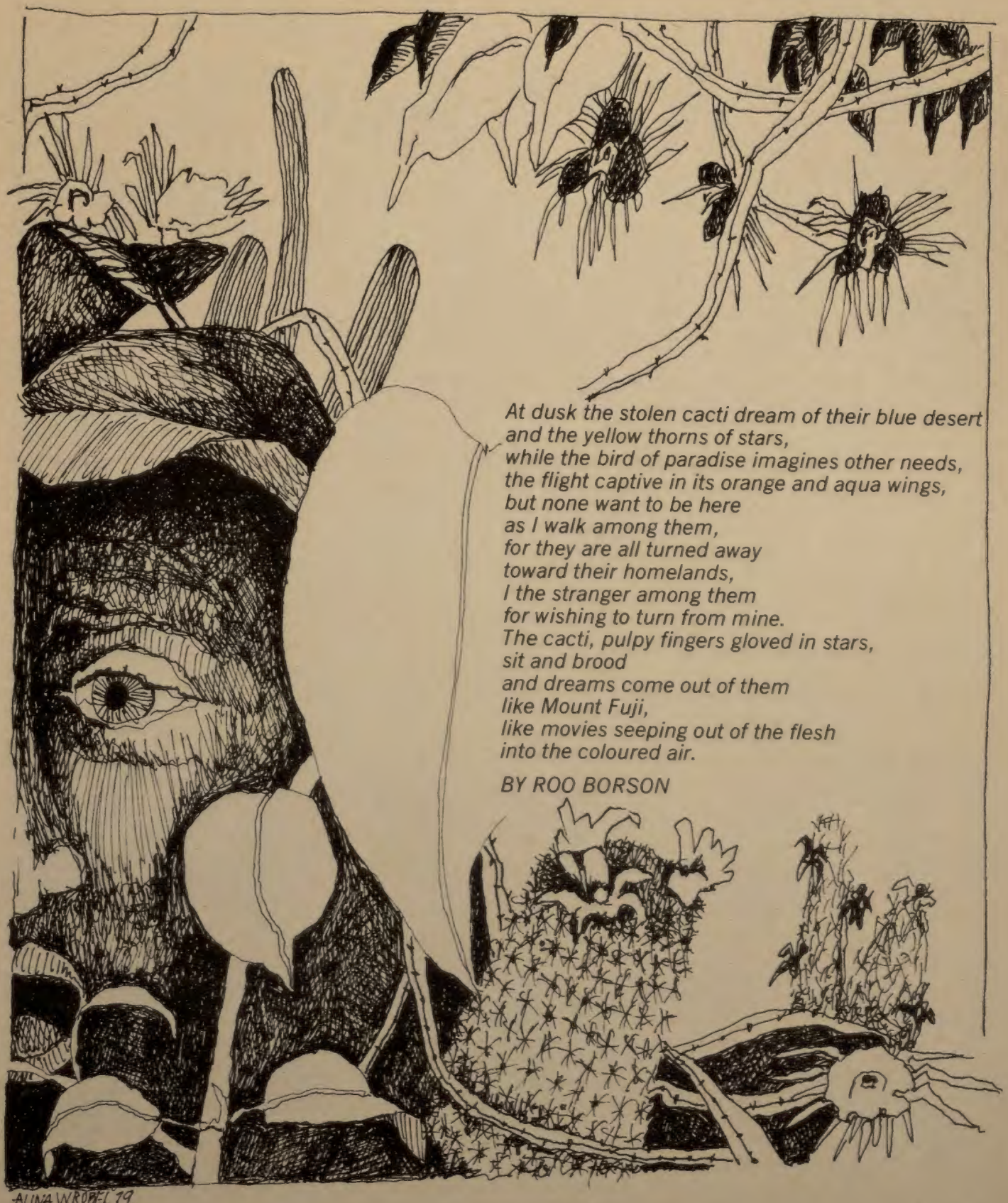
I am intrigued by McCormack's idea of a feminist aesthetic that would have not merely literary or artistic implications but be a kind of social touchstone, since this aesthetic is a notion even more elusive than that of pornography. "A good culture-free understanding of sexuality" seems similarly unattainable. And although I applaud these as well as the demand for a genuine marketplace of ideas and choice for the "rational person," what takes the utopian cake is her condition that authority for censorship rests with the Women's Movement. Yes, these are interesting, desirable conditions; but the probability of their being met is nil. Their practical effect is to preclude all action.

True, the distinction between erotica and pornography is one more easily made etymologically than practically, subject by subject. Yet some images, especially of bondage, seem fairly obvious, and it is with these that one would like to start developing a public sensitivity. The point to make, simply, is that pornography does not portray women in a way most would like to be regarded.

Since all definitions are more or less unsatisfactory at the edges, it is clearly impossible to develop the perfect one for pornography or obscenity. That doesn't mean we should settle for a particularly imperfect one, certainly we don't want one that errs in the direction of more rather than less censorship. But nor should we abandon the field altogether.

It is gratifying to have elicited such interested response to my article, and to have had the opportunity of contributing to the debate. As for urinals, my simile has been confirmed by reliable sources as quite exact. However, urinals are hardly something I would ever take a stand on.

IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS



At dusk the stolen cacti dream of their blue desert
and the yellow thorns of stars,
while the bird of paradise imagines other needs,
the flight captive in its orange and aqua wings,
but none want to be here
as I walk among them,
for they are all turned away
toward their homelands,
I the stranger among them
for wishing to turn from mine.
The cacti, pulpy fingers gloved in stars,
sit and brood
and dreams come out of them
like Mount Fuji,
like movies seeping out of the flesh
into the coloured air.

BY ROO BORSON

PRINTED MATTER

"Have You Heard the One About . . .?"

"Bigotry ranges from jokes to genocide," said Rhoda Kaellis, a member of Victoria's Jewish community speaking at a May 3 public meeting protesting the recent behaviour of the B.C. Human Rights Commission. Members of various Victoria groups formed a coalition to object to Human Rights Commission (HRC) attitudes and to call for resignation of HRC members. This coalition included the Victoria Black Peoples' Society, the Status of Women Action Group, the Civil Liberties Association, and the Feminist Lesbian Action Group plus individuals concerned with the rights of old people.

"At an April 3 meeting, HRC members exchanged jokes and snide comments deprecating women and homosexuals."

The speakers objected to attitudes displayed at an April 3 meeting of the B.C. Human Rights Commission where some HRC members exchanged jokes and offhand snide comments deprecating women and homosexuals. Present at that HRC meeting were Norrie Preston of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women and its human rights committee, and Stephen Hume, reporter for Victoria's *Daily Colonist*. The Human Rights Commission's responsibilities include increasing public awareness of human rights issues. Yet Hume reported that the meeting "dominated by nine male commission members, was often interrupted with sarcastic remarks about women and homosexuals." Norrie Preston said "they just sat there and joked and jocked around. It was just an old-boys' club." Both particularly focused on Commissioner Jock Smith who "described as 'nonsense' a sex discrimination case which is now before a provincial Board of Enquiry." Even two members of the HRC, Hume reported, seemed dissatisfied with their fellows' jokes and banter. "Human rights education," Commissioner Joe Katz said, "should begin right here."

As the controversy grew, facts emerged to further darken the reputations of some Commission members. Hume reported that Jock Smith was a member of the Surrey School Board when it was accused of human rights violations in 1976 and 1978. (In 1976 the board was "found in violation of the B.C. Human Rights Code and agreed to drop its religious restrictions for employment. In 1978, the board, with Smith as a vocal opponent, was "ordered to stop discriminating against and to pay benefits to teachers with pregnancy-related illnesses.")

Public reaction was immediate and strong. Roman Catholic Bishop Remi De Roo, chairperson of the previous Commission, said "I was pained to hear the reports of the meeting". Members of the Victoria womens' community felt that bigotry was evident in the comments of HRC commissioners and questioned their right to stand as a Commission. Letters to the editor and one newspaper editorial felt that the present Commission had blatantly violated the principles of the Human Rights Act in their comments and attitudes. B.C. MLAs Karen Sanford (NDP Comox) and Charles Barber (NDP Victoria) said that the B.C. Human Rights Commission should resign because it is hurting human rights in the province.

"Finally the HRC apologized and conceded that the 'jokes and asides were misplaced and assuredly inappropriate."

Another event sparked more community anger. Human Rights Commissioner Rev. Neil Vant stated in an April 15 interview that homosexuals should not be employed as teachers because "when they can't find consenting adults they sometimes prey on others." The Commission did disassociate itself from Vant's remark but no government officials demanded the resignation of this guardian of human rights. In fact, throughout the controversy, B.C. Labour Minister Alan Williams claimed that the Commission was free to resign or not. He met with HRC chairperson Margaret Strongitharm to discuss the Commission's behaviour but did not criticize any of their remarks or actions. Finally, the Human Rights Commission apologized for the remarks about women and homosexuals made at their April 3 meeting. Their apology conceded that the "jokes and asides were misplaced and assuredly inappropriate at a table dealing with human rights". This apology was acknowledged at the May 3 public protest but the participants labeled it insufficient and would not rescind demands for Commission resignations.

Mary Anne Erickson

Genital Mutilation: An end to the Silence?

At least thirty million women and children in Africa have been subjected to genital mutilation, according to Fran Hosken, a special advisor to the World Health Organization. At a public meeting in Toronto on July 4th, Hosken condemned the operations as a violation of human rights and charged that the international community and African leaders had maintained "a conspiracy of silence."

After five years of extensive research, including visits to hospitals in Africa, Hosken has documented that "female circumcision" is practiced in over twenty-six countries in Africa and in some countries of the Middle East. "The operation most frequently practiced is clitoridectomy or excision — the cutting out, without anesthetic, of most or all of the external genitalia of female children, from newborn babies to the age of puberty." Razor blades, knives or glass splinters are used; women perform the mutilations.

The most dangerous operation, infibulation, is practiced mainly in the Moslem areas of Africa. After the clitoris and labia minora are cut out, the outer labia are scraped of skin and then fastened together with thorns or catgut. The legs of the child are tied together for several weeks until the wound is healed, closing the vagina except for a tiny opening for urine and menstrual blood, thus ensuring virginity.

These operations are so painful that frequently the child goes into convulsions. Some girls bleed to death or die of infections, such as tetanus, which result from dirty tools. Women who survive the ordeal are plagued with health problems, such as damage to the bladder, rectum or vaginal wall, cysts and hardening of the scars, menstrual problems, extremely painful intercourse, life-long frigidity and sometimes infertility. The psychological effects of these traumatic operations are unknown.

"In the case of infibulation, normal intercourse is impossible," Ms. Hosken said. "At the time of marriage, the girl has to be cut open by the husband." Repeated intercourse is necessary to keep the wound open. The scarification also makes for prolonged labour which can kill mother and child. Unless the woman is cut open further unassisted childbirth is impossible. Some women are sewn up again after each birth until the state of the organs makes further operations impossible.

These mutilations have been practiced in Africa for at least two thousand years. The most common reasons are to increase fertility, to increase the sexual pleasure of the male and to preserve virginity and prevent promiscuity by denying female sexuality. It is widely believed that without the operations, women are hypersexual and uncontrollable; men refuse to marry uncircumcised women and since a woman's status is entirely dependent on marriage and the production of children, especially where polygamy is practiced, mothers insist on the operations for their daughters. Women who are not mutilated are social outcasts.

Development has not eradicated the problem; genital mutilation is more widespread today than ever before. In some countries both western-trained physicians and hospitals that receive international assistance perform the operations. Although western development agencies, the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the churches have been aware of genital mutilation for years, they have refused until recently to speak out against these "cultural practices." Largely because of the persistent efforts of Fran Hosken to publicize the facts, and to growing resistance to genital mutilation among African women themselves, agencies like the World Health Organization and Planned Parenthood are finally beginning to publish information. In February of this year, WHO sponsored a seminar on "Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children." African and Middle Eastern delegates openly discussed female circumcision for the first time and made several specific recommendations for its abolishment, including the adoption of clear national policies and educational programmes for both the general public and midwives.

"In February, WHO openly discussed female circumcision for the first time."

However, as Ms. Hosken pointed out, this seminar was only a beginning. In 1979, tens of thousands of African girls will be mutilated.

North Americans should not be smug in their condemnation of these practices, for there are disturbing Western parallels: circumcision, clitoridectomy and even infibulation have been practiced in Europe and North America. Nineteenth century American gynecologists shared with primitive Africans the belief in the strange and dangerous influence of the clitoris; clitoridectomy was a popular surgical cure for excessive masturbation, convulsions, insanity, idiocy, tuberculosis and other ail-

ments attributed to "female hysteria" Barely fifty years ago, a group of American gynecologists attempted to persuade mothers to have all newborn daughters circumcised. The debate was not resolved until 1937.

While genital mutilation has never been as widespread in the West as it is in Africa, similar attitudes to female sexuality have inspired some gruesome practices of our own, such as the use of chastity belts in the middle ages, the padlocking of the labia of female slaves in the American South and the slashing of the genitals of gang rape victims.

Other forms of unnecessary gynecological surgery may also be considered a form of mutilation. With the rise of an all-male obstetric and gynecological profession in the nineteenth century, many new operations, including the removal of the ovaries and hysterectomy, were invented. As G.J. Barker-Benfield documents in his study of nineteenth century American gynecology, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life*, removal of the ovaries was a medical mania from 1880 to 1900; the operations were supposed to cure insanity and make patients more tractable. Today, hysterectomy is the most frequently performed unnecessary operation in the USA.

What can Canadian women do? They can pressure international agencies such as WHO and the Canadian International Development Agency to develop health and educational programmes which stress the harmful effects of genital mutilation, and they can join in the growing worldwide protest against these practices. An information package and action guide can be obtained from Fran Hosken at 187 Grant St. Lexington, Mass. 02173 USA.

Victoria Freeman

Prime Time: Aid for Women's Middle Years

Women struggling with mid-life problems can now find helpful information in a new kit produced by Prime Time, a Victoria group which focuses on the needs of women in middle years. The kit, representing the summation of three years' work, contains twelve resource booklets on topics like *Single Women, Natural Menopause,* and *Shifting Gears in Middle Years*. Each booklet provides information plus suggested course outlines and working bibliographies. Co-ordinator Susan Stein anticipates that the kit will be useful to structured or unstructured groups, women's centres, libraries, employment centres, and to individuals seeking programme ideas.

A National Health and Welfare Demonstration Project, Prime Time is completing its third and final year of operation and has accomplished several objectives in its busy existence. The group started several programmes in conjunction with communities, then transferred total responsibility for continuance to them. They offered courses in areas like options for women, going back to school, and dealing with widowhood, which are now offered by local agencies like the YWCA and Camosun College. In the three major areas of employment, health, and education, Prime Time has acted to involve the community in decisions that affect mid-life women.

As well as consulting with institutions to raise awareness concerning women between 35 and 60, the group provides direct services to women through their downtown office which houses a counsellor, a weekly support group, a lounge, and a library. Their most recent project was a television show aired on CBC-Access in July. Prime Time invited over 35 Victoria women to participate in the filming, some of whom, Stein says, "we actually asked to write case histories as a way of getting at certain kinds of realities about women's lives." Stein and contract worker Gretchen Brewin edited the 2½ hour tape to produce a 27 minute show. Now the group has a video cassette, soon to be a film, which can be shown in the community.

The list of the group's accomplishments is long. They plan to culminate their three years with a spring 1980 conference co-sponsored with the University of Victoria School of Social Work and School of Nursing. It will involve both mid-life women and the professionals who work with them. The staff feels that in some ways Prime Time has only begun to scratch the surface in terms of trying to affect community attitudes, yet they also know that their work has changed many women's lives. Their efforts will continue to influence the lives and thoughts of Victoria women because they have skillfully made niches for their programmes within existing structures. For those interested in purchasing the kit, here are details:

PRIME TIME INFORMATION KIT

12 booklets: "Non-Traditional Planning for Women;" "I'd Like to Go Back to School But;" "Financial Planning for the Lay Person;" "The Challenge of Widowhood;" "Shifting Gears in Middle Years;" "How To Say What You Need to Say Without Feeling Guilty;" "Single Women;" "Short Workshops;" "Natural Menopause;" "Practical Budgeting on a Low Income;" "My Husband Retired Early;" and "Leadership Training." Various small pamphlets are also included. Send $10.00 plus $2.50 postage payable to: PRIME TIME #304-620 View St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 1J6

Mary Anne Erickson

Run!

Photos of participants in Edmonton 1st Annual 10 km Road Race, by Mufty Mathewson. Held in August, the race was sponsored by Royal Trust and the Y M C A.

The Lady Was a Politician

by Helen Melnyk

The hollyhocks and snap-dragons are fading in the autumnal afternoon sunshine but the chrysanthemums and zinnias still hold brilliant court in the terraced flower-beds overlooking the crumbling, overgrown Lacombe Trail. An apologetic Bee (Beatrice) Parlby stoops to pull a weed nestled among the blooms. The flower garden outside Dartmoor used to be the pride and glory of her perfectionist mother-in-law, Irene Parlby. She would spend hours stooped over the beds, her legs wrapped with newspapers under long skirts to fend off the bugs and dirt, weeding, hoeing and experimenting. "Gardening was her passion," says Bee. "She always referred back to her garden for analogies between her life and work. She tackled her flower beds with the same purposeful energy as her political duties — pruning and weeding out the crooked and bad to allow the good things to grow and flourish."

It is not for her gardening skills that Irene Parlby is remembered today, of course, but for her position among the famous five. Along with Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Edwards and Louise McKinney, Parlby took the battle for the recognition of women as "persons" in the Canadian constitution all the way up to British Parliament. She also shared the distinction with British Columbia's Mary Ellen Smith of being one of the first women to serve in a provincial cabinet. During her tenure in the Alberta legislature as a representative with the United Farmers from 1921 to 1934, she was responsible for a number of progressive reforms for women, including a minimum wage act and dower act safeguarding the interests of a wife in the event of her husband attempting to sell or dispose of their home.

Silver-haired Bee — the widow of Mrs. Parlby's sole child Humphrey — continues the tour inside the house, crammed with family heirlooms, antiques, books and papers. The Wedgewood china stands displayed in glass-fronted cabinets, the meticulously dusted and polished antique furniture gleams while underfoot the Persian rugs offset the white walls with their colourful designs. Hunt prints and yellowed family photographs line the walls and careful arrangements in crystal vases provide another flowery tribute to the spirit of Mrs. Parlby.

Dartmoor, with its flower gardens and antiques, still stands out as an isle of Edwardian Britannia in the midst of the rolling farmland and bush near Alix, Alberta, about 150 kilometres southeast of Edmonton. There is a museum-like atmosphere about the residence as Beatrice Parlby carefully preserves both the family house and family history for the benefit of passing journalists, historians and graduate students researching thesis papers. This fall — the 50th anniversary of the momentous occasion of Oct. 18, 1929 — the trickle of visitors has turned into a steady stream.

The lengthy showdown began when a defense lawyer, enraged by the stiff sentence meted out to a bootlegger, shouted to police magistrate Emily Murphy in an Edmonton court: "You're not even a person. You have no right to be holding court!" In the stunned silence, an equally angry Magistrate Murphy asked the lawyer to develop his argument. The lawyer did indeed. Under British common law, based on a decision handed down in 1876, women were persons in matters of pains and penalties, but not in matters of rights and privileges.

"She tackled her flower beds with the same purposeful energy as her political duties — pruning and weeding out the crooked and bad to allow the good things to grow and flourish."

An Alberta Supreme Court subsequently ruled that women were persons, at least in the province of Alberta. There did seem some doubt, however, about the legal status of women in Canada under the British North America Act when women's groups across the country subsequently petitioned Ottawa to appoint Mrs. Murphy as the first woman to sit in the Senate. Under the wording of the act, the governor-general was empowered to appoint 'qualified persons' to the Senate, but the term did not make clear whether women as well as men were considered persons. Under the provisions of the constitution, Mrs. Murphy and four others petitioned the Supreme Court of Canada for an interpretation of the word 'persons.' After lengthy deliberations, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women, along with the insane, imbeciles and minors, were not persons.

Canadian women were shocked to learn for the first time that they were not considered persons by their own country. "There was a general outrage," recalls Bee Parlby. "It was thought that with suffrage, women had achieved political equality." Not so. Undaunted, however, the five took their petition all the way to the Privy Council of London which — 13 years after the issue first surfaced — confirmed that women were indeed persons. The status of women in Canada was assured thanks to the perseverent efforts of the remarkable Alberta five.

Compared to her sister crusaders, Parlby was the more reserved and proper of the group. She always remained the cool, cultivated English gentlewoman — the perfect lady. Mrs. Parlby, for instance, would never have coached her three-year-old son to lisp "I am the son of a suffragette and have never known a mother's love," and then let him loose among party guests as Nellie McClung did. It would have

Parlby in 1916

been unthinkable for her to practice social work at home by bringing prostitutes along for dinner as Magistrate Murphy did, sending them off with a lecture on morals, a Bible and a few dollars. Unlike upright, religious McClung and Murphy, Parlby was not a temperance crusader. She was known to indulge in the occasional cigarette and drink, and was overheard once to tell a politician currying her favour to "Go to the devil!"

At heart, Parlby was not a grass-roots politician in the style of McClung who revelled in verbal boxing matches with hecklers. "She was not a fiery speaker, but very organized," recalls her biographer and former neighbour, Barbara Cormack. "She was all sweet reasonableness and logic. She had a cool, well reasoned mind that could always delve to the bottom of things and express her opinions in simple terms to people. She was never rattled or carried away. At least she never showed it — it was the British stiff upper lip all the way."

She was quite capable of putting her detractors in their place with her cool wit and sense of sarcasm. A broadside delivered at a Liberal MLA in the legislature drew the delighted approval of the *Edmonton Journal*, a paper not normally supportive of the U.F.A. government. Her target was the Hon. Joseph T. Shaw who criticised a committee appointed to study the legal status of women as a waste of time. Responding, Parlby caustically remarked: "If the honourable gentleman has a bill already prepared which is going to satisfy the married women of the Province with regard to their economic status, then he must have more than the wisdom of Solomon and certainly more than I have seen evidence of."

"Unlike McClung and Murphy, Parlby was not a temperance crusader. She was known to indulge in the occasional cigarette and drink, and was overheard once to tell a politician to 'Go to the devil'!"

An excellent orator and determined campaigner, she never really enjoyed the rough and tumble of electioneering, however. Her proper standards revulsed against primitive overnight accommodations when the hired man would be evicted from his bed into the barn to make room for the lady policitian overnight.

"If at all possible, she would try to make it home every night which meant for a lot more driving," says Bee, recalling vividly churning and splashing over nearly impassible trails to campaign speeches. At the height of the U.F.A.'s power, when the party with its co-operative philosphy was seen as the champion of the western farmer against unfair Eastern tariffs and the monopolies of railways, grain elevators and meat-packing plants, the country people would patiently wait for the lady candidate to arrive.

"One time we were due to deliver a speech at Bentley school house, but the roads were so bad we kept grinding down in mud over a foot deep. Humphrey phoned ahead that we couldn't make it on time, but we were told they would wait until we got there. So we went grinding and grinding on, way on, until we arrived at about 10:30 p.m., two-and-half hours after we were supposed to be there. The big crowd was still there, enthusiastic, and refused to hear of the cutting of any speeches."

Although Parlby held land and investments in her own name, fought for women's rights in the legislature for over a decade and represented Canada at the League of Nations, she never did learn to drive. After her first turn at the wheel, she leaped out of the Model T Ford, vowing never to sit in the driver's seat again.

"Parlby hankered for an acting career but wasn't prepared to deal with the social ostracism that went along with that profession."

Brought up in an upper class family in India and England and presented to court upon her debut at 18, Parlby was always destined to do things in the proper British way. Her family's attitudes towards women and their role in the world were hardly traditional, however. Appreciating his daughter's fine intelligence, Colonel Ernest Marryat urged Irene to enter university and study medicine. Ahead of his time in many ways, the Colonel was at the forefront of a movement championing the right of women to receive degrees.

Medicine didn't appeal to Irene who hankered for an acting career instead. She wasn't prepared to deal with the social ostracism that went along with that profession,

Parlby at 16 in India

however. Actresses were considered barely one step above streetwalkers. Certainly no nice girl would be caught dead on stage.

Instead, she decided to journey into the wilds of Canada in 1896 to visit a friend in the Buffalo Lake area of Alberta. Love added permanence to her plans when she became engaged to a neighbour, Walter Parlby, an Oxford classics scholar turned rancher Although she was destined to remain in the wild and woolly West. Parlby was determined not to live like any cowboy. She sent home for her books, piano and pretty clothes as a start in building a beautiful, cultivated haven for herself in the otherwise uncivilized surroundings. While most of the settlers in the 1890's lived in log shacks, the Parlby home boasted big arm chairs, china and brass and bookshelves crowded with Browning, Kipling and Maeterlinck. The Parlbys established

In later years, they continued to live in style as Mrs. Cormack recalls. "If you were invited to the Parlby's for dinner, you'd know better than to turn up in your overalls. Most farm wives would serve supper at the kitchen table over oil cloth, but at the Parlbys dinner was served in the dining-room with lace table-cloths, the family silver and china. Mrs.Parlby was keen on the finer things of life. If you knew she was coming to tea, you'd put on an extra spurt and work a little harder at the cleaning and gardening. "An invitation to their house was considered a real treat. They were the only people to the district to have electricity and plumbing. At that time I was a university graduate turned rancher's wife. We were just starting out and lived in a shack. I'd treasure those invitations to Sunday tea and play themselves in the hub of community life organizing polo matches, gymkhanas, teas and picnics.
readings. Bernard Shaw's *St. Joan* was a favourite." Still, not everyone in the district looked upon the "literary" evenings with approving eyes. The lot of the farm wife was hard in those days with women putting in back-breaking 18 hour days, cooking, baking, minding their numerous babies, and preserving as well as working along with their husbands in the fields. "Some people resented the Parlbys for being well-off," says Cormack.

On her part, Mrs. Parlby sometimes had difficulty in understanding her neighbours as immigrant farmers streamed in from middle-Europe with their foreign customs and tongues. These were not her people and she was never to really understand them. Shy and reserved, she sometimes gave people the impression of coldness and stiffness. She was not a folksy, out-going type, says Cormack.

" 'The day has forever fled when the woman can confine her interests within the four walls of her home.' "

Recognizing the importance of community, Parlby was instrumental in founding the Country Women's Club to counteract the isolation of farm women. The group was to become an important political force when it became affiliated with the U.F.A. and marked Parlby's debut on the political scene. The Country Women's Club was first accepted by the U.F.A. as an auxiliary but after being elected president, Parlby pushed for a stronger role for the group which became the United Farm Women of Alberta. Although the U.F.W.A. was never fully amalgamated into the U.F.A., it was invited to send two delegates to the party's convention in 1915.

In her first annual report as president of the Club Parlby wrote: "The day has forever fled when the woman can confine her interests within the four walls of her home." Her words were to come back to her when she was asked to run for provincial office less than four years later. "The phone call came as we were in the middle of housecleaning one afternoon," says her daughter-in-law. "She didn't want to stand at first, but was reminded that she was the one who'd been urging women into public. Although she finally agreed, she didn't think she'd be nominated, never mind win."

"Although she was appointed to the cabinet, she was never offered a portfolio. One of her colleagues cited her 'delicate' health as the reason, but when she was asked years later whether or not she would have accepted the more demanding position, she answered, 'I never had the problem of decision as I was never asked.' "

When critics asked whether she thought "dirty" politics was a woman's job, she would wave at the black range in her immaculate kitchen and respond: "I clean my stove with blacklead. And I do it in a white apron." Although she was appointed to the cabinet, she was never offered a portfolio. One of her colleagues cited her "delicate" health as the reason, but when she was asked years later whether or not she would have accepted the more demanding position, she answered wryly: "I had never the problem of decision as I was never asked".

Her debut in public life quickly shattered Parlby's previous sheltered life as battered wives, unwed mothers, women in every wretched plight turned to her for help, knocking on her door and filling the mailbox with their letters. She joined ranks with Nellie McClung who sat across the floor as a member of the opposition — she was also elected in 1921, as a Liberal — to pass through legislation to improve the status of women. Today her Sexual Sterilization for Mental Defectives bill — since repealed — is not considered one of her more impressive pieces of legislation.

" 'My little experience of political life tends to make me feel that ideals of any kind are the last thing to flourish there, and that the longer you remain in the life the harder you must fight if you would not fall a prey to the deadening vice of cynicism.' "

Her political career led to loneliness and to disillusionment as she spent months away from her family during the sitting of the legislature. She was to write later: "My little experience of political life tends to make me feel that ideals of any kind are the last thing to flourish there, and that the longer you remain in the life the harder you must fight if you would not fall a prey to that deadening vice of cynicism." She was fortunate to have a loyal, ardent supporter always at her side, her husband Walter. Parlby had a strong, supportive marriage as did her sisters in struggle, McClung and Murphy. "He supported her in every way," recalls Bee. "He had a good sense of humour and would joke about being pointed out as 'Mrs. Parlby's husband.' Dad wasn't the kind of man who would sit and watch a woman washing dishes alone. He didn't think that was a gentlemanly thing to do. I remember once he had just finished reading a letter from Renee in Geneva (at the League of Nations). Among all the newsy happenings, she wrote about attending an official function on the arm of the Maharaj of Bikenir. 'You know the nicest thing about all this,' he said 'is that she's *my wife!* He only weakened once — on his deathbed — when he confessed that sometimes he'd wished she had never got involved in political life."

Despite support from family and friends, politics were to take their toll. Parlby returned from Geneva after four months on the verge of a complete physical and nervous breakdown. Although her interest in politics never diminished, Parlby contented herself with tending her flowers at Dartmoor, leaving others to hoe the political row.

Her career was over for the lady politician, but the battle for women's rights in Canada was just begun. When Ottawa unveiled a plaque in 1938 commemorating the victory of the Famous Five, Nellie McClung was to prophetically say: "Women had to convince the world first that they had souls, then mentality, and then a political entity, and the end is not yet".

Today, only six women sit in the Alberta legislature: token, decorative blooms in the political garden once so actively weeded and pruned by Irene Parlby.

Helen Melnyk writes for the Edmonton Journal.

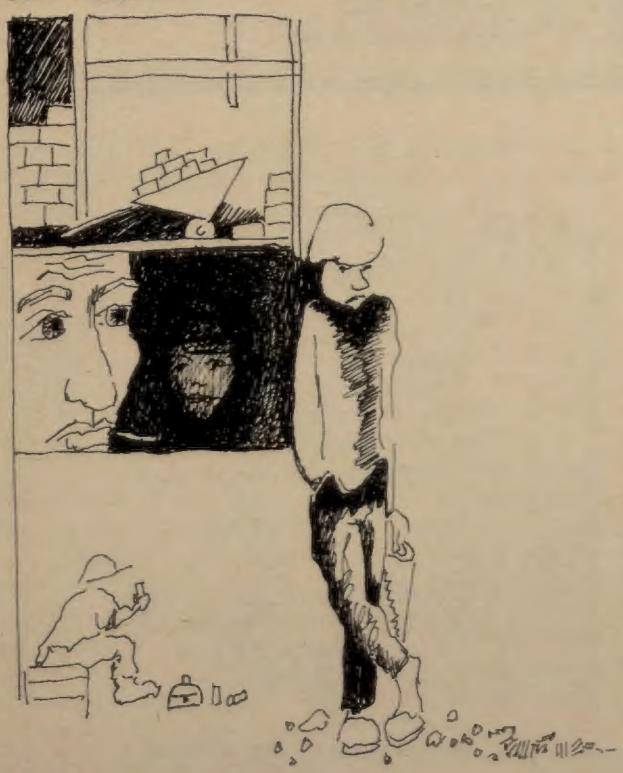


illustration by Alina Wrobel

"One member of the construction crew encouraged me: 'Lie. Tell them you have experience . . . If you claim none, you'll never get the job.'"

Zen Construction

wherein a woman learns harmony, balance and how to lay 'im down

by Kathleen Braid

At a party recently a man whose concrete basement I had helped to pour the week before told me he thought women became tougher and less feminine when they did hard work.

"If that's the case," quipped his wife, "how come you always call me first when there's heavy work to be done on the farm and say I'm your best partner?" The women in our group burst out laughing and began exchanging stories of how hard and long they worked on their land, in their homes and in their husbands' businesses.

Women have always worked hard. When people say that women working in construction, logging, mining, or fishing, are doing 'non-traditional' work, what they mean is that they are not used to seeing us do such work for money. Pioneer women, farm women and women called into emergency service during the two world wars performed heavy physical labour as a matter of daily routine. What is different now is that women, like myself, are being paid on a permanent full-time basis for their labour.

For the past year I have been a construction worker. I do the same jobs as the male labourers, but since it is all still new to me, the work is more adventure than drudgery. I pack boards from place to place so they're available where they're wanted. (One of the first things I learned on the job is on a construction site you don't 'carry' boards, you pack them. As one foreman put it: "It doesn't matter so much how you do it, as long as you say it properly.") I also do plenty of pick and shovel work, insulating, nailing, roofing and sheet metal work.

Desperation led me to apply for my first construction job. Stone-broke, I had exhausted all the possibilities for female employment on the small island where I live. I had tried to get work as a clerk or waitress at the food stores, restaurant and bar. Construction was the only work possibility left. That summer there was a major project going on — the building of a school-community centre complex that called for a crew of about 14 people, one of the largest our island had ever seen. It took me weeks to get up enough courage to apply.

One member of the construction crew encouraged me, offering some timely advice. "Lie. Tell them you have experience. A foreman expects it; he discounts half of what you claim as experience. If you claim none in the first place you'll never get the job. When they say

there are no jobs, keep coming back and bugging them."

Amid the helter-skelter of lumber piles and saws, someone pointed out the foreman's shack and I asked for the boss. "That's me," said the man behind the plywood desk. "I'd like to apply for a job," I said tremulously. Without blinking an eye, Ray answered, "Fill out this application card." I lied about a previous job for a construction company "up north." "No jobs right now," he said. "Come back tomorrow".

The next day I was told I could start on clean-up the following Monday. I was hired! (Months later Ray told me the crew had really been slowing down at the time and this had something to do with his hiring me. Performance improved noticeably, he said, immediately after I was hired. About three months later when it eased off again, he hired another woman.) Friends lent me a hammer, square and a carpenter's belt while I bought a 16 foot tape measure, hard hat and steel toe boots. I was, more or less, ready.

As the only 'lady' construction worker, my first few months were lonely. For company I kept a daily journal. My entry for the first day on the job notes: "Pain is the present overwhelming impression. My right hand has three open blisters and three more that wait to be broken tomorrow. My left palm aches from where I pulled a truss toward me, let go, and fell over backward down the height of 14 two-by-fours. My right ankle aches from where I bashed it sometime or other and the right wrist reminds me I've hammered more and heavier nails today than ever in my life. But the doozer is my left thumb which is a deep violet colour where I hit it with the 16 ounce carpenter's hammer I carried so proudly this morning."

The carpentry foreman was not impressed. At the end of the first day, someone held out my blistered hand to show him as he walked by. "That'll teach her to try and do a man's work", he growled. But the man holding my hand defended me: "In a month she'll be tougher than you are". Every night I would come home and collapse for half an hour's sleep before I could summon the energy to cook supper, only to return to bed again. My first shift was from 5 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.: the early hours meant we could avoid the heat of the afternoons. I got up at 3:30 a.m. to be at work by 5. We had coffee at 7, lunch at 9 just as the sun came up over the trees, another coffee break at 11:45 a.m. and work was over at 1:30. Later we worked nine hour days from 7 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. so we could get off early on Fridays.

Despite all my awkwardness and the aches and bruises, within two weeks of this kind of routine, I felt exhilarated at the end of most days. My body felt excellent. It certainly looked different. One day as I brushed my hair I noticed the new bulges in my arm muscles. That and my calloused hands took some getting used to, but the sense of greatly improved muscle tone, of a tighter belly, thighs and back made me feel slim, powerful and healthy.

Construction work forced me to come to grips with physical fear. Before I had been able to back down from things out of ignorance and timidness. Now I had to bully myself into climbing onto a roof to lay down plywood sheets. Courage had to be tempered with caution I learned one day as I stepped off a scaffold and a 16-foot 2-by-12 inch plank fell on me from a 20-foot height. Luckily it glanced off my right shoulder without even leaving a bruise.

I also learned to move more carefully. One morning as I tripped and stumbled about, I realized that what not only drained me of extra energy but labelled me as a novice was my lack of grace. It was obvious from the awkward way I piled lumber on my shoulder, or dug around in my nail pouch or tripped on loose boards that I wasn't used to a construction site. So I focussed steadily on walking. When people ask me what I did in the first two months, I tell them I learned to walk. Zen construction: harmony between board, body and ground. I focussed on my feet and stopped tripping.

The work got easier over time. After the first few weeks of mild panic at proving myself, showing that a woman could do the job and feeling obliged to throw around 60 pound bales of shingles 'like a man', I relaxed. I discovered a day was much less tiring if I didn't strain on any one job and if I paced myself, which included asking for help with loads that were beyond my comfortable carrying capacity. Strength, I discovered, is not the only or even the best way to carry. Balance and co-ordination will often accomplish what brute strength cannot.

Being a 'first' meant I became something of a public monument on the island as people would drive by to see the lady construction worker. I was always hailed by one 80-year-old man with, "Here's the lady who pours cement!" People were always asking me about my new job. This quickly became a source of isolation and tension: I felt different.

Although many of the crew made a real effort to clean up their language, the swearing never really bothered me. I figured I could cuss with the best of 'em. What did offend me was the vocabulary of the construction site. A board is 'dressed' or 'undressed' depending on how it's cut. You then 'lay *her* down' (or 'lay er down') and get it into place by knocking it a 'cunt hair' to the right or left. When another woman was hired on the site three months later, we delighted in masculinizing the pronouns. "Lay 'im down," we'd shout.

My big identity crisis occurred one day when some young women walked by the site. Bruce nudged Dale, "should we whistle?" Suddenly I was reminded of all the construction sites I had walked by, waiting for the inevitable whistles and cat-calls. I laughed out loud at the switch in positions. Now that I'm a construction worker, who do I whistle at, Baby?

Kathleen Braid lives in Vancouver. She will begin pre-apprenticeship in carpentry in January. Branching Out *would like to hear from other women who have worked in such jobs as construction, welding, mechanics etcetera. Were your experiences working with men similar to those described in this article?*

Finger vs. Man
A Hands Down Victory

by Victoria Powell and Jenifer Svendsen

Having read and enjoyed Betty Dodson's book *Liberating Masturbation* and having reflected upon David Reuben's comment on masturbation ("it is like going to the movies by yourself — the show is the same except that you are in the movie theatre alone"), it occurred to us that Dodson takes the matter much too seriously while Reuben is entirely too flippant. Reuben implies that aloneness is necessarily a less desirable state than togetherness. We feel that this snide attitude is unwarranted and that Betty Dodson's approach makes a continual mountain out of what can be, at times, a nice little molehill. A digital quickie can be fun. We take the view that the nicest thing about masturbation is the fact that it is something you can do when you are alone. The stress of a sexual relationship with another human being is totally eliminated in constructive auto-eroticism. Indeed, this is truly "doing your own thing."

Your finger is your friend and just think of what a faithful and loyal friend it can be. It's handy, too. (Pun intended.) Being attached to you, you are unlikely to ever be without it because it is difficult to lose it, forget it or misplace it. Other good points about your finger that you should be aware of are the following:

1. You never have to nag your finger to take a bath or shower before it makes love to you.
2. You never have to pester your finger to turn off the T.V. and come to bed. It is always ready when you are.
3. Your finger doesn't have a nose, so you don't have to be squeaky clean to insist on some sexual attention from it.
4. Your finger doesn't talk. (What bliss!) Just think of what this means! Your finger doesn't criticize you for not having orgasms, taking too long to have orgasms, or having so many orgasms that it can't get loose. It also doesn't ask stupid questions, such as "Did you come?" or "Was it all right for you?" or "Did the earth move?" Your finger will never criticize you for being too quiet and undemonstrative, nor will it fuss that you make so much noise that the neighbours might call the landlord. Your finger won't moan at you because it can't have an orgasm or, if it just had one, because it can't have another one again so soon. You don't have to make charming and intelligent conversation with your finger before, during or after sexual activity. Nor do you have to listen to it give you the definitive view of the Third World.

"Your finger doesn't criticize you for not having orgasms, taking too long to have orgasms, or having so many orgasms that it can't get loose."

5. Your finger does not wake you up at 4 a.m. to read you the poem it has just written, to brag about how it clinched the Figby contract (after seven double martinis, yet!), or to discuss (in excruciating detail) how it solved that fascinating problem in staff relations.
6. Your finger is somewhat better than a vibrator. It never needs batteries replaced or mechanical repairs. You can use your finger in the bath or shower without either damage to it or risk of imminent electrocution.
7. Your finger is a perfect bed-partner. It does not snore, fart, sweat, belch, hog the bed space in spread-eagle fashion, hog the covers, steal your pillow, or dig you in the ribs with its sharp elbows. Your finger doesn't complain when your pets want to sleep on the bed. Also, your finger does not misfire and leave wet spots on the sheets. In the morning, your finger will not pounce on you intent on seduction because it awoke with an a.m. tumescence before you have had a cup of coffee. Nor will it refuse to seduce you before it has had a cup of coffee, made by you and brought to it.
8. Your finger will not get you pregnant. You do not have to concern yourself with an IUD, hormone pills, rubber apparatuses and greasy kid's stuff. All you have to have is a bottle of hand lotion, in a scent of *your* preference.
9. Your finger will not give you syphilis, gonorrhea, yeast infections or crabs. The most harm you can do to yourself with your finger is to scratch yourself with a ragged fingernail. (File it down gently; your finger is your friend, remember. Reflect also that if a penis hurt you, its owner wouldn't permit you to file it down.)

Life with your finger can be serene, silent and blissfully content. But, cry the critics, "What will happen when you are lonely?" Your finger can help you in this department as well. Your finger can dial the telephone number of any of your favourite friends. You will discover that friends become better friends when you are not sexually dependent upon them.

Finally, when you are old and gray and full of sleep, you will find that your finger has gracefully grown old with you. Indeed, the more use you have made of it, the more gracefully it (and you) will grow old. Remember, the more exercise a joint gets, the less susceptible it is to arthritis.

Victoria L. Powell and Jenifer Svendsen live in Vancouver.

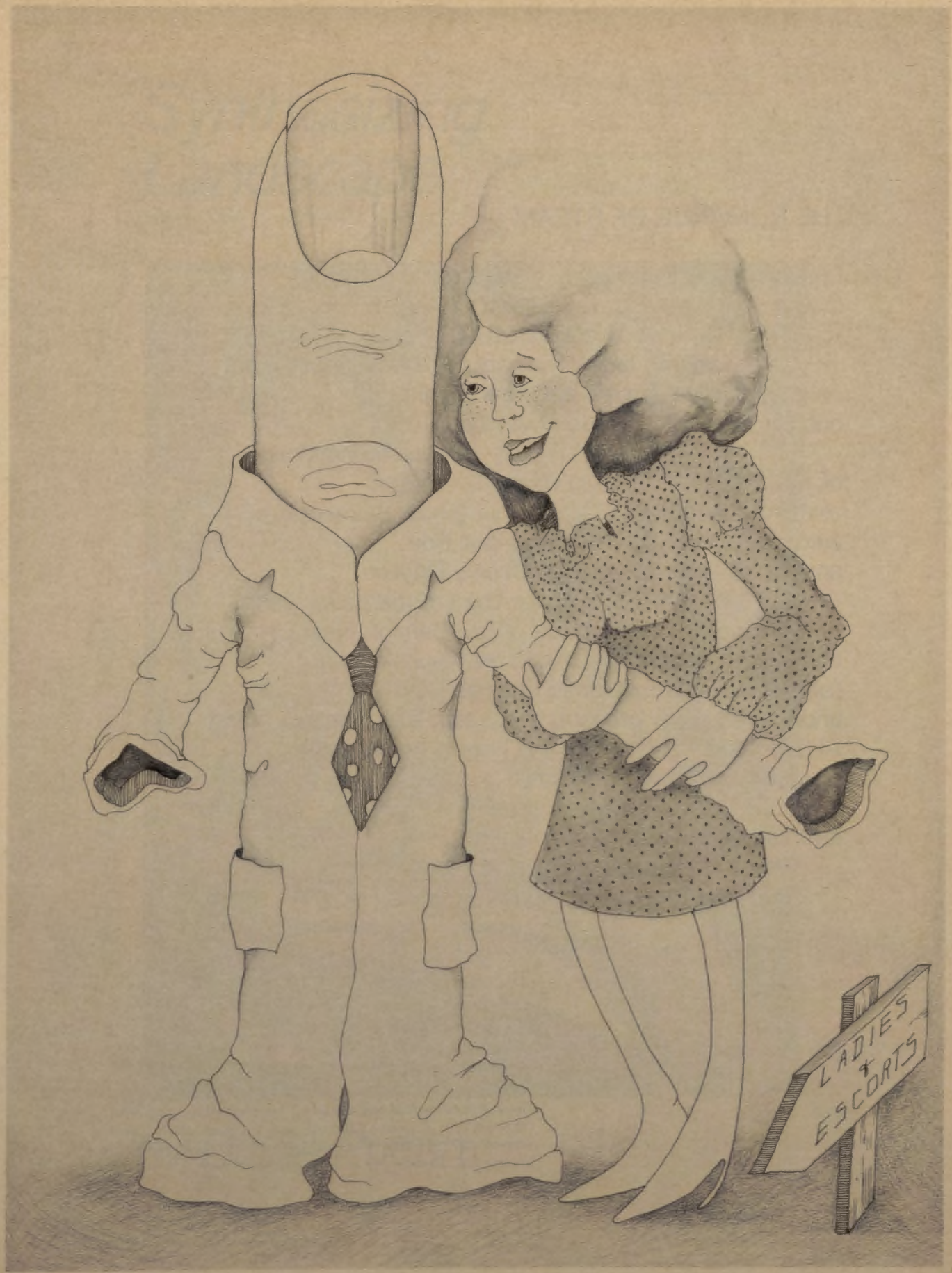


illustration by Diana Roy

THE ROMANCE OF STEAM

I never actually ran away on a train tho
it was a vital part of my twelfth summer
roller skating on cobble stones
past wagons laden with satchels and caged cats
up to the drive-wheels and searchlight
but the semaphore was always red
glazed portraits
of new York to Toronto tourists lined
airconditioned cars and young man passengers
were all Hobo Billy taking his last ride
and the brakemen were all Jimmy Rogers
but the real bums under the trestle never sang
tho some traded tales of jazz men in New Orleans
and moose beside the tracks at Kapuskasing
for sandwiches and loose change
under the town nameboard arm linked groups sang
AULD LANG SYNE and I could not imagine
why parting made them cry
I sang
love ta see th' towns apassin' by
there is no steam in trains today
and I no longer cherish my illusions.

by Eunice Brooks

Eunice Brooks has had poetry published in 3¢ Pulp, Poetry Northwest and Poetry Seattle. her short stories have appeared in Vancouver Magazine and she has been freelancing to yachting magazines for six years. Married, with two sons, she is "inching toward a BA in English," taking courses at Douglas College in Surrey, B.C.

Synthesizing Landscape

by Diane Pugen

Testing #1

Horizon Interchanging

Mountain Lights

Sleepers

Diane Pugen presently works in three modes: drawing and drawn collage, etching and lithography. She draws landscapes on location, returning to the same spot as frequently as necessary to complete the work. In larger compositions she synthesizes landscape, human figures and everyday objects, such as telephones. Also characteristic of these drawings are the bold spontaneous black ink areas which are used to produce an interaction of positive and negative in the composition.

Pugen was born in Toronto and from 1962 to 1964 attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago. She had her first one-woman show at the Pollock Gallery in Toronto in 1966 and has since exhibited at many group and individual shows. She teaches at Arts' Sake, Inc., and the University of Toronto, Hart House.

the cuban code

by Margaret Randall

The following excerpts are taken from a recent article by Margaret Randall, a journalist residing in Cuba, detailing the various aspects of the struggle against sexism in Cuba since the revolution in 1959. The focus here is on two legislative changes, the first with implications for women's labour force participation and the second for relations between women and men in the family. Although both are aimed at providing a full place for women in Cuban society, each takes a very different approach. The labour law reforms lead to a segregation of vocation by sex. The implementation of the Family Code on the other hand appears to remove any institutionalization of male or female roles.

Randall provides an accounting of the development and progress of the labour and family reforms from her vantage point as a ten-year resident of Cuba. In the next issue we will print an analysis of these reforms from the perspective of women involved in both labour and family law reform in Canada.

photo from Cuban Women Now by Margaret Randall, published by Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974, Toronto

The Labour Code

Following the 1959 Revolution, Cuba inherited a female labour force of about 194,000. Of these women, 70% worked as domestic servants,

with the accompanying long hours, oppressive conditions, no benefits and miserable pay. With 700,000 men unemployed and 300,000 sub-employed, immediate incorporation of women into the labour force would have been impossible. Consequently, the Federation of Cuban Women* decided the first step was to encourage housewives to become involved in voluntary work where new disciplines and work habits might be developed. By 1964, with unemployment a thing of the past, the emphasis was shifted to getting women into the paid labour force.

Ten years later the emphasis changed once more: by that time women made up 24% of the productive and service forces and the work force no longer consisted of simply a vast number of jobs to be filled. Highly skilled workers were in demand. The Federation, while continuing to encourage women to join the labour force, now developed specialized training courses that would prepare women to compete for more qualified and rewarding work.

In March of 1968, articles 47 and 48 of the Cuban Labour Code were passed, stipulating some 500 posts closed to women for reasons of health connected with the female reproductive system. Another 500 were reserved for women only. These restrictions were an attempt to reorganize the labour force in an economy desperately trying to resist the U.S.-imposed blockade while overcoming the problem of underdevelopment. Forseeing that many jobs held by women would be lost, the Federation membership went out and discussed the country's production needs with thousands of Cuban men. They convinced many of them who were working in light industry or other less physically strenuous tasks to take on physically heavier labour and to relinquish their positions to women. Approximately 25,000 men switched jobs as a result of this campaign.

At the same time these cadre visited 411,127 women in their homes, convincing many of them to enter various sectors of industry and services, in jobs designated by the Code as physically compatible with their sex. It should be noted that neither administrative nor pay differentials result from this compartmentalization. However, the ideological and practical consequences are complex to say the least.

In 1970, while interviewing for the book *Cuban Women Now*, I questioned Cubans about articles 47 and 48 and whether they thought a woman could do the same physical work as a man. Similar answers came from workers in different fields. Many had never heard of articles 47 and 48. Women cane-cutters laughed when told their specialty was on the prohibited list!

This and many similar situations seemed to uphold the assertion that these clauses in the labour code were written to both protect women as well as a means of reorganizing the work force. Women who wanted to cut cane and load heavy sacks, and who were found to be productive at that type of work, were never actually *prevented* from doing it. Many peasant women found my questions curious or irrelevant. But the consensus still seemed to be that in Cuba physical differences between men and women were thought to be biological as well as social in origin.

In 1974, articles 47 and 48 were repealed, but shortly afterwards more moderate, though similar, controls were again put into effect.

The Family Code

The Family Code was first discussed by the Cuban people early in 1974. The original idea was for the Code to become law in time for the Federation Congress in November. At the same time the importance of this code made it imperative that discussions be thorough and far-reaching.

The Code, like all Cuba's most important laws, had been published

"Women cane-cutters laughed when told their specialty was on the prohibited list!"

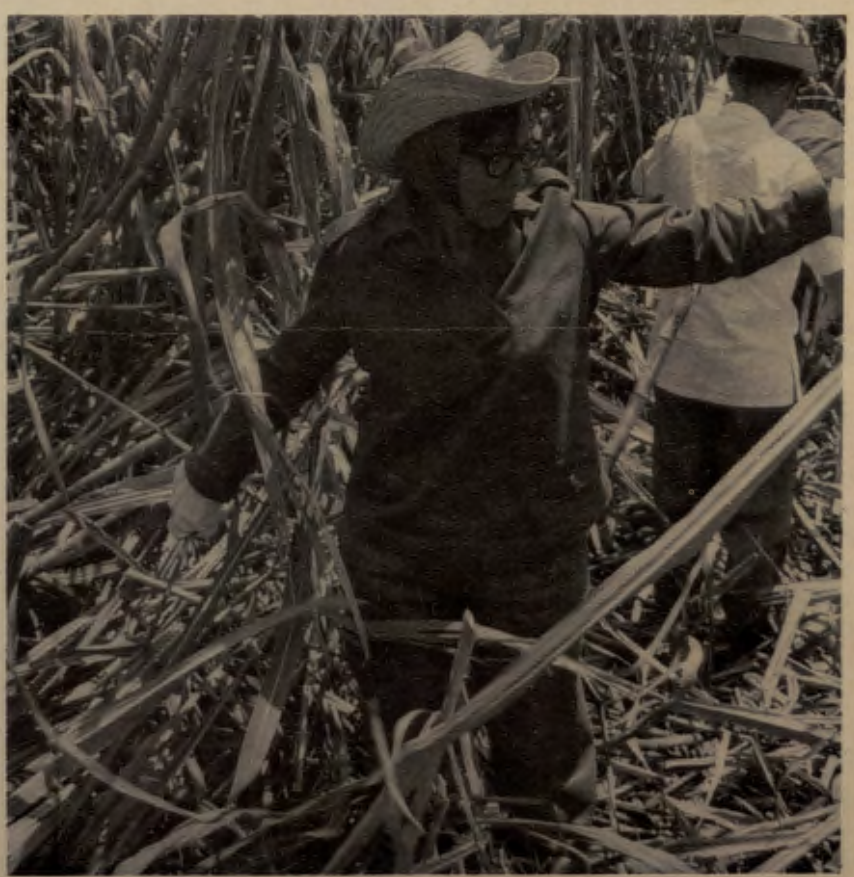


photo from Cuban Women Now by Margaret Randall, published by Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974, Toronto

* A government-sponsored organization with representatives on government bodies. It has local chapters in every community.

in draft form in a cheap tabloid edition so that virtually every man and woman could have a copy to read and study. In meetings sponsored by the Trade Unions, the government and the schools, people were able to discuss the Code point by point, ask questions and suggest deletions. A record of each meeting was sent through the respective organizations to their highest level where they were tabulated, computed and turned over to the original committee. The Code was then modified according to the people's observations and signed by the President, making it effective.

The differences between the original draft and the final published Code attest to people's attitudes around specific issues and their participation in this process. While in the original draft of the Family Code, the marriage age for men had been higher than that for women, the people changed them to read the same. The Code was finally returned to the people on International Women's Day, March 8th. 1975.

The Family Code covers marriage, divorce, property relationships in marriage, recognition of children, obligations for children's care and education, adoption, tutelage, and so forth. Basically, the Code stipulates new relationships of equality between women and men in their social relationships. Child support is not now automatically expected of the man. It can be expected of the woman in cases where the man is studying and the woman working. Children are not automatically given over to one parent or another, but provisions are sought through which both must continue to assume responsibility in the event of divorce: in other words, joint custody.

The clauses in this Code receiving the most attention and discussion were those stipulating both parents' equal responsibilities for child care and housework. The five clauses (24 through 28) covering this aspect, have also been incorporated into the Cuban marriage ceremony and are read by judges performing all civil marriages, the only kind recognized by Cuban law.

Clauses 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 read as follows:

24) Marriage is constituted on the basis of equal rights and duties of both spouses.

25) The spouses must live together, be faithful to one another, consider and respect each other and each mutually help the other.
The rights and duties established by this Code will subsist in their entirety as long as the marriage has not been legally terminated, in spite of the fact that for justifiable reasons a common household cannot be maintained.

26) Both spouses are obliged to care for the family they have created and cooperate with each other in the education, formation and guidance of their children in line with the principles of socialist morality. As well, each to the extent of his or her capabilities and possibilities, must participate in governing the home and cooperating towards its best possible care.

27) The spouses are obliged to contribute towards satisfying the needs of the family they have created in their marriage, each according to his or her faculties and economic capacities. Nevertheless, if one of the spouses contributes only through his or her work in the home and childcare, the other spouse must provide full economic support without this meaning that he or she be relieved of the obligation of cooperating with the housework and childcare.

28) Both spouses have the right to exercise their professions or crafts and must lend each other reciprocal cooperation and aid to this effect, as well as in order to carry out studies or perfect their training, but in all cases they will take care to organize their home life so that such activities be coordinated with the fulfillment of the obligations imposed by this Code.

"How many women are willing to take their husbands to court is yet unknown. The important thing is that, in Cuba, laws now exist which support women's struggle."

How does this Code work in practice? That is the question asked by most visitors to Cuba, and many seem to imply that unless an overnight close-to-total change be effected, the Code "doesn't work."

The Family Code is a law. But it is also an educational tool. The very discussions over the period of eight months during which time people grappled with these ideas, stimulated an emerging consciousness and gave voice to a series of previously unarticulated ideas. Discussions were not only those officially staged by the political and mass organizations; some of the most intense debates took place on buses, in waiting rooms, in supermarket lines and on the streets.

In the discussion held on our block, an elderly neighbour had this to say: "You know . . . I've always believed in helping my wife. We've been married a long time and I cook, clean, have taken care of our children and our grandchildren . . . But one thing I never felt right about doing was hanging the clothes out on the line. I was afraid people would see me and laugh. Now I guess the time has come to get over these complexes . . . we're all in this together!" In our market one day at a time when the discussions were at their height, a man in the meat line complaining about shopping being women's work was loudly chastised by a woman shopper.

The judicial repercussions of the Code, needless to say, depend on women themselves actually taking their husbands to court for violations. How many women are willing to take this step is yet unknown. Clearly many, for a long time, will allow themselves to be held back by the dozens of mechanisms that have, all over the world, developed to keep things as they have always been. The important thing at this point, in Cuba, is that laws now exist which support women's struggle. A woman can go to her local government representative, to the leadership of her or her husband's trade union and use a legal — and not simply subjective — basis on which to request help in a situation of equality.

Margaret Randall is a poet and journalist who has been living and writing in Cuba for the last 10 years.
Appreciation is extended to Linda Yanz for her assistance in editing this article.

LEGAL NOTES
ideals out of reach ?

by Louise Dulude

Last week a woman told me, "I am not a feminist, I am a humanist," and that, as they say, gave me furiously to think. What puzzled me most was her assumption that one had to choose between the two.

When I first became aware of women's issues, about eight years ago, most feminists I encountered were civil libertarians whose politics were distinctly left wing. Now, not a few of the same women favour censorship of pornography, would restrict the traditional rights of the accused in rape cases, and voted Conservative in the last federal election.

Have they changed? Some of them did. It is admittedly easier to be a socialist when you are a penniless student than when you have become half of a dual-career family with a $100,000 home. Others have remained faithful to their original ideals, but only to discover that the "right way" is not always easy to recognize in the real world.

Take democracy, for example. Last year, when asked whether I preferred the boards of directors of hospitals to be elected by the public or appointed by governments, I unhesitatingly chose elections. They made institutions more responsive, resulted in more women on boards and, of course, were more democratic. But if you asked me today whether I favour the current proposal to turn the Ottawa Civic Hospital into a public corporation whose trustees would be elected (instead of appointed as they are now), I would answer "I don't know."

The fact is, such a move would delight the very active local Right-to-Life group, whose chances of representation on the hospital board would be good given Ottawa's strong French-Catholic minority.

Even where pro-choice forces predominate, the battle over abortion has turned hospital board elections into three-ring circuses. If the Vancouver General Hospital had not been taken over by the B.C. government and its board dismantled, it has been estimated that as many as 20,000 people could have shown up to vote at its annual meeting last year.

The ugliest episodes took place in St. Thomas, Ontario. In June 1978, following a secret membership drive, the local Right-to-Life group captured four of the sixteen positions on the board of the St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital. These four people harassed the medical staff, demanding detailed information on each woman who got an abortion, and tried to impose a consent form including entries such as: "My unborn child is a human life and at this point in development it has characteristics . . . ." The upshot of it all was that the outraged doctors drummed up local support and at this year's meeting the Right-to-Lifers were trounced 3,246 to 668.

"Affirmative action does not give women and minority groups an advantage over others, it simply brings them up to a competitive level in a system where all the structures and values are still those of white males."

The assembly also approved the use of a screening committee for future board members, prompting anti-abortion groups to denounce the manoeuver as "an insult to the democratic process."

Equality is another principle giving many feminists (but not me) crises of conscience these days. "After almost a century of fighting for equal treatment regardless of sex," they say, "how can women turn around and insist on getting preferential treatment under affirmative action programmes?"

This question is still theoretical in Canada. No Canadian law requires affirmative action, and precious few firms have instituted it on their own. But two American Supreme Court cases give an idea of what such programmes can do. The first, decided last year, involved a medical school which reserved sixteen of its 100 first-year spaces for minority students. As a result, white applicants such as Allan Bakke, who took his case to court, could be refused entry even with qualifications superior to those of the sixteen "special" students.

The Supreme Court held that Bakke had been illegally discriminated against because he had no chance to compete against the minority applicants. The Court also decided that it was acceptable, in an admissions programme without reserved quotas, to give extra points to minority students because they increased the cultural diversity of edu-

cational institutions. In attempting to create this "enriched" environment, it would not be illegal for a university to aim at a certain proportion of minority students, as long as this goal remained flexible.

The other case, decided this summer, involved a union-management plan aimed at increasing the proportion of black craft workers at Kaiser Corporation. The plan called for an end to hiring skilled craftspeople from outside, and the establishment of an in-house training programme with 50% of trainees being black until the proportion of black carpenters, electricians, etc. equalled black people's share of the local population.

The result, which led Brian Weber to sue, was that whites could be turned down for the training programme even though they had more seniority than the blacks who were accepted. The Supreme Court approved the programme. How can Weber complain of hardship, the judgement implied, when the training programme he wants to enter would not even exist without the affirmative action plan?

Replace 'blacks' by 'women' in these two cases and you get an idea of the revolutionary impact such plans could have in Canada. Would they be unfair to men? I don't think so.

First, as these cases show, the courts are carefully monitoring these programmes to ensure that no one is treated unfairly. Although women and blacks are given a better chance than before, no white male is forced to give up the position or status he already has.

Second, and most convincing, in my view, affirmative action does not give women and minority groups an advantage over others, it simply brings them up to a competitive level in a system where all the structures and values are still those of white males. If you are amongst those who begrudge women the few extra points they might get under an affirmative action plan, try to imagine what a women feels like when she is being interviewed for an executive position by three men whose wives do not work outside the home.

Louise Dulude is an Ottawa lawyer and researcher.

illustration by Barbara Hartmann

Elly's Dad

fiction by Sharon Sterling

Elly strained to see anything in the fog that might tell her how long she had slept. The compass hovered around south, southwest. That didn't seem right, but she couldn't remember what it was supposed to read. She rubbed her eyes in an effort to clear her thoughts. Her father had said something, but that could have been earlier this morning, or even the day before. She felt a dull confusion and could only keep thinking that the boat would be smashed to pieces on some rocky island and he'd never forgive her.

Elly looked back at her father. He was still bent over the stern checking the deep-line. There were two seats in the bow of the small open boat. She sat in one to steer, the other was piled with tangled rigging, her father's sweater and a stained orange life jacket. She tried to imagine sinking into the cold ocean, but she couldn't concentrate on anything but the motion of the boat and her churning stomach. The fish and gasoline smells give a thick taste to anything she tried to eat and each day her sandwiches remained on the dash, squashed against the windshield.

Her father stood and spat over the side. The brown stream of spittle turned her stomach. Blue and grey shifted before her eyes as she vomited into the ocean. Her father laughed and shook his head.

Elly wiped her mouth on her sleeve and stretched the leg she'd been sitting on. It was numb and ached as

she pressed it against the deck. She tucked the other leg under her for warmth and laid her head on the gunwhale. The vibration of the hull against her temple blurred her vision as she watched her father fasten the last leader to the deep-line. In one motion he clipped the snubber onto the mainline and swung the coil of line and bait clear of the side. He let the line run out, then snapped the brake on the gurdy. Elly took a deep breath, she couldn't wait any longer to tell him.

"Dad?"

He had settled in the stern and couldn't hear her above the grind of the outboard. His head nodded as small waves caught against the hull. He looked like a sad giant There had been a picture of one just like him in her grade three reader. Now she was in grade seven and the books were mostly words. Grey words, like the grey fog that had surrounded them for most of the day. She shouted above the noise.

His head jerked up and he smiled. Thin wedges of brown tobacco filled the spaces between his teeth. Before she had a chance to speak, his head slid slowly back to his chest. Elly turned back to the compass. It felt smooth and efficient beneath her hand.

They had been warned about leaving that morning. Fog had socked in the small harbour until the houses were faint glowing patches and the moored fishboats could only be located by the tinkle of their brass bells. Two full hours before sunrise she followed her father down the plank to the dock. Everything was coated in a thin layer of dew and she placed each foot carefully to avoid sliding head-long down the slippery wood. A few radios were playing in the cabins they passed as they walked along the dock, but nobody seemed ready to head out.

As they passed the "North Star" old Jack came up on deck to empty his coffee pot. He chuckled when he saw them.

"And where do you think you're going, this morning?" Her father stopped.

"Well, I thought we'd give the far side of Copper Island a try. Hear they're getting good-sized 'Spring' over there."

"Nobody'll be getting anything in this fog. You're not going out in that little piss-pot of yours, are you? Even the high-liners are staying in today." Her father put in a chew of tobacco. Elly was always amazed at how he could talk with his bottom lip bulging like that.

"It'll burn off by noon. Got to be tough in this game." He motioned for Elly to follow and continued along the dock.

The fog had lifted for a while in the afternoon. Toward evening, though, it had returned, forming a curtain between them and the shore. Elly felt herself dozing off again and looked for something on which to fix her attention. Trees formed out of the fog on either side, but she'd seen that before and wasn't fooled. A chunk of wood bobbed to the surface; she steered a wide circle around it. She heard her father muttering as he woke to check the lines. He poured himself a coffee from the thermos, spat over the side and began to sing.

Oh, there was blood on the floor,
'twas the blood of the fair Fanny More.

Elly grinned and sang the last verse with him. He seemed to know dozens of old ballads. Her favourite was "The Wreck of the Ellen B."

"Dad," he looked up at her, "sing the one about the Captain. You know, he ties his daughter to the mast so she won't drown in the storm."

He shook his head. "Got to check the lines."

She glanced at the compass and rested her head against the wheel. The motor became a rhythmic murmur and her head grew light.

She hadn't gone to school the day the boat came. Her father had stood outside in the early dusk, running his hand along the hull, testing the fittings. Elly and her mother watched from the front room window where they had stood since the boat had lurched down the driveway behind the old Ford. Elly felt her father's excitement, but waited with her mother until he called them outside.

Her father bounded up the stairs and switched on the porch light. A yellow triangle lit her parents and the boat. Elly remained in the dark. Her father pulled her mother closer to the boat.

"Sixteen feet, Ginny, and sound as anything." He guided her toward the stern. "This is the motor, fifty horse. We'll need a smaller one for trolling. We'll use this one to run in and out of the harbour and the little one to putter along with. Blue water, sunshine," he put his arm around her, "Gin, you'll love it."

Her mother stared at the scraped hull, her back rigid.

"I know, you're thinking about the roof, but by Christ, I'll make enough this summer to buy a whole new house. I'll put out a deep line, a pole on each side." His arms moved in circles as he outlined the changes. "You'll see, we'll be hauling them in."

She looked past him.

He held her by the shoulders, shaking her slightly. "Why not? Just give me one good reason." She pulled away and walked quickly past Elly into the house. Her father turned back to the boat.

"She'll see. I'll get some gear — hoochies, plugs — even cut my own strip. Head out about four, tough it out 'til the evening bite." Elly watched him climb onto the trailer and peer inside.

"I'll put a gutting trough back here, fish box with a cushion underneath. I can tend the lines and steer." He paused, judging the distance from the wheel to the stern. Elly slid into the light to return to the house. He jumped down as her shadow fell across him.

"Elly, honey, you can come along. I'll let you sit up front and steer. You'll like the sunsets and the ocean." His voice was soft and Elly was suspicious, but he put his arm around her and pulled her to him. His coveralls smelled of oil and tobacco.

They always left just after dusk, when the logging roads were open to public traffic. They arrived at the rented cabin too late to unpack and often stayed a whole weekend without touching the various things her mother thought they would need. The first night she would lay awake listening to the sound of the sea against the rocks and the distant groan of the Cape Beale foghorn.

Elly shook herself awake and listened. It was the Beale horn, more of a rumble now that they were so

close. If it weren't for the fog she'd be able to see the lighthouse, the high straight cliff and the white foam where the ocean broke apart on the sudden shallows. She turned to her father. He was laughing and cursing as he tried to net a large 'Spring'. She clenched her hands on the seat and watched him shake the jumping fish from the green net. It bounced and slid along the deck and he danced beside it, net in one hand, gaff in the other.

"Holy Jesus, fifty bucks, at least. Get back here, Elly. Hold it down while I clobber the son-of-a-bitch. Sixty bucks, at least."

Elly scrambled from her seat and tried to grab the tail. Her foot caught in the net and she fell against the fishbox. Her father tumbled down beside her.

"By Jesus, by Jesus." He grabbed the gasping fish by the gills and cracked it between the eyes. His hand flew back.

"Damn near broke my finger, but I got it." He stood above her, grinning and holding the twitching fish. Elly climbed back into her seat. He threw the salmon into the gutting trough.

Elly watched the knife slide into the shiny belly. The blood ran down the trough and the yellow guts followed. He rinsed the fish clean and tossed it into the box, then sat on the lid.

"Too bad we left that tape back on the dock somewheres. I bet you'd like to see how long it is, eh?" His smile dropped into a frown. Elly swallowed and stared hard at the deck as the sound of the foghorn rose and failed. Her father rushed forward and banged the compass with the flat of his hand. He squinted into the fog, as though noticing it for the first time.

"That's got to be Cape Beale." He turned to Elly and held her by the shoulders. "What the hell have you been doing up here?"

Elly tried to answer, but nothing would come. He pushed her into the other seat and took the wheel. They spun in a half circle, with no regard for the lines.

"That'll keep us off the rocks, near as I can figure." He faced her, "Lot of good you are."

A violent shivering began in Elly's jaw and took over her whole body. She had to get warm. She pushed the rigging aside and pulled his sweater around her. The rough wool smelled of oil and tobacco. She closed her eyes and imagined his arms holding her, his heart beating against her ear. It would be all right. He would tie her to the mast and she would ride above it all to safety.

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Mary-Lou

Mute flesh emerges
Is slapped
Pinkens and protests
Is washed labelled
Wrapped cradled
Captured forever
On celluloid
Mary-Lou
Seven pounds
Seven and a half ounces

Prize possession
Burdened home in pink
Handled dandled
Dressed displayed
Scarlet rage of impotence
Pacified with milky flesh
Mary-Lou learns
to seek approval
Wear your pink with a simper
Helplessly appealing

Smooth and rounded
Fleshed out
Of childhood
Pinched patted
Stroked into submission
Still-born passion
Passive pink
Man-handled woman-child learns
To writhe and moan on cue
Answer when she's spoken to

Stirruped feet twitch
Mountainous belly heaves
As rubber fingers delve and slice
Delivering pain
In blinding scarlet sheets
Numbed blood-wet tissue
Expels her passion-ripe fruit
Into the hands of a masked bandit
Who severs the flesh
From her flesh born

Tender fingers minister
Rouge to the waxen cheek
Mary-Lou lies passionless
In her pink satin-lined box
A true woman at last
Dead and bloodless
Embalmed with man-made substance
The undertaker smiles lovingly
At his perfect product
And opens the doors for viewing

by Amanda Hale

At right: Amanda Hale writes drama and poetry. She lives in Montreal and has taught playwriting at Concordia University.

Reflected Vision

review by Patricia Gallivan

A Reflection of the Other Person, The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1929 — 1931. Editor: Nigel Nicolson. Assistant Editor: Joanne Trautmann. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1978. $29.95.

The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume II 1920 — 1924. Edited by Anne Olivier Bell. Assisted by Andrew McNeillie. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1978. $22.95.

Most of the letters in *A Reflection of the Other Person* are personal, addressed to friends, but they are *for* other people, written partly (as Virginia Woolf says in the passage which supplies the title for this fourth volume of her letters) "to give back a reflection of the other person." The diary is different, a performance, but not a public one. She writes it for herself, to give back her own reflection. It is a long, one-sided conversation addressed to a "you" whose actual name appears only rarely, and because of the fact that it is written as a conversation, the diary has both the freedom of speech and the discipline of audience. It might *almost* be addressed to one of the friends who appears in the *Letters* — to Clive Bell or Vita Sackville-West or Lytton Strachey or even (after she had stopped being afraid of him) T.S. Eliot — but the tone is easier and the book lower-keyed and more unflinchingly open than even those audiences could have allowed. It is a book in which Virginia Woolf is free to ask, of any subject, "Why not write about it? truthfully?" and one which has, she says, "greatly helped my style; loosened the ligatures". That loosened quality is almost certainly the product of the audience for whom this diarist performs. The "you" to whom the diary is addressed is the perfectly personal audience: it is to "old

Virginia Woolf in her 50s
photo by Giselle Freund

Virginia" that the younger writer speaks, to herself at fifty, to the woman she is becoming. That audience frees the performer of the poses even of friendship, compels her, on pain of the worst punishments of gross self-deception, to keep her self-evaluation unrestricted.

The fact that Virginia Woolf addresses her diary to a self as yet undefined gives it a nice consistency with all of her other work. Her novels are full of her attempts to give the exact shades of personal change, to catch the shifting nuances of adjusting identity. She shows her characters becoming themselves in increasing degrees of clarity, Mrs. Dalloway becoming more and more Clarissa in her twenty-four hours, Lily Briscoe struggling with her vision in *To the Lighthouse*, Miss Latrobe adding to herself in the pageant of the brilliant *Between the Acts*. "Never settle, is my principle," Virginia Woolf writes in the diary, "& I try to put it in practice." That is not a superficial notion, a confessed flightiness, but a powerful apprehension that we are always unfinished, and it is her strong sense of the accumulations of identity which is at the heart of what she had to say about women. *A Room of One's Own* takes as its central point the idea that women are as yet unmeasured, as yet undefined. "I must repeat that the fact that women have improved," Virginia Woolf writes in a feminist document which is appended to this volume of her diary, "shows that they may still improve; for I cannot see why a limit should be set to their improvement in the nineteenth century rather than in the one hundred and nineteenth." In this account of her own life, she makes her awareness of incessant personal change, of the possibilities of growth (she must have had her tongue *almost* in cheek when she wrote in a high Victorian tone about improvement), into the first fact of her technique and her style. The idea is basic to her vision. It keeps her aware of her own mystery. She gathers her present experience into shape to hand it over to a still-undefined future, imagining, even as she does that, the next metamorph-

osis: "Greetings! my dear ghost," she says to her future self, "& take heed that *I* don't think 50 a very great age. Several good books can be written still; & here's the bricks for a fine one."

The diary is in some ways an accounting, a report to "old Virginia" on the uses of her time. "I have a sense of the flight of time," the younger woman writes, and when she turns forty, she says, "My theory is that at 40 one either increases the pace or slows down. Needless to say which I desire." The diary records her efforts to fill the time fully, and it shows her impressively increasing powers. During the years about which she writes in this volume, she was a publisher (of E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot, Chekov, Roger Fry, Freud), a student of philosophy (she read Berkeley with G.E. Moore, took up Hume to "purge myself") and of languages (she worked on Russian to help her husband Leonard with his translation of Chekov), a professional journalist (she wrote more than a hundred articles and reviews), and a serious critic (she put together the beginnings of her *Common Reader).* She was also developing the ideas and the sharpened tone which would go into *A Room of One's Own*: they can be seen in the two pieces on the position of women which are printed in this edition of the diary, one of which Virginia Woolf concludes with the assertion that "the degradation of being a slave is only equalled by the degradation of being a master."

And during these years, Virginia Woolf became famous, a fact about which she remained satirical: "Fame? Is not Clive writing an article on me? Has not Bunny praised me in the Dial? Does not Madame Logé propose to translate *The Voyage Out*?"

Virginia Woolf's major accomplishment during these years was the completion of *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway,* the works in which she discovered and perfected her characteristic subject matter and her technique of "tunnelling," as she called it, her means of representing the levels and layers of consciousness. The greatest pleasure for a reader of this diary is to watch the steadily increasing clarity of her intention and the delighted triumph of her confidence. *Mrs. Dalloway* detaches itself from a welter of originating material, abandons its original title *(The Hours),* departs from its original form as a short story, and becomes, as Woolf knew when she had finished it, "the most satisfactory of my novels." The book had begun as a difficulty, had seemed at times "sheer weak dribble," and had ended as a major victory: "I can write & write & write now: the happiest feeling in the world."

Virginia Woolf saw her diary as implicated in her triumph:

> It strikes me that in this book I *practise* writing; do my scales; yes & work at certain effects. I daresay I practised Jacob here, — & Mrs. D. & shall invent my next book here; for here I write merely in the spirit — great fun it is too, & old V. of 1940 will see something in it too. She will be a woman who can see, old V.: everything — more than I can I think.

The diary, it appears, did more than loosen the ligatures of style: it provided an audience who demanded the truth. The major preoccupation of these pages is truth, truth of perception, truth of expression. The practise which produced Jacob and Mrs. D. was practice at making the language truthful. The letters are brilliant, full of light and darkness, flashing with character and feeling, but they are not so close to the centre of Virginia Woolf's art as her diary is. Even to Ethel Smyth, the friend who is most present in this volume of the letters, to whom Woolf writes unswervingly about herself, she would say: "Why do we want letters? All I say is false. I mean, so much has to be left out that what remains is like the fingerprint in salt of some huge pachydermatous quadruped which no private house could contain." In the diary, by contrast, old V. was prepared to wait through the practise until the truth appeared. "Courage & decision are my need, I think," Woolf writes, "to speak out, without mincing." I think that that is what the diary helps her to achieve in her work: "On the whole," as she said about herself, "I like the young woman's mind considerably. How gallantly she takes her fences — & my word, what a gift for pen & ink."

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Poetic Travelogue

review by Verna Reid

Taking Off, by Nancy-Gay Rotstein. Toronto: Longman's, 1979. Paper. $3.95.

As its title suggests, *Taking Off* is essentially travel poetry, a series of verbal snapshots and running commentary inspired by the author's jet trips to Italy, Greece, Israel and the Caribbean. As such, it forms a continuation of an odyssey that began in *Through a Woman's Eyes,* Rotstein's first volume of poetry. There, she chronicled the familiar experiences of a middle class, middle-years woman who has emerged from domesticity to enter academia; who has raised a family and has gone back to study. In *Taking Off* we are shown the same woman entering the next phase of growth as she spreads her "aircraft" wings to get a look at the rest of the world.

In sharing these journeys, Rotstein emphasizes, first of all, the primacy of the senses. With quick verbal strokes, she conveys the visual impact of Lilliputian cities as seen from the departing plane, the precise routine of the tour-guided breakfast, the heat shimmering off white buildings and hovering over the olive groves, the sound of calypso, the buses of Rome, the ancient ruins of Athens. And, like all North Americans, she is impressed with the echoes of history and of myth that resound through the European-Middle East landscape. The perceptions of the present arouse shades of the past and everywhere she is vi-

sited by ghosts: Greek kings, Old testament prophets, Jewish martyrs, and the various soldiers and victims of the many wars. The awesome sense of Here Is Where It Happened and of the timelessness of the landscape is contrasted with the ironies of today's economic expediencies:

> Arab girls on
> Pfaff machines make
> Israeli army shirts.

In the last section in this volume, she returns the reader to Canada, and once again in Can Lit, the snow and the pine trees take over. Unlike that of the countries of her jet travel, our landscape is complete unto itself, empty of human association. As Earl Birney has said, "It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted" and in Rotstein's vision of Canada, this still seems to be true.

I liked the precision of Rotstein's imagery and the way that she connects a sense of the past with her perception of the present. Unfortunately, to give this poetry a fair and attentive reading, I had to fight a persistent and annoying distraction, the over-use of alliteration. Almost every other line has an ingenious example so that reading with full concentration was like trying to listen to a speaker with a recurring tic. I was bemused by "bunched blue buses," "brutal boulders," "candy-cotton clouds," "growers of grapes and grain," "paunchy pigeons," "abandoned alcoves," "prison-free penalty," and "primal pathways." What is the effect of poems whose chief poetic device is the repetition of chosen consonants? After some pondering, I decided that, in the cause of light verse, the effect can be one of blithe wit, or, as is often the case with Rotstein, it can impart to the poetry a kind of pleasing solidity whereby the words and images fall powerfully and securely into place. Consider, for example, her description of the shores of Crete:

> White-water thrusts
> waves over volcanic
> stone shore, spilling
> over stark-scrubbed soil

There are other examples, equally strong; however, in large quantities throughout a volume of poetry where one poem is designed to be read in conjunction with the next, the total effect of all this alliteration is to make the words fall like bricks, obliterating meaning and imagery in the distraction of sound.

Added to this is Rotstein's penchant for double-barrelled nouns and adjectives: "tourist-demanded," "prison-pallored," "postcard-courtesy," "marble-blood," and so on. "Nancy-Gay" is having fun with words but the result isn't often much fun for the reader. No doubt this is a passing phase, a stage in perfecting her craft. I look forward to her next volume which I trust will be marked by the sharp imagery and flowing language of this poet at her best.

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Tender Vignettes

review by Shirley Neuman

Gabrielle Roy. *Children of My Heart* (Translation by Alan Brown of *Ces enfants de ma vie*, 1977): McClelland & Stewart, 1979. $12.95.

Nearly thirty-five years ago, Gabrielle Roy received a Governor-General's medal for her first published novel, *The Tin Flute (Bonheur d'occasion*, 1945). That book remains Canada's most successful social novel; it details the problems of Montreal's poor during the Depression with a richness of characterization and incident and a depth of humour and compassion remarkable in a first novel and unmatched in Canadian literature.

Roy recently received her third Governor-General's medal for *Children of My Heart (Ces enfants de ma vie*, 1977). She is seventy this year and the inevitable comparisons between her early and late work are being made in a predictable attempt to limn a shape to her career that will leave us all with a satisfying sense of closure: "Roy's finest and most powerful novel since *The Tin Flute*," rhapsodizes one reviewer in a blurb for this book which appears on the translation's dustjacket. The comparisons do Roy an injustice. Not because *Children of My Heart* doesn't deserve praise: it does. It evokes a sense of significant beauty and a lingering tenderness that are the result of writing so skillfully wrought as to seem without contrivance at all, the heart's speech with itself. But *Children of My Heart* is *not* a novel and it is *not* in the tradition of *The Tin Flute*.

Like all of Roy's recent work (*Garden in the Wind* and *Enchanted Summer* come immediately to mind) and like much of her work about the West, this book is a collection of vignettes. It is loosely held together by the central consciousness of a fledgling teacher little older than some of her pupils. We see her in three different prairie schools from which she recalls five children — farmers' sons, immigrants' sons, for the most part — children whose

lives are moved by more insistent demands and rhythms than those of the schoolroom. The characterizations are not without irony: Roy can write of the bullying Demetrioff brothers that, "if they seemed to love the youngest more than each other, it was clearly not with a comforting affection." Nor are the portrayals without a keen self-awareness on the narrator's part: she carefully modulates her role as character by the tact to love her charges without intruding on their personalities, her role as story-teller by a similar sense of her characters' privacy and self-sufficiency. As teacher-character, she is never officious or manipulative; as narrator, she never over-explains. At its best, her delicacy itself becomes the centre around which the events of the plot are arranged; her precarious authority over her "trouble-maker" Médéric, for example, is finely and frequently scrutinized for the extent to which her very weaknesses in the situation enable her to fulfill her role as teacher, the extent to which her caprice and curiosity make him the teacher, her the pupil.

But these moments of irony and self-awareness are, for the most part, but grace-notes to the composition. Its real theme is transfiguration through shared love and beauty. The initial statement of the theme is simple enough: the tension produced by a day of dealing with hysterical and frightened children who are at school for the first time reverses itself when Vincento, the most grief-stricken, turns from hostility to hugs. His is the slightest of the stories and its emotion is never quite achieved; just as the rest of the narrator's memories of Vincento melt into a "general sweetness," so does the reader feel that the child's significance is never clearly articulated. But the story's theme is reiterated, more strongly each time, in each of the succeeding vignettes. Nils' song soothes and encourages the afflicted of spirit as it gestures towards a world of limitless joy: "it took your heart and turned it round and turned it over, as hand might do, before leaving it an instant, with due gentleness, to the freedom of the air." In an ecstasy akin to the religious spirit, the last of the uncomprehending Demetrioffs fills the blackboard

Gabrielle Roy *photo by John Reeves*

with classically elegant script and exchanges his first smile — a smile born of astonished wonder and delight in this artistry — with his taciturn father. The moment is one of the most fully realized in the collection. With the story of the house "well-kept" by a child burdened with cares and a love beyond his years, the theme gains a richness of texture as we are made to sense André's sacrifices to uphold his family's continuing independence. But again the story's emotional significance hovers behind the page; the teacher's tenderness for the family's courage, her regret for the boy's lost opportunities, are evocative but are not precisely enough rendered to move the reader as does the story of the Demetrioffs.

Implied in the tenderness with which the narrator recalls these children is not only pedagogic and maternal nurturing but an erotic yearning. Among all these children arriving at school, displaying their special talents, vying with each other to give the cherished teacher the most impressive gift or to have her as a guest in their homes, only once do girls appear and then they are all secondary characters. Appropriately, then, Roy's theme of transfiguration culminates in the story of Médéric, who, through his love for the young teacher, effects the transition from a child's solitary pleasure in the world around him to an adolescent's troubled solipsism. His attraction to the teacher deeply moves us, not so much by its own hesitant unfolding, as by the tact of her perception of the situation and by Roy's simple but poetically charged narrative. Epiphany follows upon epiphany as these two share, as gifts to each other, the things that move them. Occasionally they fail or anger one another, yet the young woman's triumph is that she is able to let her pupil's unrealizable and but half-understood love for her follow the course of his own maturing, that she is able to refrain from encouraging or discouraging it, so that, finally, it strengthens rather than diminishes Médéric's personal integrity. When he tosses a farewell bouquet into her lap as her train passes him and that bouquet speaks "of the young and fragile summer, barely born but it begins to die," the moment becomes the epiphany including and transcending all the others. For the essence of this encounter between teacher and pupil is that it is both ephemeral and revelatory, marking as it does the moment when the child's unself-conscious absorption in himself and his world yields to troubled self-awareness, the moment when the rare and delicate possibilities of childhood, like Médéric's flowers, briefly show forth from their intimate and sheltered places before they begin to fade in the stronger, knowing light of adulthood.

"Roy's images etch themselves in our minds and alter our consciousness with the transfiguring emotion they bear."

All these transcendent moments ultimately derive from one of Roy's least successful novels, *The Hidden Mountain*, in which she presents her parable of the Artist. Significantly, that novel's hero is a visual artist who dies painting what was to be his final picture of the mountain which has been almost a grail to him. The picture is to make tangible not just the physical mountain but the vision it contains, its metaphysical truth. The novel's failure is that the picture is never completed; the reader is left with a dab of mauve, and not with a well-articulated and, therefore, knowledgeably shared vision. In *Children of*

My Heart, Roy writes more successful variations of the parable. Again and again, she strikes us by the visual iconography of her narrative, by the painterly tableaux in which she bodies forth her love, her compassion, her tenderness, her conviction that meaning inheres in humanity and in nature. The youngest Demetrioff, appearing from the Inferno of the family tannery, "his black head showing in the sun like a face from an icon with its gilded halo," or sharing with his father "a smile so fleeting, so clumsy, so tentative, that it seemed the first to be exchanged between those two faces"; Médéric and the narrator holding, in the cold water of a stream's source, the trout that come to play in their hands in "inexplicable abandon"; the two of them enclosed in the extravagant berline in the midst of a prairie blizzard with the narrator watching Médéric in the mirror as, thinking her asleep, he reaches to catch a straying lock of her hair, then, surprised by his own tenderness, arrests the gesture; Médéric on his horse as he whirls into her lap a bouquet replete with even "the smallest flower of this tender season": these are images that etch themselves on our minds, that alter our consciousness with the transfiguring emotion they bear.

Alan Brown's translation is sensitive and generally faithful to Roy's style and tone. Occasionally, he does fail her by slipping into cliché, most notably when he renders her description of Médéric's horse, *la fougueuse créature*, as *a fiery steed*. Not only does his substitution make Médéric unendurably melodramatic, it sacrifices a delicate metaphoric pattern by which the horse, the trout (ces fuyantes petites créatures) and finally Médéric himself (la brave créature) become linked in his self-discovery.

If you can read *Ces enfants de ma vie*, even haltingly, in the original take the time to do so. If you must rely on translation, be grateful to Brown for the extent to which he has caught the directness and compassion of Roy's prose; far more fully than is often the case he has, most movingly, kept the integrity of his text. But *méfiez-vous* of the occasional jarring phrase; the infelicity is not always Roy's.

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". . . a duck and a goose & an author"

review by Cora Taylor

Letters of Flannery O'Conner: The Habit of Being, selected and edited by Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1979. Cloth $19.95.

Flannery O'Conner died August 3rd, 1964 at the age of 39. Because of the nature of the disease that eventually caused her death, (disseminated lupus) travel was difficult and sometimes impossible for the thirteen years she suffered from the disease. Letters were a vital link to her friends during those years. It is this fact and the fact that Flannery was an indefatigable correspondent and an incredible writer that make this collection so rich. In many cases her friendships began and were maintained through correspondence; in some cases she never actually met these friends. These letters range from humourous epistles to more serious letters on writing and theology, but Flannery O'Conner was primarily a writer and a Catholic and letters on these subjects predominate.

Her attitude to her writing is best illustrated by the fact that when a cousin gave Flannery and her mother a trip to Lourdes, she prayed, not for her health (she was by then continually on crutches because of bone disintegration due to arthritis), but to finish her novel *(The Violent Bear It Away)*. Because of her financial situation, she was obliged to earn money by giving talks on writing to various small colleges and writing groups. She resented this time away from her work, but made the best of it and sometimes found characters for her stories. O'Conner's literary earnings were small and when she left short stories to do an article on peafowl (her only non-fiction other than talks and reviews) for *Holiday* magazine in 1960, she wrote a friend, "*Holiday* took the peacock bait. $750.00 more than I have ever got for any piece of writing by about half. Crime pays." (She had, at that point published her novel, *Wise Blood*, and a collection of short stories, *A Good Man is Hard to Find.)* More common was the following: "I sold 'A Good Man is Hard to Find' (the short story) to the *Partisan Review Reader*, another of those 50¢ jobs."

Flannery mentions that she has been criticized because anyone could write to her and receive a reply. It was true that she replied even to crank letters; however, she make a habit of replying to struggling writers seeking advice. She was a gentle critic of the manuscripts she received and she explained the reason:

> . . . I remember my own early stories — if anybody had told me actually how bad they were, I wouldn't have written any more.

Although she denigrated her talents as a critic, (I have no critical sense. I write entirely by smell and criticize the same") her advice was always useful and generously given.

> The person who teaches writing is not much more than a midwife. After you help deliver the enfant it is ungracious to say, Madame your child has two heads it will never grow up. The procedure I follow is, after it's here, to announce only if it's alive or dead.

While she was always kind to and interested in struggling writers she pulled no punches with those academics who read things into her stories that were not there. Many of her letters were to 'A Professor of English' attempting to straighten out those who suffered from this malady. One such response was to one who wrote at length with the analysis he and ninety students had made of her story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find." She began:

> The interpretation of your ninety

students and three teachers is fantastic and about as far from my intentions as it could get to be.

and ended:

> Too much interpretation is certainly worse than too little, and where feeling for a story is absent, theory will not supply it.

One of her last letters in the few months before she died and was only able to write brief notes to her friends showed her continued problem with the 'Professors of English':

> Thank you for your note. I'm sorry I can't answer it more fully but I am in the hospital and not up to literary questions . . . As for Mrs. May I must have named her that because I knew some English teacher would write and ask me why. I think you folks sometimes strain the soup too thin . . .''

Flannery O'Conners' letters are infinitely quotable and reveal aspects of an intelligent woman and a bitingly satiric writer. When she wrote a poem to enter a contest sponsored by the Poetry Society of Georgia, she sent a copy to Sally and Robert Fitzgerald for comment saying, ''This is my first and last. I think it is a filthy habit for a fiction writer to get into.''

On Education she wrote:

> . . . total non-retention has kept my education from being a burden to me.

On Criticism she wrote:

> No matter how just the criticism, any criticism at all which depresses you to the extent that you feel you cannot ever write anything worth anything is from the Devil and to subject yourself to it is for you an occasion of sin.

On Fame she wrote:

> If the fact that I am a ''celebrity'' makes you feel silly, what, dear girl, do you think it makes me feel? It's a comic distinction shared with Roy Rogers' horse and Miss Watermelon of 1955.

On Family she wrote:

> I come from a family where the only emotion respectable to show is irritation. In some this tendency produces hives, in others literature, in me both.

On Feminism she wrote:

> On the subject of the feminist business, I just never think, that is never think of qualities which are specifically feminine or masculine. I suppose I divide people into two classes: The Irksome and the Non-Irksome, without regard to sex. Yes and there are the Medium Irksome and the Rare Irksome.

On Writing she wrote:

> You can suggest something obvious is going to happen but you cannot have it happen in a story. You can't clobber any reader while he is looking. You divert his attention, then you clobber him, and he never knows what hit him.

On Being An Author she wrote:

> Every year we have the nursery school and the first grade and the various kindergartens . . . . The children go all over the yard and see the ponies and the peacocks and the swan and the geese and the ducks and then they come by my window and I stick my head out and the teacher says, ''And this is Miss Flannery. Miss Flannery is an author.'' So they go home having seen a peacock and a donkey and a duck and a goose and an author . . . .

I have a few minor complaints about this book. I would have liked the self-portrait Flannery painted of herself with the peacock included instead of the photograph. She refers to this portrait often, preferring to send snapshots of it to friends since she disliked photographs. (''The one I sent looked as if I had just bitten my grandmother and that this was one of my few pleasures, but all the rest were worse.'')

It is difficult to criticize a collection of letters since one never knows which bits of correspondence were excluded or what editing was done. Certainly Sally Fitzgerald has done a masterful job of tracking down correspondence from Flannery's friends, fans (who became friends) as well as editors and organizations. The result is the many facets of Flannery O'Conner that we are able to see. The variety of correspondence makes the reader feel the 'essence of Flannery' that would have been lost if just a single set of correspondence was used. (Who could pretend to *know* Sylvia Plath by her letters to her mother?) There will no doubt be biographies of Flannery O'Conner in spite of her own comment, ''there won't be any biographies of me because lives spent between the house and chicken yard do not make exciting copy,'' but I am grateful that this came first, a look at the Flannery O'Conner her friends knew.

Cora Taylor is an Edmonton writer.

Preventive Defense

review by Dulce Oikawa

In Defense of Ourselves: A Rape Prevention Handbook for Women, by Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Ann Fetter. New York: Doubleday, 1979. Paper $7.75.

At last — a self-defence book that presents more than a series of instant combat techniques. *In Defense of Ourselves* takes a serious look at rape: the why's of the ongoing physical victimization of women. How do movies, television, advertising, newspapers and music portray women? To what extent are womens' images moulded and shaped by these mediums? Does the media make an impact on the psyche of boys and girls to such an extent that "boys see only one role in the issue of rape — as rapists; and girls always see women acting as helpless victims?"

How engrained are the following norms: when spoken to, always acknowledge the other person with a gracious smile; when in difficulty defer to the protection and judgment of men; accept casual touching or suggestive comments in social settings as a tribute to your desirability; accept the kindness of strangers when they offer to help with our heavy burdens; always act with graciousness and openness; be compassionate and helpful with people? Authors Sanford and Fetter conclude that the influence of the media in shaping women's image and engrained American etiquette contributes to low self-esteem, poor self-concept and self-critical behaviour in women. When applied to sexual assault, this means that "we may be chosen as victims, that we will put others' rights before ours, that we allow others to intrude into our territory and most important, that we feel helpless to do anything about it."

Questions and exercises assist readers to assess their own level of self-concept. The effective use of body language, eye contact, tone of voice and assertive sentences are recommended as ways of improving self-concept; "how good you feel about yourself will directly dictate how well you defend yourself." "What if" games probe women to consider situations such as, "what if someone asks you to give a message to a neighbour who is out; what if you are walking your dog in a park and three teenagers hassle you?" Will polite, acquiescent behaviour dominate or will women respond assertively in these and other given situations? Above all, the authors urge women to pool their resources to help one another rebuild self-esteem. "It is only from sharing with someone from a common background that we can understand our own roots and continue to live with the self-love, dignity and confidence we deserve." Within this context, self-defence is offered as an option, a choice for women. Some women may view fighting as an unacceptable alternative because of pacifist political or religious convictions. Whatever the reason, women should not feel inadequate or weak if they choose not to fight back.

For those who consciously choose self-defence as an option, the authors outline some basic techniques accompanied by illustrations. They are quick to state that "self-defence is not karate, judo or kung-fu, it's just plain mean commen sense combined with a little knowledge about how to kick and hit, and what the body's vulnerable targets are. The primary self-defence goal is quite simple; to create pain in the man who has attacked." Indeed the target areas suggested for attack are all of the taboo areas in a bona fide martial art: the eyes, nose, groin, knees and the neck.

One of the recurring themes throughout the book is the importance of mental attitude in determining behaviour. Successful self-defence is therefore predicated not only on a combination of effective target selection and technique but also on the mental confidence that what you do will work. Also, it is necessary to trust in one's own innate radar, to attend not to heightened imagination or paranoia, but to instinct: be prepared. Reliance on the aid of others, or weapons such

below, elbow smash *above, groin pull*

Palm-heel strike

as keys and repellent sprays, is discounted. Instead, dependence on one's own weapons of fingers, knuckles, elbows, voice, knees, legs and feet is outlined in a sound and practical fashion. Possible body holds, grabs and chokes are illustrated along with the corresponding escape techniques and counterattack movements.

Authors Linda Sanford, a social worker and founder/director of the Seattle Rape Prevention Forum, and Ann Fetter, a black belt in karate, now a practising attorney, have obviously tapped their own resources to holistically explore with readers the rape problem and its prevention. With the exception of a minor criticism regarding two omissions — a section on the use of blocks to thwart off blows, and, an honest statement that if women engage in self-defence, they should be prepared for some bruises and bodily pain, *In Defense of Ourselves* is a commendable book. It is readable, and can be a valuable resource manual for teachers, rape relief staff, or, for home use by individuals. Ultimately, rape is much more than a freak event that happens, once in a lifetime, to that "other woman." In many ways we are all that other woman. *In Defense of Ourselves* shows us why, and what to do about it.

The authors do not attempt to provide a check list of every possible situation that could occur and ways in which to get out of it, but instead urge readers to practise the physical techniques and picture oneself victorious in an attack situation.

Dulce Oikawa has a brown belt in karate and is secretary of the B.C. Division of the National Karate Association.

Suburban Sensationalism

review by Barbara Novak

Neighbours, by Laurali Wright. Toronto: Macmillan, 1979. Cloth, $12.95.

To judge this book by its cover, one might expect a potential thriller. A pen and ink drawing of a pair of terror-stricken, larger-than-life-size eyes looms over three homes on a suburban street, printed in a rather garish purple on white. The cover blurb promises: "A Chilling Story That Could Be Happening Next Door to You!" It looks like a good book to take up to the cottage to read over the weekend. In fact, that's exactly where I read it, but long before the weekend was over I'd finished the book. Fast reading? A little too fast for my taste. In both marketing and content this year's winner of the fourth annual Search-for-a-New-Alberta-Novelist-Competition may be compared to a made-for-TV-thriller.

The novel is structured around a seriously disturbed, grossly overweight woman named Betty, whose increasingly bizarre behaviour is rooted in a mysterious, shocking incident in her childhood. Betty's husband, a travelling salesman, struggles not to lose hope in her recovery, but his patience runs out, and he considers taking their child and leaving. Following the advice of her psychologist, Betty makes friends with her neighbours, whose problems form the novel's sub-plots. Sheila, an attractive, efficient wife and mother, discovers that her husband has been unfaithful to her and although she loves him, finds she cannot forgive him. Betty's other neighbour, Bertha, is a fiercely independent elderly woman whose arthritic hip threatens to make her totally dependent on her son and daughter-in-law. As the novel progresses, Betty's psychosis worsens, Bertha has her inevitable fall down the flight of stairs, and Sheila waffles back and forth between deciding to stay with her husband or to leave him.

The author successfully develops the character of Betty from a pitiable women to one who becomes increasingly obnoxious and even threatening. As her childhood memories gush forth, it becomes clear that her distorted perceptions will result in an act of violence against her own daughter. Gradually, she alienates even her sympathetic neighbours and as the novel speeds towards its climax, grows progressively more paranoid, so that the reader is prepared for a catastrophic ending. After all this manipulation, however, the author opts for an ambiguous conclusion, and the reader is left wondering if Betty's husband will arrive home in time to save his daughter.

The real questions this novel raises in my mind, however, are concerned with why the author, whose pacing is good, whose descriptive passages are controlled and sensitive and who can write natural, flowing dialogue, would limit her talents by choosing to write such a slick, sensationalized story. Is this what the Canadian market demands and is this what the Alberta First Novel Competition encourages?

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

More Than a Genealogy

review by Rebecca Smith

Random Descent, by Katherine Govier. MacMillan of Canada, 1979. $12.95 cloth.

> A family is like a fistful of water. The more you try to hold, the less you have . . . . And yet, without my hand and his, clutching, without the stream running between our fingers back into the sea, what would life become?

Katherine Govier's *Random Descent* is a novel about the ineluctable opposites, the pulls and pushes, the attractions and repulsions, the coincidences and choices that mould a family and hold it tightly/tenuously together. *Random Descent* at first struck me as gratuitously random — but soon its perfectly appropriate pattern became apparent: stories,

memories, anecdotes, descriptions piled upon one another, with recurring names and images that soon became familiar and engaging — like we all learn the story of our own families. This novel has no single storyline or relentless chronological progression, as in the too-logical and orderly re-telling of *Roots*. Instead, the history of the family emerges slowly, pieced together. The narration moves by leaps and turns and regressions; the mention of someone, some incident, or some object triggers a recollection by or about one of the many family members, creating a multi-layered stream-of-consciousness. My early reservations disappeared. The style and pattern of the novel rings true: I have learned the story of my own family's random descent in the same kind of random "order."

Random Descent accepts, indeed celebrates, life's opposites, its randomness. Jennifer Beecham Anderson — facing crises and betrayal within her marriage, her most immediate family — intrudes herself into the lives of her grandparents, who were strangers to her before. She is asking, implying, demanding, as if she has a natural right to the past, her past. Constance and Chas at first insist that they do not want to talk: "They'd always been secretive. Now they also were old." But the opposite also is true:

> They remembered she'd come here to find out about their lives. It was almost unseemly: they weren't dead yet. They didn't want to talk but it was more than they could resist, a chance to remember without feeling useless, a time to make it all come alive again.

Great-Great-Grandmother Elmira insists early in the novel that "what's past is prologue," and Jennifer suffers from the same obsessive foreshortening, stating that her family's collective past is in "the present tense." But Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Submitta, clearly the highest authority, eventually reappears to remind Jennifer that the present is "where it all ends . . . . This is already the past." Like the families in *Fear of Flying* or *Kinflicks*, Jennifer's family turns in upon itself, with no sense of perspective or proportion: Grandmother

Katherine Govier

Constance sighs to Jennifer, " 'All the weddings and funerals we've had . . . . In this family.' As if no other family went to such extremes." So the prudent family members only show up for the funerals, because as Submitta sagely said years before, then at least "you know who you're dealing with. At weddings it's too early to tell." However, unlike Jong's and Alther's heroines, Govier's heroine's egocentricity (familiacentricity?) is challenged. The adolescent exclusivity is counterbalanced by Jennifer's reinterpretation of the "tree of life" that Submitta, at the age of seventy, began to needlepoint onto a fantastic four-seater davenport, which she covered with the rosebud faces of her descendents yet to be born, daring God to take her in mid-stitch. Jennifer creates another image: "The tree did not flower at the top of one thick and lengthening trunk. Its limbs leaned and broke; it was tangled and obscure; it did not stand alone but close on others, partly strangled and partly supported by the intruders."

Jennifer must learn and accept not only the coincidence ("Slight, this prism, this momentary conjunction of line with line.") that turns the "dignity of one's lineage into a luckly pause in the music," but also the choice: "After the accidental meetings, the timing and the placing, still their routes might have proven to be nothing like each other's . . . . Anyone could have said no, any time. There were no victims, at least no willing ones."

"This novel examines the past but *sans* self-righteousness and self-justifying confessionalism."

After all the repetitions — after all the cyclic recurrences of names, faces, pain, joy, and even events from generation to generation — we learn, from the same oblique method that teaches Jennifer, that, finally, "You have your own saying to do." Never mind what *they* said. What Jennifer, who is clearly the archetypal "new woman" — a compendium of opposites: well-educated, confused, self-confident, guilt-ridden, independent, and desperate for security — finds in her search into the past is a release into the future. She sees, hears, imagines, and dreams the clamour of ancestral women on the hilltops asking, "Where have we got to?" And she dreams her mother's message: "Go ahead . . . . Go it your own way, so we can see what this is all about. Because it is not about the right mate, or a good job, or the new heir. It is about who you are. We're waiting."

Ultimately, I found a bit of myself in *Random Descent*, and a bit of what I must become. This novel is in the positive new women's Bildungsroman genre; thus, it examines the past, but *sans* self-righteous and self-justifying confessionalism. And it points to a new kind of future for women, not merely to rearrangement of existing stereotypes. I recommend to you the humour, the page-by-page delight in the surprising and powerful images, the sensitivity, and especially the sensibleness of Katherine Govier's first novel.

Rebecca Smith teaches in the English department at the University of Prince Edward Island.

FILM


Prädikat:
BESONDERS WERTVOLL
Hanna Schygulla
in einem Film von Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Die Ehe
der Maria Braun
... sie währte nur einen halben Tag - und eine ganze Nacht!

fassbinder's women: subtle stereotypes

by Judith Mirus

Some feminist critics approach prominent films by male film-makers as if they must be evaluated according to how reinforcing or sympathetic an image of women they present. There's every reason to criticize, as feminists, the ideas in any film, but it strikes me as silly to demand that movies made by men reflect a feminist or even feminine consciousness. Instead, it makes more sense to decipher what is being "said." There are a few male directors whose films do in fact show an atypically astute perception of the female persona without reshaping it to fit some wished-for notion of Woman.

R.W. Fassbinder is, perhaps, one of the better examples. Only "perhaps" because his view, repeated persistently in every film, that personality and personal relationships are inevitably perverted through socialization, certainly infects his depiction of women. He doesn't provide any positive female role models — or male, for that matter. Even Effi Briest (*Fontane Effi Briest*, West Germany, 1972-74), by far the most sympathetically portrayed woman in his gallery, yields to persecution and degradation like a wounded animal. His perspective seems to me not only limited but artistically limiting. Nevertheless, within his very determinist framework, women are more realistically conceived, even as types, than in any film by a Bergman, Truffaut or Altman.

Maybe this is because, unlike directors who have a simplistic fascination with women or what they don't understand about them, Fassbinder isn't construing a mythology of the Feminine. Ultimately, he identifies woman — and identifies with her — as victim. Effi Briest exemplifies a woman martyred for the sake of social convention. Married at 17 to the older Baron von Innstetten, she enjoys the physical and social comforts commensurate with her position, but life is uneventful and boring. In her loneliness and longing for youthful companionship she succumbs to the attentions of a handsome young officer. Years later Innstetten discovers her indiscretion, challenges the man to a duel and kills him, and then banishes Effi from his household to die in poverty and remorse.

Based on Theodor Fontane's turn-of-the-century Realist novel, the film follows the essential narrative exactly but so constricts it that it becomes effectively "Fassbinder's Effi Briest," an hermetic portrait of a woman who acquiesces to her punishment because she can't imagine a self separate from society's conception of her. Similarly, her husband's behaviour isn't prompted by a wounded ego but by an ingrained sense of moral responsibility. Both are victimized by society by virtue of so inertly endorsing its conventions.

But it's more than circumstantial that only Effi should be the *sacrificial* victim. Fassbinder has set up a spectrum of primary victims drawn as often as not from society's aberrant or minority fringe: gangsters, homosexuals, blacks, workers. Effi belongs because she's a woman. In *Ali (Angst essen Seele auf*, 1973) cleaning lady Emmi Kurowski (played by the exceptional Brigitte Mira) marries a Moroccan guestworker, a man almost young enough to be her son, only to suffer the sneers of a selfish family and bigotted neighbours. In the beginning she and Ali cling to each other out of shared loneliness but also as a defense against unrecognized fears and inadequacies. When public pressure begins to flag, so does their relationship. At the end, as Emmi is reduced to fetching him at the local pub — the same pub where she met him — he collapses on the floor haemorrhaging from a stomach ulcer. At the hospital the doctor explains that this is a typical — and recurring — malady of guestworkers resulting from the stress of adapting to an alien culture. Emmi and Ali are together, but clearly the basis for their relationship is a pathetic need for a refuge against an entrapment they sense but can't comprehend.

It's revealing that when the Canadian and American distributors titled the film they implicitly identified Ali as the focus of interest. The original title translates as "fear eats the soul," something Ali says to Emmi — in ungrammatical German — emphasizing the source of their attachment and expressing the whole tenor of the story. While it's his line, Emmi is the more central figure and the one who's most subjected to disdainful, knowing looks, even from Ali's friends. As a foreigner and a black man, he's an outsider by definition. But Emmi's victimization is doubly determined, and more insidiously, first by her situation as a cleaning lady, but foremost

by her sex. What business does she have taking up with a nigger guest-worker half her age? She's made to suffer as much or more for not behaving in a fashion appropriate to her position as an "older woman" as for her inferior socio-economic status.

In Fassbinder's world women are classified, whether victim or aggressor, on the basis of a prescribed role derived solely because they're female: wife, mother, mistress, whore. There doesn't seem to be any way for women to dissociate their sexual identities from these or associated role assignments. Emmi is a cleaning *lady*, while Ali is a guest*worker*.

The male roles drawn from minority stereotypes have most in common with Fassbinder's females because they're also derived generically; it's easy to recognize the grounds for their victimization. Closest of all is his "wholesome homosexual" in *Fox (Faustrecht der Freiheit,* 1975), whose naivete and exploitability so overreaches that of Effi Briest that by the end he's been turned into a merely pathetic figure. Other male characters — and they make up the majority — belong to the fringe simply by virtue of being marginal, maladjusted personalities. In a system founded on perceptible behavioural catagories the indistinctness of their role assignments makes them feel disfunctional.

The irony is that both men and women in his world are trapped and betrayed by social conventions but in emphatically different ways. Women by inescapable stereotypes rigidly tied to their sexuality, men by fluctuating roles made meaningless for having no tangible sexual association. It isn't surprising, then, that Fassbinder's women are far and above the stronger characters, dominating their male counterparts even when they're being brutally victimized.

In fact, Fassbinder glamourizes the female roles even further by accentuating the star quality of his actresses and incorporating it into the character, a technique noticeably rarely applied to male performers. An outstanding example is Hanna Schygulla, whose natural sensuality has been more variably and effectively utilized by Fassbinder than by any of his colleagues. Her roles have been as different as young wife-mother in *Effi Briest* or, most recently, as ambitious career woman in *The Marriage of Maria Braun (Die Ehe der Maria Braun,* 1978).

This ties in neatly with his penchant for designing each character strictly according to some stereotype and for deliberately over-dramatizing his plots. Both belong to melodrama, a style perfectly suited to his purposes because it dramatizes the effect of actions or events on the behaviour of a core of characters. Most films cover only a segment, kammerspiel-like, of their lives, but even in the few that elaborate on characterization, novel fashion — as in *Effi* or *Maria Braun* — the characters are only allowed to emerge, never evolve, and drift into whatever end is in store for them.

All of this relates back to his perception and depiction of women. Melodrama has a long history in the cinema, and the Hollywood Women's Film of the Forties and Fifties personified its use in American movies. It's this specific brand of melodrama that Fassbinder simulates.

For the most part tear-jerkers, these Hollywood productions created the convention that the audience should get some kind of cathartic release, either through a "happy end" or through an over-emotional identification with the heroine and her fate. Mostly, such films only reinforced the conventional notions of women's roles, but a few directors used the genre to make direct, if guarded, social comment. Douglas Sirk's dramas — especially admired and emulated by Fassbinder — stand out in this regard, despite the fact that they're blatant "Weepies," a term applied to the genre in general. In *All that Heaven Allows* (1956), Jane Wyman plays a wealthy widow — an "older woman" — who falls in love with her gardner, played by a young Rock Hudson. The social context has been changed, indeed, radicalized; but *Ali* couldn't be a more deliberate remake. In either film, the director makes it clear that his sympathy is unambiguously on the side of the heroine.

Hollywood's type of melodrama was so intimately linked to the audience's expected identification with the star and her supposed off-screen glamour that they made the mundane palatable. Any social criticism inherent in the plot was in a sense abstracted from the films' effects. Society may have forced women into dire circumstances, but via the independent persona of the star they weren't presented as irreparably marred by the roles they assumed. In contrast, no Fassbinder film I can think of ends happily or permits the viewer to identify other than with the characters' situation, never with their personality.

Society, then, is the first and last victimizer. But for Fassbinder it is the perpetrator *in abstracto*. He isn't interested in making distinctions that might clarify the nature of the problem, but in demonstrating, dramatically, society's effect on human character. Since this is reality "for adults only," every adult, however relatively innocent in comparison to others, has already been imprinted with a set of social values. They aren't just being exploited, they cooperate in their own exploitation, usually out of some unrealistic and unrealizable expectation of happiness or success. So seen, not only is life — on or off the screen — melodramatic, but relationships can't avoid being stereotypic.

In this sense, his use of melodrama resembles that watched daily — or so the ratings proclaim — by millions of women on "As the World Turns." The TV soap opera, like the Women's Film, relies for its success on audience identification with lives of its characters. But as in a Fassbinder film, these lives never actually go anywhere, and even if some characters come and go, the roles are so stereotyped that any other face can easily fit into the empty slot. By giving pseudo-significance to the everyday-ness of events, the afternoon "soap" is cynically exploiting the presumed need of a captured audience to have their roles reinforced and made important. Fassbinder's treatment goes off in another direction.

His projection of life is similarly static and melodramatic, but his use of such stereotyping is meant to call attention to the effect of sociali-

zation on character. It's also the conscious tactic of a stylist who has formalized and readapted a style and its associated conventions in order to magnify his interpretation of reality.

It's not accidental that stereotypes of women's roles lend themselves so well to soaperatic or melodramatic handling. Men's roles aren't less prescriptive but they're certainly less proscriptive. Exposing the stratification inherent in female roles makes for a stronger statement. But what further distinguishes Fassbinder's approach to characterization, especially of women, is "distancing." Stereotypes are heightened and mannered while the glamour of the players contradicts the sordidness or degradation of their situations. The meaning is put out in front so it can be examined rather than experienced.

More to the point, his perception of the variety — and nuances — of female stereotypes is painfully accurate. Women are presented as easy victims and able victimizers, sometimes simultaneously. The film that probably most compactly, and negatively, illustrates this is *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (Die Bitteren Traenen der Petra von Kant,* 1972). Petra (artfully played by Margit Carstensen) is a clever, pretentiously sophisticated lesbian fashion designer who directs her affairs from a lavishly over-decorated boudoir. Within this highly artificial, encapsulated environment the central figures play off against — and feed on — each other. Petra's business activities are managed by an adulating personal secretary, who never says a word (played by Irm Hermann, an actress who's become a Fassbinder transfiguration of the Marlene Dietrich persona). Enter the young, slothfully sensual Karin (another Hanna Schygulla role). Seduced into being Petra's concubine, she gradually turns the position to her advantage, languishing in the comfort of Petra's increasingly slavish affection. The remaining cast of all-female characters is a timid daughter, a greedy friend and a self-serving mother. Karin eventually departs for better climes leaving Petra shattered and frantically out of control. Denuded physically and psychologically — illustrated by her suddenly "natural" appearance — she destroys the apartment's decor, the outer reflection of her previous personality. Finally abandoned by everyone — they prefer the old Petra — she retires with the Platters' version of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" playing on the phonograph.

Such an explicit stereotyping of female relationships does call attention to how destructive role-playing is, but, as in *Fox,* the unusually extreme stylization of setting and characterization backfires. The characters have been so objectified that the feeling is left that Fassbinder himself can't distinguish between disdain for the sterotype and the attempt to give a distanced depiction. Petra's new purified self isn't less of a stereotype, it's merely a counter-image.

The ambivalence that surfaces in a film like *Petra* hints at an underlying attitude toward women that identifies with them as victims, but perhaps also identifies them with an ideal. As the only characters in Fassbinder's world who count on the future being better than the present, there's some indication that women are the nearest he can come to creating redeemable characters.

In *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (with Schygulla as Maria) Fassbinder creates his most convincing and complex portrait to date of a female character. The day after her marriage husband Hermann is dragged off to the front, only to be reported missing after the armistice is declared. No one but Maria ever expects him to return. She spends her days waiting at the train station, but since that won't provide her food and clothing, she gets a job in a GI bar and takes up with Bill, a black American officer — pudgy but nice. Hermann does return and finds her naked in Bill's arms. After a struggle — who's defending whom isn't clear — she cracks Bill over the head, but Hermann goes to prison for the murder. In the interim Maria becomes the confidential secretary of a textile manufacturer, another "nice guy." All the while she remains emotionally faithful to Hermann. It's for their future happiness that she does what she does, including taking over management of the company. (There's an appropriately "tragic" surprise ending that shouldn't be revealed.)

Hanna Schygulla as Maria Braun

Maria incorporates the stereotypic extremes of the one-dimensional innocent who stubbornly sacrifices herself to a fantasy vision of reality, and of the ingenious bitch who cooly separates desires from objectives and uses anyone who can satisfy both. What Fassbinder and Schygulla achieve is a more real victim, someone who is a by-product of the materialism of the Wonder-Economy of postwar Germany. The coda that closes the film — huge negative photos of West Germany's chancelors — spells out the meaning rather too blatantly, but the Maria-character is the most credible realization so far of Fassbinder's message.

Maria is a type, in fact, the "calculating kind" most other women abhor. But she is an accurate projection of how some women have become in order to survive. Fassbinder is just as accurate in suggesting that her dream of eventually having her perfect marriage with Hermann is the kind of far-flung hope that many women still base their lives on. The image isn't an attractive one; on the other hand, it's one, he says, that we've been trained to pursue. By implication it's the training which is flawed and at fault, not the trainee.

Judith Mirus is film editor for Branching Out. She recently became a mother.

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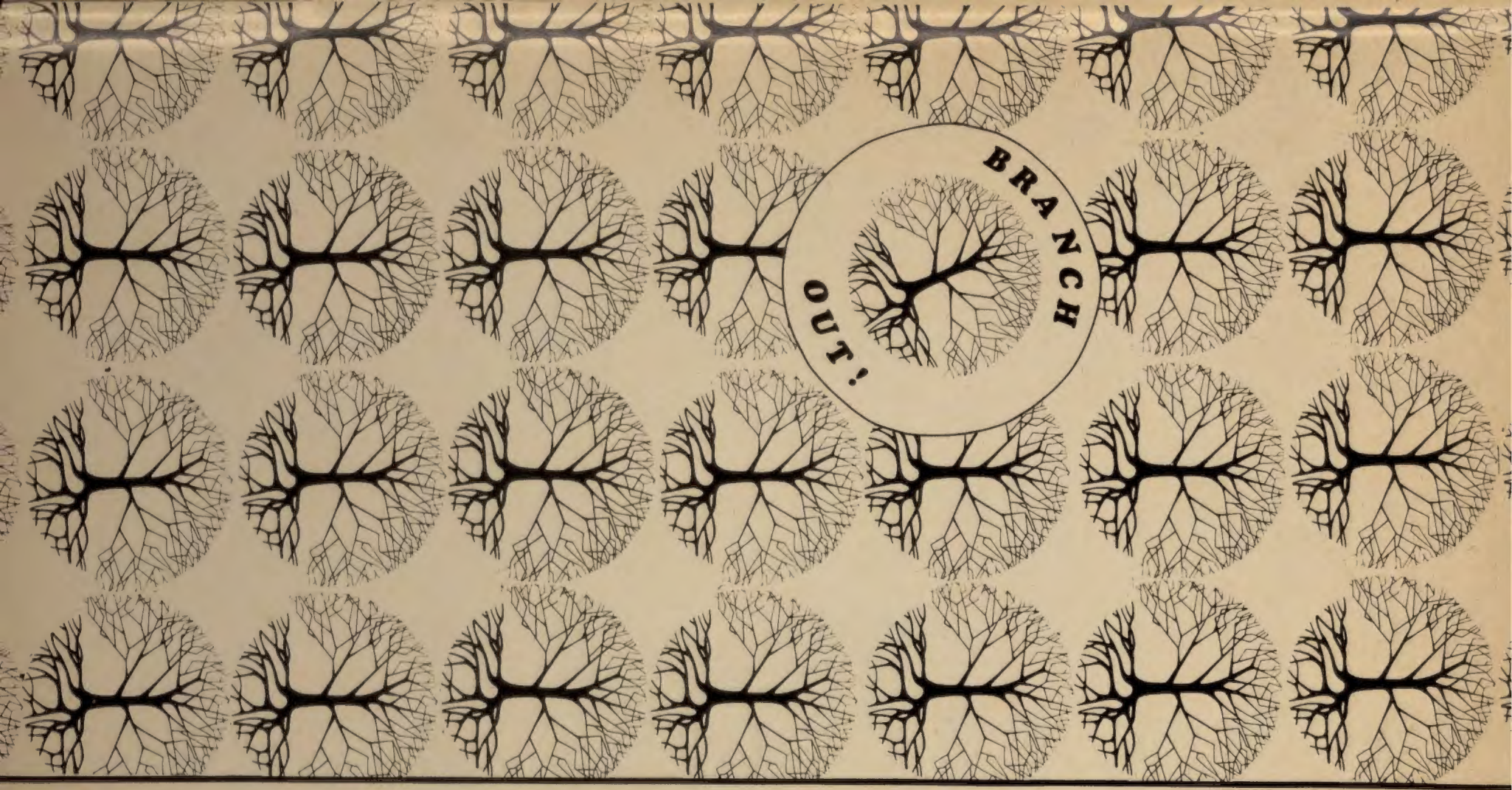

BUY A BUTTON!

Talk to Phyllis Ellis

Director of the

ALBERTA WOMEN'S BUREAU

when you need information

Information is their business at the Alberta Women's Bureau, and Phyllis Ellis and her staff give it to you from the woman's point of view . . . your rights, responsibilities and other requirements. For instance, do you know what your rights are in the event of a marriage breakdown? your responsibilities as an executrix? your requirements concerning insurance?

The Women's Bureau is building a library of information on topics affecting women in business, legal and social situations, and it's yours free.

A variety of subjects is completed and ready for distribution; others are in various stages of preparation. However, if you have a particular concern that is not listed here, suggest it to Phyllis Ellis or her staff. They'll help.

Send for any of these topics, or suggest others of interest to women.

- ☐ Alberta Labour Legislation of Interest to Women in the Paid Work Force
- ☐ Probate Procedure
- ☐ Helping You Cope with Widowhood
- ☐ Wills and Estates for Albertans
- ☐ Ending a Marriage: The Legal Aspects of Separation, Annulment and Divorce
- ☐ Insurance: The Woman's Point of View
- ☐ Changing Your Name
- ☐ Children: Custody and Access
- ☐ The Illegitimate Child
- ☐ A Woman's Rights
- ☐ Establishing a Good Credit Record
- ☐ How to Prepare a Meaningful Resume

Write or phone
Alberta Women's Bureau
1402 Centennial Building
10015 - 103 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0H1
Telephone 427-2470

Alberta
WOMEN'S BUREAU