

Par l'affirmation de son expérience intime, le "je" désire ainsi se découvrir et se dévoiler dans le contexte culturel. Authenticité de la démarche, plaisir de l'écriture, création d'une mémoire collective féminine tels sont les points

marquants de l'aventure autobiographique chez Simonne Monet-Chartrand, Paule Saint-Onge et Claire Martin.

<sup>1</sup>Claire Martin, *Dans un gant de fer* (Montréal: C.L.F., 1965-1966), deux

tomes; Paule Saint-Onge, *La vie défigurée* (Montréal: La Presse, 1979); et Simonne Monet-Chartrand, *Ma vie comme rivière* (Montréal: Les Editions du remue-ménage, 1980-1981), deux tomes, 1919-1942, 1939-1949.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## LOOKING INTO MY SISTER'S EYES: AN EXPLORATION IN WOMEN'S HISTORY

Edited by Jean Burnet. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986.

*Lydia Burton*

This collection of thirteen papers, dedicated to Marta Danylewycz, explores the background and condition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrant women in Ontario. A sensitive preface by Robert Harney and a perspicacious introduction by editor Burnet place in context the valuable research represented by the contributors' work in documenting the basis – cultural, economic, political, and social – of women's roles in the historical circumstances that required emigration from their familiar homelands to Canada.

Adjustment to the Canadian scene was easier for some women (the northern Europeans) than for others (the eastern and southern Europeans, the Chinese), but for all, the dislocation was only successfully accomplished through the courage and determination that are shared elements in establishing a new life well outside the traditional cultural environment of one's birth and upbringing. That male immigrants shared with females many of the dubious features of adjustment to Canada – including exploitation as workers and cultural discrimination – is indisputable, but the value of this collection is its focus on the circumstances and feelings of women. Some papers in this volume are particularly adept in providing a sense of the unique position and personal qualities of indi-

viduals who experienced deprivation of many sorts in their effort to cope with an unfamiliar culture while striving to maintain their own.

If women of British origin were more privileged in their immigrant experience because they were less culturally different, they were nonetheless forced to work hard for relatively low pay, were looked down upon, and were often cut off – without time or resources – from social activities. They were also fortunate in comparison to their middle-class predecessors, who suffered not only extreme isolation and hardship but the backbreaking labour associated with frontier experience in the early 1800s. The 1900s saw the development of hostels for domestic workers from the British Isles. Similarly, there was Finnish community support for their own strong-minded, tough, and respected migrants: organizations sprang up to accommodate this female domestic labour force, which changed jobs frequently because working conditions were often intolerable. But exploitation even affected these young British and Finnish women who came – as single people and by personal choice – to earn wages that could not be matched at home and for whom this immigration was more a matter of general and financial betterment than an escape from abysmal poverty or political/religious persecution.

Italian, Jewish, Polish, Greek, Macedonian, Ukrainian, and Chinese women, however, immigrated with families (not always "coming over" at the same time as husbands), as did Armenian women, although Ottoman persecution of Armenians resulted in the destruction of families, so that a small contingent of surviving girls and women were admitted to

Canada in the 1920s. Mennonites, considered here as an ethnic/cultural group because of their strong independent cultural attitudes, also migrated as families. Within these groups, the details of women's achievements as workers – inside the family and sometimes outside as well – and their endeavours in maintaining a cultural identity that could be passed on to others can only be termed heroic. Secular and religious organizations were developed by these women, both to accommodate their own needs and to serve others. Although often not political (except for some among the Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians) – an arena frequently controlled by their men – these organizations served not only as charitable or fund-raising institutions, but were also training grounds for learning organizational skills, group discipline, reporting and recording, and public speaking. Women's involvement in workers' movements and labour unions, as well as in language schools for their children and church groups, testifies to the energy and indomitability of these newcomers in an Anglo-Saxon cultural landscape.

Often mediating "between . . . immigrant parents and their [own] Canadian-born children" (p. 120), these women have had the heartbreaking task of trying to maintain cultural traditions while realizing that "success" in a new homeland requires adaptation and acculturation. How this story ends remains to be seen, but these studies give us a high level of exposition (not merely descriptive), through discussion of substantive issues behind the facts of our existing multiculturalism. This approach makes *Looking into My Sister's Eyes* an exemplar of quality scholarship and humane analysis.