

stand why there are many women today who reject feminism for similar reasons. It does women's history no service simply to imply that any woman who is not a feminist of some sort had been duped or brainwashed. We need not only to describe the past lives of women, but we also need to accept those lives on their own terms. To skirt the issue of motiva-

tion, to assume that women "then" thought as women do "now", is to ignore time and place in women's history and to denigrate that history. We need to ask of women in the past, as we need to ask of women today: what are women's priorities? Are women trying to build a world that is different and better than the one that restricts them, or do women only

want to be let into the clubhouse to be like the boys? Once past the purely descriptive, each essay in *Not Just Pin Money* poses this dilemma.

Despite some ragged edges, *Not Just Pin Money* contains new information, provocative insights and deserves to become required reading in any course on the history of women in Canada.

### **CANADA HOME: JULIA HORATIA EWING'S FREDERICTON LETTERS, 1867-1869**

Edited by Margaret Howard Blom and Thomas E. Blom. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983.

*Margaret Conrad*

Julia Horatia (Gatty) Ewing (1841-85), the British-born writer of children's stories, was much admired by the likes of Rudyard Kipling and Henry James. Of delicate constitution, she was a romantic soul who by all accounts, including her own, was happily married to an officer in Queen Victoria's 22nd Regiment which was posted to Fredericton in 1867. From this 27-month Canadian experience came over 100 letters which Julia Ewing wrote to her close family circle in England. The Bloms have carefully edited these letters and illustrated them with Ewing's Fredericton sketches to produce another handsome volume in the UBC Press series of diaries and reminiscences. While the letters are less revealing of 'ordinary' life than modern readers may have wished, they are the very stuff of Victorian middle class women's history and offer a lucid account of high society in Fredericton at the time of Confederation.

Julia Ewing's letters read much like a Jane Austin novel. This is in part, the editors tell us, because she did not wish to worry her family back in England with accounts about 'roughing it' in the colonial

bush. It is also because Julia Ewing was happily and uncritically socialized to the values of middle class Victorian society. She describes Fredericton summer nights as settings for operas, finds the concept of a native Indian woman riding a train as foreign as Plato dancing a polka, and is moved to rapture by the flora and fauna of North America. She fills those hours not consumed with domestic chores and social obligations with her sketch book, her flower press and her writing. Victorian ladies did not waste their time. Indeed, Canada was well served by the Susanna Moodies, Catharine Parr Traills and Julia Ewings who preserved the country's natural history, chronicled its social customs and, on occasion, left a mark on the society they so diligently observed. Julia Ewing's stay in Canada was too brief and her personality too retiring to allow her to transform the community in which she was situated or even to allow Canadians to lay claim to her as they have Susanna Moodie. Nevertheless, Ewing's disciplined eye and practiced pen offer us a rare window through which to see how others saw us over a century ago.

Scholars of women's history will be delighted with the details of women's domestic economy preserved in these letters, as well as the description of the close bonds of female friendships and family relationships. They will also find evidence concerning the advice books consulted, the material possessions treasured, the values so deeply held as to be invisible among women of Ewing's

class and culture. ". . . I can only write a scrap today. I am wildly busy copying sketches and varnishing leaves to send you," she wrote to her sister in October 1867. "I am sending a book of Autumn Leaves to the Mum - & a few for Mrs. Bryce - & for Aunt Mary. Also some bits of bead work for Mrs. Aveling - & Annie Bonnar - which might be sent to Howard St. for an opportunity" (pp. 60-61). No grass grew under the feet of the women in Ewing's circle, either on matters commercial or domestic. ". . . I am getting our house quite spic & span. The only drawback is that none of you can see it. . . The dirt & untidiness of New Brunswickers combined with the prevalence of the *irish* elements in servants & workmen, is enough to cure an untidy party like myself - and I have 'set my face as a flint' against one 'irish corner' inside or out" (p. 156). Of course, like other British travellers in Canada, Ewing pays much attention to the vagaries of the climate, the mails and the local 'help.' And she offers practical advice, complete with sketches, on how to make knickerbockers to ward off winter chills (p. 349). She provides little direct evidence of the social tensions between the town folks and the military which led to the sensational Brennen murder trial in October 1868 but we can guess after reading Ewing's letters that the 'airs' of the transient officers and their families would not always go down well with the local populace. It is perhaps fitting that when the Ewings left Fredericton, it marked the end of the official British military presence in Julia Ewing's 'Canada Home.'

### **THE LAST BEST WEST: WOMEN ON THE ALBERTA FRONTIER 1880-1930**

Elaine Leslau Silverman. Montreal: Eden Press, 1984.

*Rebecca Coulter*

In *The Last Best West*, Silverman has

utilized the results of more than one hundred and fifty oral interviews with women from various ethnic, religious and class backgrounds to create what she calls "a collective autobiography" of women on the Alberta frontier. The book is organized around the events which the women themselves identified as important in their life cycles so that chapters are included on topics such as girlhood,

courtship and marriage, contraception and childbirth, household work, waged labour and social life. In each chapter, Silverman effectively weaves together the words of individual women with well-written and informative bridges to demonstrate the commonalities and differences in women's experiences.

The format adopted by Silverman succeeds in helping the reader feel and

understand what women faced when they migrated to Alberta. We get a sense of the harsh realities they and their families confronted and we understand, too, the incredible adaptability and resourcefulness of women who were so often faced with sickness and death, hunger and fear, loneliness and isolation. This book also provides much new information on women's lives in Alberta. While earlier works have informed us of some of the more public hazards of homesteading, Silverman's book reveals something of the more intimate aspects of women's experiences. The honesty with which some of the women spoke of matters still generally regarded as private and personal suggests that Silverman developed a fine rapport with her informants. In fact, Silverman's empathy for these women

and the obvious pleasure she took in meeting and talking to them is conveyed on nearly every page.

Silverman makes no claim that the women she interviewed provide a representative sample though she does argue that common patterns of experience emerged. In seeking to demonstrate these patterns, however, a tendency to submerge differences appears. The vast majority of the oral testimony comes from white women in rural and farm settings so that, for example, we learn little about aboriginal women. Some evidence from women in the urban centres of Alberta is included as part of the autobiographical narrative but it is not as well integrated as the material from the rural women. A reader is left with the impression that some material was included simply

because it was too interesting to discard.

*The Last Best West* is a fittingly ironic title for this book which tells us much about the struggles and hardships, the accomplishments and joys, the isolation and the friendships of women on Alberta's frontiers. Clearly, for many, if not most, women, life in the "last best west" was not the exciting and fulfilling adventure promised by the propagandists for the C.P.R. and the Department of Immigration. Indeed, after reading women's first-hand accounts of their experiences, one is most struck by their tolerant, though resigned, acceptance of their lives of constant work, worry and fatigue and their view that "Well, you just had to keep going."

### THIS IS MY OWN: LETTERS TO WES & OTHER WRITINGS ON JAPANESE CANADIANS, 1941-1948

Muriel Kitagawa, edited by Roy Miki.  
Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985.

*Mona Oikawa*

I first discovered the writings of Tsukiye Muriel Kitagawa during a visit to the Public Archives of Canada. Within the intimidating walls of the Ottawa monolith, I retreated from the reams of government documents condemning my people, to find comfort in the manuscripts of one woman who protested the roots of that devastating power.

It is with joy, therefore, that I have rediscovered Muriel Kitagawa in *This Is My Own: Letters To Wes & Other Writings On Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948*, edited by Roy Miki. Kitagawa, a Nisei (second generation Canadian) woman, was a writer and activist, who was born in Vancouver in 1912 and died in Toronto in 1974. Her journey from the west coast to central Canada is the story of the forced removal, incarceration, dispossession, deportation and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

As the title suggests, the volume is divided into two major sections. The first, "Letters to Wes," is comprised of Kitagawa's correspondence with her brother Wesley Fujiwara in 1942. The letters chronicle the day-to-day events resulting from the Canadian government's decision to forcibly remove all people of Japanese origin from the British Columbia coast.

Kitagawa's words express her outrage at the racially motivated government policy, "And this is democracy! . . . It has just boiled down to race persecution." (p.90)

Her letters also reveal the concerns she had as a mother coping with a difficult pregnancy and the subsequent birth of twins, all while caring for two other daughters and a husband. She describes how they become the targets of "mass hatred" through the actions of both the people and the country she so dearly loved. Her sense of betrayal is evident in witnessing the effects of racism upon her children, "so thoroughly Canadian they would never understand being persecuted by people they regard as one of themselves." (p.74)

The second section, "Other Writings," contains selected poetry and prose, some of which were previously published between 1942 and 1949. It is impossible to describe at length the intricacies of thought in Kitagawa's writings. What are striking to me are her clear, articulate analyses and her powers of argument, both of which prod the reader to question fundamental assumptions about democracy and freedom in light of the wartime experience of Japanese Canadians.

*This Is My Own* heralds the voice of a passionate woman who despite repressive restrictions upon her personal freedom, spoke out on the questions of the war, state power, racism and the position of women. Muriel Kitagawa openly protested racist wartime legislation through letters, articles and public addresses. She used her knowledge of government oppression, not only to fight

on behalf of Japanese Canadians, but also to demonstrate how the struggle for equality is inextricably linked to all peoples' fight against "race and economic greed." (p.203)

This wonderful collection was compiled and edited by Roy Miki, a professor of English at Simon Fraser University. His introduction provides a brief historical background to Kitagawa's life. Archival research and oral history form the basis of the documentation, which includes forty photographs. A strength of the book is that Miki has allowed Kitagawa's words to stand on their own, rendering permanent the gift of this remarkable woman.

The one criticism that I have of the collection is the lack of biographical information on Kitagawa herself. After reading her writings I am left thirsting for answers to questions not addressed in Miki's ten page biography, "The Life." I wonder about her friendships with other women and men. What was her relationship to her community, her political involvements and how, for example, did she come to address the Toronto Council of Women in 1948? More information on Kitagawa would have woven a thread of continuity between the beautiful pieces of poetry and prose.

Unfortunately, as Miki points out, Kitagawa was unable to complete this autobiographical task herself. One may speculate that the reasons which prevented her from fulfilling her dream of writing the history of Japanese Canadians during World War II are in some way related to her position as a woman and as a member of a denigrated racial group, at a