

## THE ELIZABETH STORIES

Isabel Huggan. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1984.

*Susan Hughes*

Childhood and adolescence are times of life we look back on with mixed feelings. We try to remember events with fondness and cheerful maturity, but deep down realize we are simply applying objectivity to those vividly painful years of growing up. *The Elizabeth Stories* explores these important early years through the voice of Elizabeth. A sensitive and blunt narrator, Elizabeth forces us to experience with her the significant agonies of sex, love, misunderstanding, and the beginnings of compassion.

We cannot remain objective and uninvolved in Elizabeth's narrative. Why? Because her narrative is so detailed and matter-of-factly personal, so much *not* a plea for pity and involvement, that we begin to empathize, to remember and recognize and feel. Her stories are deliberate explorations of the forces that shaped her, told in a way that evokes a sense of sharing. And the more we hear her stories, the more we become aware of the quiet desperation that lies behind Elizabeth's words.

Elizabeth's methods of survival are childish, selfish, and disturbingly practical. The first story is of Elizabeth at age nine. Her blunt and ruthlessly untempered observations are certainly those of a child: "Celia's head was so round and she seemed so bland and stupid and fruit-like . . . I hated Celia with a dreadful and absolute passion." These are the feelings

that we, as adults, have learned to deny ourselves. Elizabeth's easy, honest hatred alarms us and yet attracts us. We envy her her freedom from guilt and yet this is what she must learn in order to mature and adapt within society.

It does not come easily for Elizabeth. She and a friend are caught as they experiment with sexual intercourse for the first time. Fearing the end of the world which she knows will come with all the force of her mother's wrath, Elizabeth lies. She insists that her friend, Rudy, had made her lie down, that she didn't understand what he wanted. It is Rudy who must suffer and it is Elizabeth who feels regret, not for lying, which was a necessity, but for this situation which has caused her to lose Rudy's friendship.

Elizabeth struggles to survive in her world of peers who are judgmental and fickle. They play by children's rules, unfair and cruel – rules which Elizabeth does not rebel against but feels compelled to play by. Much of her agony also springs from a belief that her parents are disappointed in her and never show her affection. In one story, Elizabeth sacrifices a friend's trust because she feels she must prove her innocence to her mother. She suffers from hurting her friend but again feels she had no choice. She regrets only the necessity of her action.

Most of Elizabeth's decisions are made in an effort to gain her parents' approval, for at this stage in her young life it is still only they who can give her a sense of worthiness, of integrity. In a sense, she has no conscience because her parents are her conscience and her judges. And they judge only what they see, the ends and not the means. They are not close enough

nor care enough for their daughter to investigate beyond the face she presents to them. Elizabeth does not trust their love for her and so cannot reveal her secrets. Though sensing that her decisions to mislead or conceal are not "right," Elizabeth feels they must have merit because they lead to ultimate approval.

As Elizabeth grows older, she begins to learn that others, too, conceal. She says that "my mother and her friends had secret lives . . . I learned that duplicity was as necessary, as natural to their existence as breathing." But she also learns that these secret lives were necessary as an escape from an unbearable reality of a mundane life. She is startled to find that adults also feel this life is stale and frustrating.

Later, Elizabeth learns that her mother has a real secret, another man in her life. Suddenly, given this power of knowledge, Elizabeth must decide whether to tell her father. Does her mother deserve punishment? The decision is difficult, but showing a maturity which she has not had before, Elizabeth resigns herself to keeping a secret she does not want and to feeling compassion that she would rather not feel.

Isabel Huggan's *The Elizabeth Stories* is a disturbing, compelling book of stories, disturbing in their revelation of the slow and inevitably painful gaining of experience and maturity, compelling in their subtle optimism that one survives and learns and grows in spite of it all. We are left with the certainty that Elizabeth will overcome and will keep growing; we are left liking Elizabeth and hoping for the best for her. We are left reevaluating ourselves.

## Book notes

*Beth Light*

### DISCOVERING WOMEN'S HISTORY: A PRACTICAL MANUAL

Deirdre Beddoe. London: Pandora Press, 1983.

This book is a practical and extremely useful guide designed for non-

professional historians who are interested in exploring the past experiences of women in Britain from about 1800 to 1945. However, the time frame and the geographic specificity do not limit its instructiveness for researchers in other locales or for those concerned with women in other times. The introductory essay, "Why Should We Study Women's History?," presents arguments applicable to all researchers. The subsequent six chapters address key themes essential for the reconstruction of women's experiences in the past by providing factual background and by suggesting research questions and published and other sources. A final chapter describes methods for publicizing the results of the research.

### THE DORA RUSSELL READER: 57 YEARS OF WRITING AND JOURNALISM, 1925-1982

Dora Russell. Forward by Dale Spender. London: Pandora Press. 1983.

Throughout her life in Britain, Dora Russell campaigned tirelessly for birth control, women's sexual freedom, progressive education, world peace and other social changes. This book presents a selection of her published writings from the mid-1920s to 1982 in which she analyzed sexual politics in modern times.

## **ELIZABETH BAGSHAW**

Marjorie Wild. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, The Canadian Series, 1984.

Dr. Elizabeth Bagshaw became the medical director of Canada's first birth control clinic in 1932 at a time when such a service was still subject to criminal prosecution. She practiced at the Hamilton Birth Control Clinic until her retirement in 1966. This readable, highly illustrated book is more than a biography of a leader in planned parenthood: it also documents the Canadian struggle to allow women to control their fertility. The book should prove extremely useful for high school or general readers who wish to explore this topic through an examination of the life and perspective of a female pioneer.

## **FIRST PEOPLE, FIRST VOICES**

Penny Petrone. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

Canadian historians have, until recently, been woefully negligent in researching Canadian Indians through their own literary and oral tradition. This volume corrects, in part, this absence by publishing a selection of the writings and speeches of Canada's native peoples from the early seventeenth century until the present. The approach allows the reader to capture the recorded beginnings and evolution of Indian culture. Unfortunately, only a few of the voices represented in the collection are female.

## **THE MARRIAGE BARGAIN: WOMEN AND DOWERIES IN EUROPEAN HISTORY**

Marion A. Kaplan, editor. The Haworth Press and the Institute for Research in History, 1985.

This collection of scholarly essays studies the economic, political and social aspects of marriage for women through an examination of the practice of providing doweries. Included are essays on the institution as practiced by patricians and artisans in eleventh and twelfth century Mediterranean cities, on upper and middle class doweries in Siena, on the experience among the nineteenth century Sicilian peasantry; an examination of the German Imperial bourgeoisie and a contemporary look at

doweries among Greek workers and farmers. An introductory essay by the editor provides a context for the study of the marriage gift in patriarchal society and ideology.

## **MEN'S IDEAS/WOMEN'S REALITIES: POPULAR SCIENCE, 1870-1915**

Louise Michele Newman, editor. New York: Pergamon Press, The Athene Series, 1985.

Drawing from articles published in *The Popular Science Monthly*, this collection illustrates the nineteenth and early twentieth century debate about woman's nature, her educational capacity, public employment, enfranchisement and ability to participate in politics. The reprinted articles, from the 1870-1915 period, are introduced and analyzed by the editor. Themes include biological determinism, female education, the question of birth rate, domestic science and domestic economy, suffrage, paid employment, and the "new woman."

## **NIGHTINGALE OF THE NORTH: GEORGINA STIRLING, MARIE TOULINGUET**

Amy Louise Peyton. St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1983.

Georgina Stirling, known professionally as Mademoiselle Marie Toulinguet, was an internationally renowned singer by the first decade of the twentieth century. Born in 1867, in Newfoundland, her career ended around 1905 when a throat ailment curtailed her singing. The author pieces together Stirling's life story using family genealogy and details about Stirling's childhood, adolescence, maturity, career, and final years. The result is a readable account.

## **NO TIME FOR WOMEN: EXPLORING WOMEN'S HEALTH IN THE 1930S AND TODAY**

Charman Kenner. London: Pandora Press, 1985.

A workbook for discussion groups, women's studies courses, and those interested in women's health, *No Time for Women* uses historical examples from 1920s and 1930s British sources and links these to contemporary concerns about

women's health and current active campaigns to improve the quality of women's lives. Topics range from women's ill-health to government services and health education. A resource and bibliographic section concludes the work.

## **EMILY MURPHY: REBEL**

Christine Mander. Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1985.

This biography of Emily Murphy, Edmonton police court magistrate, author and instigator of the "Persons Case," presents a chronology of her diverse and remarkable accomplishments. The study is less successful in establishing an understanding of the woman who was recognized as one of the key leaders in changing Canadian society until her death in 1933.

## **LET'S DIE LIVING: EXPLORING THE WORLD WITH CESO**

Vivienne Clark. Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1983.

The author describes her work with her husband as Tourist Industry Advisors under the auspices of the Canadian Executive Services Overseas from the late 1960s. Their work took them to Jamaica, Borneo, Malaysia, Brazil, Barbados, Iran, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. The author particularly records the experiences which she encountered because she was a woman.

## **SYBIL JACOBSON: PAINTING IN THE WEST**

Mary G. Alexander. Foreword by Kathleen E. Berghorn. Toronto: HMS Press, 1984.

Women painters generally have received little attention from historical biographers. This monograph begins to rectify this omission through a study of the life of western Canadian painter, Sybil Jacobson (1881-1953). The book is illustrated with a dozen of Jacobson's oils and appends a selected bibliography.

## **TECHNOLOGY AND TOIL IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN**

Maxine Berg, ed. London: CSE Books, 1979.

This rich collection reprints nineteenth century British documents illustrating the theme of work and technological change. General introductions are provided for each chapter along with brief introductory notes for each document. Of particular interest to readers of women's history are Chapters 2 and 7, "The Response to Machinery: Agriculture, the Trades, Women's Work" and "The Sweating System and Working Women."

## WIVES AND PROPERTY

Lee Holcombe. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

This book examines the history of reform of the married women's property law in nineteenth century Britain in the context of changes in women's economic and social position. The scholarly work is meticulously researched and blends an understanding of the law with the richness of social history. Appended are relevant documents, a comprehensive bibliography, general index and an extremely useful index to law and legislation. Canadian readers will find the book particularly useful for information concerning the roots of Canadian law.

## WOMEN, RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly, eds. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.

This collection of essays arose from a 1983 conference about women, religion

and social change held in Hartford, Connecticut. The scholarly studies focusing on the role of women in religion range over a variety of cultures and a broad time frame.

## WOMEN'S COLLECTIONS: LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Suzanne Hildenbrand, ed. New York: The Haworth Press, 1986.

In addition to detailing the major library holdings of women's collections in the United States, this volume also includes essays that chart the history of collecting women's materials and discuss the role of librarians, scholars and archivists in expanding collections concerned with women's lives. The addresses of representative centres in the United States, Canada, and foreign locales are appended.

## KATE RICE, PROSPECTOR

Helen Duncan. Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1984.

Kate Rice provides a fascinating life for historical study. After completing an unconventional degree in mathematics in 1906, this Ontario-born woman began a more traditional women's career teaching school. However, soon she abandoned this work and became a trapper and successful prospector in Manitoba. Based on Rice's diaries, letters and other manuscript sources, Helen Duncan has written a popular readable biography.

## REDNEY: A LIFE OF SARA JEANETTE DUNCAN

Marian Fowler. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1985.

Sara Jeanette Duncan is one of Canada's best-known authors. A successful journalist, Duncan in 1888 left Canada and her career for a world tour. Following her marriage and the establishment of a new life in British India, she wrote her first novel. Fowler's finely tuned biography explores the life of Duncan and captures her complex character.

## WOMEN'S PAID AND UNPAID WORK: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Paula Bourne, editor. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985.

The book collects the papers presented at a 1984 O.I.S.E. workshop on the history of women's collective work. It includes an essay on the history of women's paid work (Ruth Pierson), Veronica Strong-Boag on 150 years of unpaid domestic work in Canada, an examination of the connection between paid and unpaid work by Margrit Eichler, an overview of the English Protestant tradition of women's organizations (Gail Brandt), and a sample history of the Toronto Women Teachers' Association prepared by Alison Prentice. Together the studies provide indispensable background for an understanding of Canadian women's rich past and present associational life.

# Books Received

Gillian Beer, *George Eliot*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long (eds.), *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

Barbara M. Brenzel, *Daughters of the State: A Social Portrait of the First Reform School for Girls in North America, 1856-1905*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983.

Charlotte Brunsdon (ed.), *Films for*

*Women*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Anne Campbell, *The Girls in the Gang*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell/Oxford University Press, 1984.

Canadian Journal of Women and the Law/Revue juridique la femme et le droit, *La femme et l'égalité/Women and Equality*, Volume 1, Number 1 (1985).

Dianne Cleveland, *Incest: The Story of Three Women*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books/D.C. Heath, 1986.

Frank Davey, *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984.

Russell P. Dobash, R. Emerson Dobash, and Sue Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell/Oxford University Press, 1986.

Rachel Blau Duplessis, H.D., *The Career of That Struggle*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Kate Fullbrook, *Katherine Mansfield*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Charlene Gannagé, *Double Day, Double Bind: Women Garment Workers*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1986.

Françoise Giroud, *Marie Curie: A Life*. Trans. Lydia Davis. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, 1986.

Sharon Golub and Rita Jackaway Freedman (eds.), *Health Needs of Women as They Age*. New York: Haworth Press, 1985.

Leona Gom, *Housebroken*. Edmonton, Alberta: NeWest Press, 1986.

Katherine Hanson (ed.), *An Everyday*