

memoirs as conscious acts of rebellion, no matter how disguised. As examples, she discusses those of Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Emmeline Pankhurst.

Conway brings new insights into reading memoirs and the "voice" twentieth century women find. Self-reporting in the 20th century showed little change at first with what women left out being as important as what they included. Like solving a giant puzzle, Conway pieces together the many widely divergent parts of Virginia Woolf's autobiographical writings to make a bright clear picture of some of the defining moments in her life. She also reveals what the voices of Mable Dodge Luhan, Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem tell us when we listen between the lines.

In "Different Stories," Conway sensitively looks at Gay, Lesbian and Transsexual stories and how they deal with romantic myth as well as personal growth (May Sarton, Kate Millett, Audre Lorde, Martin Duberman, James Merrill, and Jan Morris).

Late twentieth century confessional writings share certain fairy tale qualities in that they are often tales of needy children confronting forces of evil and good. Kathryn Harrison and Mary Gordon deal with very different father/daughter relationships. Frank McCourt, James McBride, and Rick Bragg write about mother/son relationships while Mary Karr and Bruce McCall explore dysfunctional families. The story of an inadequate family is a central theme of these accounts.

In conclusion, Conway explains that how we remember the past determines how we see the future. Will we use an active or a passive voice? What roles will we accept? How do we think we can change the patterns? Conway is a wise feminist thinker and a beautiful writer.

## POURQUOI JE SUIS CHIENNE DE GARDE

Isabelle Alonso. Paris: Robert Laffont, 2001

PAR CAROLINE CARON

Pour dénoncer le sexisme historique aussi solidement ancré dans l'esprit des Français que le racisme l'était autrefois dans l'esprit des Blancs, Florence Montreynaud a formé le groupe les Chiennes de gardes, chargé de surveiller l'actualité française et de dénoncer toute manifestation publique de sexisme. La nouvelle présidente, Isabelle Alonso, auteure des ouvrages *Et encore, je m'retiens!* (1995) et *Tous les hommes sont égaux... même les femmes* (1999), a signé tout récemment un ouvrage au titre polémique qui a pour but de justifier son appartenance aux Chiennes de garde.

Pourquoi Isabelle Alonso est-elle Chienne de garde? En réalité, elle répond à la question en moins de cent pages... et pour plus de trente dollars. Intéressant, oui, mais un peu court et un peu cher. Dans la soixantaine de pages qui subsistent après son exposé, car le livre compte en tout 164 pages, l'auteure présente le Manifeste du groupe, effectivement très pertinent, mais pourtant disponible sur le site web des Chiennes de garde. Par une revue de presse, elle résume ensuite l'accueil du groupe par les médias français et pour clôturer l'ouvrage, elle sert à ses lectrices un chapitre complet de commentaires, de lettres et de courriels reçus en guise d'appui. Ceux-ci sont également disponibles sur le site Internet. Bref, Alonso reprend sous sa plume la genèse des Chiennes de garde, recense et commente des extraits d'articles et d'émissions de télé, termine par des bouts de lettres redondantes et pas toujours pertinentes, puis coiffe son livre d'un titre autocentré, un titre justifié par le premier chapitre seulement.

Tout de même, il faut avouer que les lectrices ont l'occasion de rigoler, car elle est drôle et sympathique, cette Isabelle Alonso! Sous sa plume, les images loufoques défilent et l'ironie est mordante. Malheureusement, on s'attendrait à un contenu plus substantiel. Le titre pamphlétaire évoque une déclaration solennelle, une profession de foi, un discours incisif. Mais non. Le texte n'est pas du tout serré, beaucoup trop anecdotique et exagérément familier dans le ton, qui verse un peu trop dans la conversation.

Néanmoins, ce livre vous fera certainement passer un après-midi rigolo, encore davantage si vous suivez l'actualité française. Quant aux féministes bien informées, elles n'y apprendront rien de neuf. Et les intellectuelles pures resteront résolument sur leur faim. *Pourquoi je suis Chienne de garde* demeure un livre intéressant si on l'emprunte à une amie dans l'optique d'un divertissement léger; plutôt décevant si on l'achète en librairie pour nourrir une réflexion analytique.

## WORKING IN WOMEN'S ARCHIVES: RESEARCHING WOMEN'S PRIVATE LITERATURE AND ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, Eds.  
Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001.

BY BARBARA MEADOWCRAFT

All of us who are researching women's lives are indebted to Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar for compiling this excellent volume of essays.

The first article provides valuable information on archives, finding aids, and electronic inventories, while other essays raise important questions concerning the methodology and ethics of working with women's private papers.

Carole Gerson begins her essay, "Locating Female Subjects in the Archives," by reminding us that the archive is not a "neutral zone." Because of the low value placed on women's activities in a patriarchal society, women's papers have seldom been considered worth preserving, or if preserved they are often housed in the archive of a male relative or correspondent. My own experience in researching *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* illustrates this situation. Although these painters enjoyed successful careers, few of their personal papers have survived.

Gerson goes on to acknowledge some of the fine work that has been done in locating and cataloguing women's private papers in the last 30 years. Recognizing that many institutions are now putting their finding aids on the internet, she provides a list of useful web sites. She concludes her essay with some examples of archival material that reveal how women's published texts have been shaped by literary markets and the intervention of editors and publishers.

The contributors all show an awareness of the ethical and ideological issues involved in dealing with women's private papers. In her essay, "Constructing Female Subjects in the Archive," Helen Buss demonstrates the difficulty of reconstructing the subjectivity of a woman who lived many years ago, and whose ethnicity, culture, and class differed from that of her biographers. Buss studies three accounts of the courtship and marriage of Marie Rose Smith (1861-1960), a Métis woman, who lived in western Canada. By comparing Marie Rose's own narrative (Glenbow Archives) to a version that appeared in the *Canadian Cattleman* magazine (1948-49), and a

"novelistic biography" by Marie Rose's granddaughter (1977), Buss uncovers many of the unacknowledged assumptions about gender, race, and class underlying the three narratives. Her sensitive discussion includes an acknowledgement that the researcher must be careful not to distort her subject by reading "from above"—that is from the class position of a late twentieth-century academic feminist.

In her essay on working with the Marian Engel archive, Christl Verduyn discusses questions of privacy involved in reading the personal papers of a writer who has died recently. While alert to the dangers of voyeurism in dealing with such material, Verduyn argues that research into a writer's private papers, like Engel's *cabiers*, often illuminates her published fiction, besides providing valuable insights into the writer's creative process and the socio-historic context in which she wrote.

Mary Rubio's anecdotal account of editing the L.M. Montgomery Journals reveals the problems she and her coeditor faced in getting these journals published. These difficulties included convincing SSHRC jurors and publishers that the journals were important documents, and finding ways to cut the text to fit the publisher's format without deforming the narrative. Publication of the later volumes offended many people, including some of Montgomery's former acquaintances who felt they were unjustly treated in the journals, and some readers who were disillusioned to learn that the supposedly sunny-natured Montgomery had her shadow, "the woman who was embittered, defeated and judgemental."

In "Researching Eighteenth-Century Maritime Women Writers," Gwendolyn Davies gives us a fascinating account of the detective work she undertook to recover the life and letters of Deborah How Cottnam (1728-1806). Davies's research extended beyond written documents to include archaeological material that illuminated the lifestyle and

environment of Cottnam's early years.

Rosalind Kerr's essay "Reading My Grandmother's Life from her Letters" is an interesting example of an "overreading" of the text. Kerr's strategies reveal her grandmother's gendered position within a particular socio-historical context and her small acts of defiance.

In the last article, "An Epistolary Constellation," Marlene Kadar discusses a grouping of letters by Leon Trotsky, Frida Kahlo, and Earl Birney. Kadar uses this "constellation" in probing questions such as the status of the letter as text and the moral responsibility of the feminist archival researcher.

This useful collection of essays illustrates the importance of archival research to the feminist project of reclaiming women's lives and writings from the "anonymity of history."

## TEXTURA: L'ARTISTE ÉCRIVANT/ THE ARTIST WRITING

La Centrale/ Powerhouse,  
Montreal: 2000.

BY CINDY  
STELMACKOWICH

In celebration of La Centrale's 25th anniversary, *Textura: L'artiste écrivain/ the artist writing*, was produced. The focus of this publication, which includes artist's projects and a 1990-1999 chronology, is on theorizing feminist art production and special anniversary curatorial exhibitions recently exhibited at La Centrale.

As Canada's respected women-only gallery, La Centrale, has contin-