BOOK REVIEWS

THE BIRTH PROJECT

Judy Chicago. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985.

Maryon Kantaroff

> *I am powerful, and I expressed it, and I am still expressing it. The power of the new images is incredible. I love them because they are an expression of who I am, and simultaneously I fear them because they result in so many personal dilemmas.*

In the above quote from her recently published book, *The Birth Project*, Judy Chicago sums up her own sense of power and control as an artist, while expressing her fears and insecurities as a woman. What makes her so different from other women artists is that the fears and insecurities she expresses periodically throughout the book, seem to have no place in her day-to-day dealings either with her self, or with the vast numbers of women whom she organizes in order to carry out her creative projects.

Her book is a thorough documentation of the evolution of this project, spanning five years following on the heels of the now famous Dinner Party. She uses the same formula as she followed in the Dinner Party and, although The Birth Project book is almost a repeat of the Dinner Party publications, the subject matter moves here from women in history to woman as giver of life. As in the Dinner Party publication, there is a rich blending of visual and written material, both personal and technical, with many vignettes from the women who did the complex needlework.

As *The Birth Project* is a large soft-cover book of over 230 pages, it can be tedious for readers not overly interested in needlework technicalities. But its real value to all readers is the running commentaries of the artist's thought process. Again and again Judy Chicago stresses her own complete dedication to her art, while lamenting the lack of it in her workers: "The women in the group were . . . afraid to take any responsibility and wanting strict guidelines and guaranteed success, as if being involved in The Birth Project could be as safe as working on a needlework kit."

Again and again she expresses dismay at the lack of professionalism in the needleworkers, while stressing her own total professionalism – and thus he insistence on total control. And over and over again we read of how overworked and tired the artist feels, keeping up with the gruelling and often inhuman pace that she herself has set.

Judy Chicago's driving, unrelenting ambition (so unseemly in a woman and so respected in a man), together with her awesome organizational abilities, is the main theme of her writing. The lesson of her book is – if you want to make it in a man's (art) world, then you have to work increasingly at your art/craft, using everything and everyone in your path to attain your end (as men have done):

> *I am learning a lot about women's real lives – and I hate a lot of what I'm learning. I'm discovering many of the reasons that women have so much difficulty in achieving their goals. They may "want" to do something, and they may have the talent, but so many women don't realize that their lives must be structured to accommodate their work. Moreover, so many of them have no idea what the world is really like – most women seem totally confused about what power means.*

> *The isolation I've imposed upon myself in order to do concentrated work does not exist for these women [the needleworkers].*

> *At the same time there is something suspect about the quality of work possible in a day that includes cooking, cleaning, stitching, taking care of the kids, and then stitching some more . . .*

> *I think part of the problem is the pace at which most of the needleworkers stitch. Work that would take me a month takes them much longer. As most of them fit their work around their lives while I, like most professional artists, fit my life into whatever time my work doesn't fill.*

Judy Chicago is every bit as smart as any Wall Street financier, every bit as capable of delegating diverse responsibilities as the U.S. President, every bit as organized as any multinational corporation, and every bit as power driven as – the most ambitious man. As an artist she is as talented as Georgia O'Keefe or Mary Cassall. She is the Quintessential American Wonderwoman – and surely a blow to the ego of every red-blooded American Male! Add to all that, she's slim, attractive and "feminine." Therein lies her fascination to us all. Her particular androgyny is so powerfully polarized that we are mesmerized by her explosive creative femininity (her subject matter is always super-female) while simultaneously being forced to examine our own inadequacies, fears and self-contempt.

But while her art brings us into facing these feelings, we see this woman, this creator, achieving her effect on us through her super masculinity. She seems to us a street smart operator, but her street is named "Power" and she travels it at a neck-breaking pace. And so she both fascinates and repels feminists. *The Birth Project* is a lesson in feminist theory, full of enlightening consciousness-raisers. At the same time, it is a technical manual and also a public relations and marketing course of instruction to any woman wanting to achieve anything. Yet the reader, while following her struggles and identifying with most of them, is left wondering about this brilliant, talented, endlessly energized power-driven woman.

She espouses feminist theory, yet we see her operating in the same autocratic, seemingly self-serving and controlling

ways that we are used to in men. She is obsessed with women and our disregard historically, yet she is remarkably unsympathetic to the needs of her needleworkers in their own personal lives that take time away from *her* projects. She constantly refers to women's abuse throughout history, yet thinks nothing of using her needleworkers' *volunteer* skills for her creative ends without payment. She is even impatient with their own ambitions and aspirations:

> *They see me as powerful, and therefore they assume that I can change everything – make the world view needlework as art* (which she did), *arrange things so everyone can get paid for their work* (which she didn't), *ensure that any work force is radically and ethnically balanced* (which she did) – *and it does no good to try to explain* (which she didn't). *When people are committed to a fantasy, it's hard to get them to change their views* (which she did) – to her fantasy (art).

How can a feminist artist question another feminist artist who is so talented and so single-minded as to have achieved the seemingly impossible – putting woman's creativity on the map? My ambivalence towards Judy Chicago, as she emerges in *The Birth Project*, does not extend to her art, which speaks for itself and to all women (and some men, hopefully). It is reserved for her methods, which seem hopelessly masculine to me. Yet, given our history and our times, could she have achieved so much any other way? Knowing the art world as well as I do, I doubt it. Any woman looking deeply into her own attitudes will confront the same buffeting ambivalences within. Judy Chicago not only confronts, she has overcome. Near the end of the book she writes: "Demonstrating the way this art has been made will, I hope, suggest that there are other models for art-making than the 'heroic' one we've inherited from the Renaissance, when only men were thought to be capable of great art."

But the nagging fear is left, that her own 'model' seems dangerously close to that 'heroic' one to which she refers. Everything and everyone (herself included) is sacrificed to her art, and the reader begins to understand the price she pays as a Woman. She is as sensitive an artist as she is ruthless in her single-minded pursuit of her ends. Let us be thankful that her ends are ourselves.

THE SISTER BOND: A FEMINIST VIEW OF A TIMELESS CONNECTION

Edited by Toni A.H. McNaron, New York: Pergamon Press, 1985.

Kitty Mattes

The merits of this little book just barely outweigh its faults. The editor's focus is unnecessarily narrow and most of the contributing essays are rather dry and labored, but it does break ground. It will find its way into many a bibliography in the future, as study of the sisterly bond proliferates. The topic is a gold mine for feminist perspectives.

There are ten essays by eight authors, seven of whom teach in U.S. colleges. Editor Toni McNaron is the author of chapters 1, 8, and 10, in all of which she tells us rather more than we need to know about herself. Even her essay on Virginia Woolf begins with over a page on her own experience. She pursues the sexual narrowly, claiming mother as daughters' first love and thereby sisters as "second lovers," lamenting "our heterosexual myopia." Her glance at Jane Austen reveals that male characters "are manipulated by the author."

A more serious narrowness informs the whole book, for the subjects of all the essays lived within the last two centuries, are white and of European ancestry, affluent, and famous. The thesis with which McNaron unifies these studies is that the intensity and ambiguity of the sister bond is central to women's experience. But in most of them another thesis would do as well: to attain professional prominence it is helpful for a woman to have a "wife."

The chapters on Fanny Wright and Jane Austen are the most interesting. Their sisters Camilla and Cassandra provided them with life-long, self-effacing devotion. Celia Eckhardt treats Fanny and Camilla to lively scrutiny, from their birth in Scotland in the 1790s through their endless travels and Fanny's burgeoning notoriety. "The pattern of the sisters' relationship was set early and traces that of the traditional marriage," writes Eckhardt. "Fanny was the star and Camilla her faithful reflector. Fanny walked boldly through the world while Camilla kept the house." Fanny's crusades for social reform, including the abolition of slavery, establishment of women's rights, and sexual liberation, were outrageous in her day; she even went so far as to express the hope that the black and white races would "gradually blend into one their blood and hue." That her sister's unquestioning support was crucial to her success is well documented and vividly evoked.

The Austen sisters, on the other hand, stayed decorously at home. And whereas Camilla was moon to Fanny's sun, Cassandra and Jane's was a mutual admiration. But Cassandra fulfilled the domestic support role, Jane the wage-earner's. In their own mother's words, they were "wedded to each other." Susan Lanser traces the life-long devotion of the Austen sisters by interlacing biographical details with analyses of the novels to make an intriguing read. She postulates that sisterhood can be seen as "the model of marital happiness" in Austen's works.

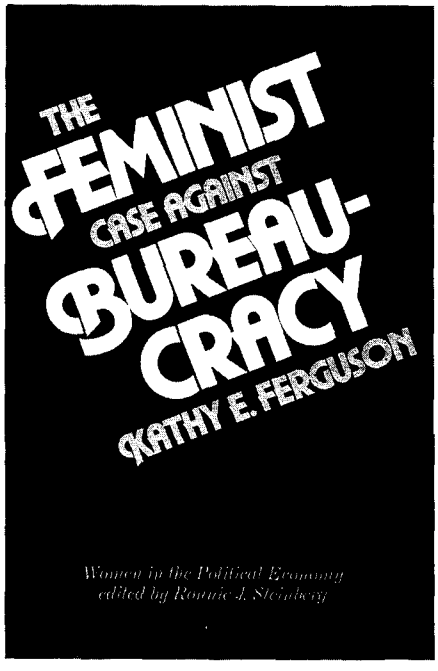
Among the other essays, those on the sister bonds of Edith and Grace Abbott and Christina and Maria Rossetti are rather flat and dry. That on Florence and Parthenope Nightingale is interesting, but somewhat forced. All three seem not to have quite passed from the note-taking phase into true cohesion. In contrast, the short essay by Adalaide Morris on Emily Dickinson (reprinted from the *Massachusetts Review)* is a light and bright cameo. Morris examines a triangular sister bond: Emily with her blood sister and "enduring companion" Vinnie and her sister-in-law Susan. The three women "lived side by side for thirty years," Vinnie the wife and Susan the muse to Emily's genius.

The ninth chapter by Robin Fast is really two essays, parallel studies of poets Denise Levertov and Adrienne Rich. Fast tries to unite the two essays by emphasizing the poets' common concerns with parents and with the paradox of likeness/difference, intimacy/estrangement, but not sufficiently to build a single cohesive comparative essay. On the other hand, Fast makes such adept choice and use of quotes that we emerge from this chapter quite satisfied. Look at Levertov's sister Olga, "By the gas-fire, kneeling/to undress,/scorching luxuriously, raking/her nails over olive sides, the red/waistband ring. . ." Or Rich's "yet our eyes drink from each other/our lives were driven down the same dark canal." Indeed, Levertov and Rich evoke far better than

any collection of essays possible the true essence of the sister bond.

White Victorians too often form the measure of our cultural comparisons. Let's not now make it white Victorian females! Without denying the solid value of The Sister Bond, keep in mind the equal power of a variety of other sibling bonds, from the passion of George Eliot's Tom and Maggie Tulliver to the sibling intricacies in Shakespeare's plays (for example, *As You Like It*), to the life-sustaining love of Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple.*

The Sister Bond is attractive in design and format, greatly enhanced by six sets of portraits of the subjects.



THE FEMINIST CASE AGAINST BUREAUCRACY

Kathy E. Ferguson. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

Mary Anne Coffey

It is difficult not to be circumspectly gleeful at the appearance of a radical feminist conceptualization of organizational theory that refutes the familiar social science excuses for bureaucracy and that simultaneously presents a challenge to liberal feminist analyses and critiques from the androcentric Left. To my knowledge, it is the first extended enquiry of its kind in a field in which radical feminist contributions have achieved print status at the proverbial snail's pace, while actual institution-building in the womanculture has proceeded at full speed. Design innovations developed by activists consequently have remained hidden in the back alleys of organizational discourse.

Movement contributions that do make it to mainstreet have articulated a predominantly liberal strategy of gaining equal access to power, status, and reward within the ubiquitous bureaucratic structures that blight the post-industrial landscape. Valuable and necessary as such efforts admittedly may be for many individual women, minority group members, and men, Ferguson correctly acknowledges that individual success stories are not in themselves particularly feminist, even when they occur *en masse.* Nor is equal opportunity a radical response to hierarchical structures which, by definition, only permit equal access to inequitable power arrangements, thereby legitimating relations of domination and subordination. The ascent of even large numbers of women within corporate ranks is unlikely to effect radical change in the nature of bureaucracy – although some limited cosmetic reforms do occur, to the delight of public relations personnel. The problematic success of a few token women lends tacit approval to the systematic but sanitized domination of many, while effectively muting the discussion of alternative arrangements for accomplishing the productive work of society.

A glance at the bottom line indicates that individual achievers pay an exhorbitant price for organizational accomplishment. Ferguson points out that the terms of even limited success require at least apparent conformity to bureaucratic rules and values along with the lobotomizing of critical consciousness, in itself a damning indictment of typical organizational experience. Although coerced compliance is the norm among the heirs to friendly corporate fascism, apparent acquiescence to the rulebook does not totally preclude resistance to its strictures. But institutionalized conscientious objectors are, at best, survivors of bureaucracy, and cannot expect to thrive there. Useful as limited resistance is in affirming individual integrity, or in achieving specific workplace reforms, the overwhelming bureaucratization of human experience co-opts dissent. Simply stated, the enemy cannot be subverted from within by using what amounts to bureaucratic self-defence measures in attack mode. As Ferguson notes, "It is hard to be a 'closet radical' when an inspection of the closets is part of the organization's daily routine (p. 193)."

Even the appearance of complicity without its substance neatly confers the seal of approval on a bureaucratic discourse that suppresses the authentic and radical organizational voice of marginalized groups, especially women. Alternatives are rendered invisible. For those of us subject to bureaucratic invasion in our daily lives (virtually everyone) but with a limited choice in workplaces, it is a classic case of being caught, and conflicted, between yet another rock and hard place.

Fortunately, even the Gordian knot of bureaucracy has a few strategically-located loose ends. Women, historically the subordinates in private enclave and public enterprise, have learned some essential survival skills from life on the margin of two overlapping milieus. Ferguson articulates a challenge to corporate authoritarianism by drawing upon the "submerged discourse" that expresses values moulded by women's traditional experience as nurturers and caregivers. Thus, the most promising arena for organizational praxis proceeds from the actual "underside" experience and perspective of women – rather than from the more familiar idealized human nature of radical Left persuasion.

Arguments based on the primacy of the submerged values arbitrarily assigned to women as necessary to social functioning, but inconvenient for capital accumulation, leave theorists open to often inaccurate charges of essentialism. To counter this tendency, Ferguson carefully delimits the less savory distortions patriarchal oppression has imposed on women's values and on the complex of devalued traits labelled "femininity." In an interesting expansion upon the important work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, she draws parallels between the subordinate traits exhibited by women and their appearance among other oppressed groups (managers, clerical and industrial workers, and human service clients). "Femininity," she suggests, is a trait exhibited by subordinates of both genders, a learned tactical response to constant domination of either the bureaucratic or patriarchal variety.

The difficulty with the "feminization of oppression" approach is that women, un-

like men, are subject to domination in both public workplace and private home, reinforced by a pervasive, heterosexist ideology of specifically female subordination to men. Women who transgress against cultural norms of appropriate female behavior, especially lesbians, are severely sanctioned. Ferguson presents an inadequate analysis of why it is that women are oppressed *as women*, rather than as a bureaucratic underclass. As Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn pointed out in *Feminism In Canada*, the central issue which unites women otherwise divided by colour, class, and sexual orientation is our relation to the reproductive process. An argument which draws inspiration from female-associated values as the basis for a radical new politics of resistance and transformation in bureaucracy, but does not unapologetically locate its genesis in women's specificity, loses much of its explanatory power.

Nevertheless, by presenting a critique of bureaucracy based in the perspective of women, Ferguson has made a notable beginning at melting the bars of Max Weber's "iron cage." Hers is a thought-provoking and accomplished contribution to the study of organizations and to feminist theory.

UNION SISTERS: WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Edited by Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1983.

HARD EARNED WAGES: WOMEN FIGHTING FOR BETTER WORK

Jennifer Penney. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1983.

Janice Newton

Union Sisters and *Hard Earned Wages* are two books that deal with the challenges and experiences of women in today's paid labour force. In many respects the books address similar themes stemming from women's experiences in the current paid labour force: the struggle to get a job; the feminized job ghettos; the challenge for women entering non-traditional jobs; the relations with bosses, foremen, employers, co-workers, the government, unions and one's own family and friends; the struggles with poverty, racism, sexual harassment and the double work day; and, in the context of all this, the struggles to improve one's working life. In each book these issues are raised through the first-hand experiences of women in their daily lives. The immediacy of these accounts provides a dramatic edge which makes the books compelling and rewarding reading.

Despite their similarities, the orientation of each book is very different. *Hard Earned Wages* is a collection of stories, presented mostly in interview format, about the experiences of working women in ten quite different job settings. The objective of the book is to focus on work itself and the ways in which women have fought to attain "good work." This is work that "enables us to use our gifts, to develop our skills, to become proud and confident of our abilities. It fosters responsibility and cooperation among us, a sense of community with other workers." Within each story, such a goal was not always articulated, nor was it won without a struggle – nor indeed was it always won. But the women's accounts provide us with a dramatic and moving record of their commitment to attaining "good work."

One of the striking merits of this book is the vividness of the first-hand descriptions: even a canning factory in Nova Scotia comes alive with sounds and smells. In the chapter "Working Steel," three women hired at the Stelco plant in Hamilton describe their very different motivations for working at Stelco, and their very different reactions to the forms of sexual harassment they experienced on the job. Another woman pointedly expressed her contempt for "crumbs-off-the-table unionism" which presumed that "If they're having a bigger meal at the table, more crumbs will fall off the side for those of us waiting below." We are led to understand the frustration this woman experienced in trying to better her working conditions while having to work through such a union. As the different themes in the lives of these women emerge, they are dealt with in a very straightforward fashion, without editorial attempts to impose upon the women's voices an artificial uniformity or analysis.

Hard Earned Wages addresses itself to a broad audience, particularly anyone who has worked in the paid labour force. It could also serve as a useful educational tool for teaching women's work experience and ways to improve work.

Union Sisters is a very different sort of book, even though it discusses many of the same themes. Its stated purpose is to "document the struggles and victories of the movement of union women as well as to provide some direction to women and unions as they fight to defend the interests of working people." The book is an edited collection of twenty-eight articles grouped into five sections, each of which deals with a different aspect of women in the Canadian labour movement: the historical and statistical background of women in the work force and in trade unions in Canada; specific union issues; the problems of non-unionized working women; the experience of union women; the alliances between the labour movement and other organizations, and a resource section on women and unions.

The largest section of the book deals with such union issues as affirmative action, microtechnology, part-time work, sexual harassment, lesbians and gays in the union movement, the right to strike, and collective bargaining. Some of these articles, although useful as an introduction for initiates to the union movement, would probably strike a union activist as far too simplistic. We are given the following as a sample contract clause for equal pay for work of equal value: "Employees shall receive equal pay for work of equal value regardless of sex." Anyone familiar with the process of collective bargaining will recognize that such language is not very useful in the absence of language concerning how to implement the clause. In contrast, other articles deal with similarly thorny issues in a much more thoughtful manner. For example, Debbie Field's article on sexual harassment makes the important distinction between harassment from co-workers and harassment from employers, and goes on to discuss possible on-the-job tactics appropriate to this distinction. Her insights are aptly augmented by examples from her experience as a steelworker for Stelco.

The articles are written primarily by women who were actively involved in these struggles; the book accomplishes its purpose of providing valuable documentation of the experiences of trade union women. It also provides very practical information on improving the position of women in the trade union

movement and in work situations generally. Finally, unlike *Hard Earned Wages*, *Union Sisters* attempts to analyse these issues within a larger analytical framework. As such it is a crucial resource for activists within the field.

MAN-MADE LANGUAGE

Dale Spender. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985. Second Edition.

Ruth King

This immensely popular book has been reprinted three times since it was first published in 1980; it now appears in a second edition. The main body of the text is unchanged, but Dale Spender has added a preface and revised the introduction. In the preface she explains that, writing in 1979, she had tried to fit the argument – that men are the creators and controllers of language – into terms acceptable to males: "I made suggestions rather than assertions; I put forward excuses [for male behavior] rather than allegations. Seeking acceptance within the academic community I tried to abide by its rules." The tone in the preface and new introduction is less conciliatory. Spender is now convinced that the dominant group will not change of its own accord. Men continue to insist on their own supremacy, their own worth and their autonomy; it is up to women to take control of the language, as it will not be handed to us.

The author believes that language is a vehicle for the perpetuation of patriarchy. Encoded in language is a male world view which shapes everyone's perceptions (consider the image conjured up by *The applicant should include five copies of his CV).* Women, like other oppressed groups, have different life experiences and the connotations they attach to words are not necessarily those of the dominant group (for example, *motherhood* is not necessarily "beautiful"). For there to be change in the social order, women must invest the language with their own meanings.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1, "To Believe or not to Believe . . . Language/Sex Research," presents a critique of earlier work in the field, in which sexism in language was considered a separate issue from male/female differences in language use. Spender sees this split as an artificial one; both have their origins in patriarchy. She is also critical of early studies in which male speech tended to be regarded as the norm and deviations from that norm (usually with respect to isolated variables, such as the use of tag questions) interpreted as inarticulate and ineffective. Happily, much of the 1980's research has overcome this bias and questions Spender saw as unaddressed or little-studied have been the subject of extensive investigation.

Chapter 2, "Constructing Women's Silence," documents the invisibility of women in many academic disciplines and in research (in sociology and anthropology, for example). Later in the book Spender shows how women writers (except those few who have been judged acceptable by male authority – Jane Austen but not Elizabeth Gaskell) have been silenced, so that their work remains unknown to following generations. Even in her own work Spender acknowledges that, writing in 1979, she assumed that she was the first to put forward her thesis, unaware of the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton a century before.

Chapter 3, "The Dominant and the Muted," introduces the theoretical framework developed by Edward Ardener in response to the bias he perceived in the treatment (or non-treatment) of women in anthropological research. The idea is that women have been excluded from the creation of meaning and therefore have no means of expressing themselves which reflects their own world view. Shirley Ardener has argued that male control is most powerful in the area of public discourse, the rules of which are especially foreign to women. Chapter 4, "Woman Talk: the Legitimate Fear", elaborates this theme and documents the important role played by consciousness-raising groups in the early 1970's in giving women an arena to develop their own form of talk.

Chapter 5, "Language and Reality: Who Made the World?," gives concrete examples of sexism in language (*he/man* language is discussed in some detail) and in Chapter 6, "The Politics of Naming," sexism in religious terminology (drawing on the work of Mary Daly) and in sexual terminology are dealt with. Women are beginning to inject our words into the language. Not so long ago the terms 'sexism' and 'sexual harassment' did not exist; today, the primary meanings of 'chauvinism' and 'sisterhood' are female-influenced ones.

Chapter 7, "Women and Writing," is about the history of women's difficulties in writing, in getting published, and in getting fairly reviewed. Also noted are the recent contributions of feminist presses.

Spender makes a strong case for women's muted state with respect to language and society. It is a simple and fairly obvious point, but one which has met, and continues to meet, with considerable resistance. She is also right about a number of peripheral issues. For instance, her comments on still-popular assertiveness training programmes for women get to the crux of the matter:

> *Assertiveness training programmes based upon the premise that all will be well when women come to talk like men have seemed to me misguided because they have overlooked the crucial deciding factor, sex. Women will still be judged* as women *no matter how they speak, and no amount of talking the same as men will make them men, and subject to the same judgments.*

The few flaws I have found with this book are all linguistic, and of a type probably not apparent (or important?) to the non-linguist. For example, her use of the word 'meaning' is vague. Sometimes she equates meaning with denotation, sometimes with connotation, and sometimes with world view. There is also some confusion about whether a particular phenomenon is semantic or syntactic in nature: none of the examples given in Chapter 5 are syntactic as claimed; they are semantic. It is implied that a language may have natural gender or grammatical gender, but not both. This is clearly not true.

Spender deals only with English data. Data from other languages would strengthen some of her claims. For example, cross-linguistic evidence would help her argument that male pitch changes at puberty are not solely based on physiology. The claim that in English a mixed-sex group can be referred to as "men" or "guys" but not "women" reminds one of strict pronominal usage in a language such as French – no matter what the proportion of females to males in a group, the third person plural masculine pronoun, *ils*, must be used.

On the whole, the book is an important one, as readable and pertinent today as when it was first published.

LANGUAGE, THE SEXES AND SOCIETY

Philip M. Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985. (Language in Society, volume 8.)

Sheila M. Embleton

Recent years have seen an explosive increase in the amount of interest, research, and publication in the study of the relationship between language and sex. Although the question of sexism in language is perhaps one of the most salient issues for non-linguists, linguists have spent far more time investigating sex-linked differences in the use of language and in conversational strategies. Much recent work, particularly that concerned with sex-linked variations (sometimes extremely subtle) in pronunciation and in use of dialect forms, has been quantitative in nature, employing sophisticated sampling and statistical techniques. It is against this background that Philip Smith sets his investigation of sex-stereotypes, perceptions of masculinity and femininity, interaction, and social change.

Chapter 1, "Major influences on language and sex research," briefly reviews well-known examples of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary differences between male and female speakers in various languages, and then sketches some recent results in sociolinguistics, where certain social factors (e.g., social class, sex, age) have been found to determine some aspects of linguistic variation. Chapter 2, "The sociogenesis of relations between the sexes," examines the binary social categorization of sex and the attendant lack of tolerance of "negative correlations between sexual anatomy and gender" in most societies. This leads into a discussion of sex stereotypes, self-assessed gender identity, and impression formation.

Chapter 3, "Language and the representation of women and men," deals with the differential portrayal of women and men in advertising, reference books, and the media in general, followed by naming and forms of address, association of occupational terms (such as plumber, nurse) primarily with one sex, "generic" nouns and pronouns, and the relationship of all these to the "sexual subculture" and perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Although the chapter goes well beyond this, those who are interested in sexism in language will find this to be an excellent summary. The first part of Chapter 4, "Feminine and masculine speech," is devoted to acoustic correlates of speaker sex and to recognition of speaker sex for both prepubertal and postpubertal speakers. The rest of the chapter returns to some issues raised in Chapter 1, discussed here in more detail – phonological and grammatical variation, standard and prestige speech norms, sex differences, and perceived masculinity and femininity.

Chapter 5, "The measurement of femininity and masculinity," reports critically on the history of the measurement of masculinity and femininity and gives the results of a study undertaken by the author with a view to developing a measure which would overcome the shortcomings of previous measures. Chapter 6, 'Judging masculine and feminine social identities from speech: two experiments', applies the new method experimentally, suggesting that "listeners discriminate less between male and female speakers, perceive members of their own sex as less uniform, and members of the opposite sex as more uniform, as the strength of ingroup gender identity increases."

Chapter 7, "The management of interaction," is concerned with interpersonal interaction in communication and the dimensions of "control" (traditionally associated with masculinity) and "affiliation" (traditionally associated with femininity), as well as with the tactics of conversation management and conflict resolution. Chapter 8, "Language, the sexes and social change," isolates "some of the more salient sources of language-related social conflict in female-male relations [and illustrates] strategies for resolving them." This chapter is extremely well-written, with an excellent section on contemporary challenges to the status quo (such as the use of Ms. and the adoption of non-sexist guidelines for language use) and denial of those challenges (e.g. arguments that sexist language does not exist).

In keeping with the strength of this book as a review of the literature, there is a 21-page reference section, followed by an index of names and an index of subjects. A word must also be said about the cartoon illustration on the cover, which would probably puzzle those who have not yet read the book. It neatly illustrates three features assumed to characterize female speech – hesitation, exaggerated intonation, and tag questions – and should certainly be clear to anyone who has finished the book.

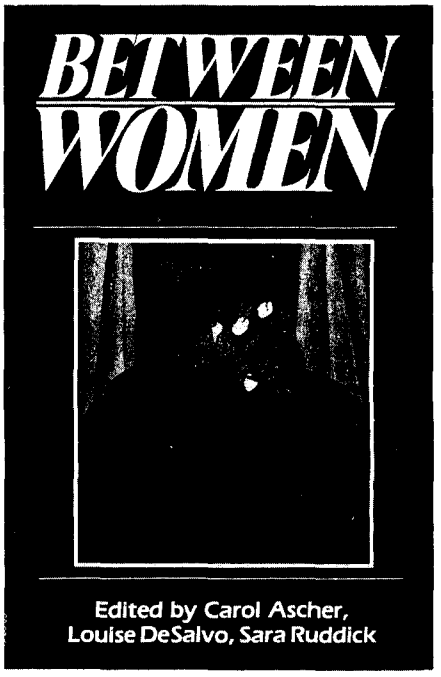
Smith writes the book from the viewpoint of social psychology, but draws heavily on results in linguistics and anthropology. Thus the book will be of interest to anyone in these fields, in women's studies, and as mentioned in the editor's preface, to "concerned human being(s)" in general. Reluctantly, however, I must state that I would be very hesitant about recommending this book, particularly as a textbook, despite its many innovative contributions. Although I am no expert in social psychology or anthropology, as a linguist and a statistician I was alarmed at the number of infelicities and even downright errors in the book related to these latter two fields.

It is stated twice (pp. 5, 81) that in Kŭṛux (a Dravidian language) "only women pronounce the conjugation of verbs for the feminine gender;" presumably what is meant is that a particular verbal inflection is only *used* by women in certain circumstances. Human vocalizations do not produce "electromagnetic energy" (p. 58); human vocalizations produce sound pressure waves, which may be converted (by mechanical devices) to electromagnetic energy for transmission by, for example, radio or telephone. The standard tone for tuning musical instruments (middle A) is not 400 Hz (p. 59), but rather 440 Hz. The vocal "chords" (pp. 59, 63, 64) are in fact the vocal cords. Compared to a figure of 81% accuracy, 60% is "significantly reduced" whereas 59% "is not significantly above chance performance" (p. 61); whichever label is chosen, both 60% and 59% should be treated in the same way (unless an explanation for the difference is forthcoming).

A study is reported in which fourteen student teachers judged the sex of the speaker from recordings of twenty working-class and twenty middle-class ten-year-olds equally divided between the sexes, without also reporting on the sex or class of the student teachers (pp. 67-8). Dental articulations are confused with alveolar (p. 79). Sample means are conventionally represented as $\overline{X}$ rather than Smith's $\bar{x}$, which would be used for populations means (pp. 119-24). I am unaware of any linguistic term "exempletive" (p. 150) for such words as "Damn!" and cannot find it in any dictionary of linguistic terms; surely "expletive" is intended.

Unfortunately, these problems damage the author's credibility to an extent which they should not. Furthermore, they could

have been eliminated simply by having a linguist and a statistician read the entire manuscript before publication; this is all the more surprising as the series editor, Peter Trudgill, is an eminent linguist. In addition, there are somewhat more typographical errors than one is accustomed to in a book from Blackwell. Most are merely annoying, but some of these errors occasionally interfere with comprehension, particularly awkward in a book with a large interdisciplinary audience. It is also surprising to find a statement such as "since boys *enjoy* a slight average size *advantage* over girls . . . [italics mine]" in a book so clearly concerned with sexism and stereotyping, and which has already devoted space to how advertisements "conventionalize our conventions" by excessively correlating higher status, larger physical size, and male. Ironically, it shows how much further some of the "social change" described in Chapter 8 has yet to go.



BETWEEN WOMEN

Edited by Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo and Sara Ruddick. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Pamela Walker

Between Women is a collection of essays appropriately sub-titled "Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women." It is the companion volume to *Working It Out: 23 Women Writers, Artists, Scientists, and Scholars Talk About Their Lives and Work* (Pantheon, 1977), which Sara Ruddick co-edited with Pamela Daniels.

Nearly all of the twenty-five contributors are American; all but five are white women. Their subjects are primarily women who are familiar to feminist scholars, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil and Charlotte Brontë. Three of the essays focus on Virginia Woolf, a surfeit that undoubtedly resulted from Ruddick's original conception: "In the first glimmering of this book, I envisioned women telling personal stories about their reading and writing on Virginia Woolf." Most of the contributors are academics: this affects the tone of the book, determines what issues are highlighted and the kinds of problems encountered by the various writers during the course of their research.

Between Women contains a wealth of information about the various women subjects. Yi-Tsi Mei Feuerwerker's essay "In Quest of Ding Ling" discusses the Chinese writer's long career and the effects of political change on her life and work. Ann Jackowitz's essay "Anna O./ Bertha Pappenheim and Me" questions the conflicting stories about Pappenheim as psychoanalytic case study and as philanthropist and activist. Gloria T. Hull's essay on Alice Dunbar-Nelson is rich in detail about this nineteenth century Black woman writer and public person. Each essay is accompanied by photos of both the essay writer and her subject. It is fascinating to study these images: many of the women chose images of their subjects that in some way resemble themselves.

The collection addresses questions about how personal life affects work and the manner in which one's own history influences the choice of subject and the stance taken. The question of objectivity/ subjectivity runs throughout the entire book. Feminists have questioned the notion that there exists a value-free, neutral stance from which one can study and write. What then is the relationship between self and subject?

Bell Gale Chevigny writes that her approach to her biographical subject Margaret Fuller gave rise to questions and a sense of engagement with her subject that "amounted at times to a sense of identification. I wondered how this had affected my work, whether it had distorted it or deepened it, or both, and what the identification meant." Blanche Weisen Cook writes: "My identification with the views and style of Crystal Eastman became the key to my ongoing work. Personal attachment is central to me. If it fails to emerge in the course of research, I change subjects." She found herself, like Eastman, drinking too much and writing letters to the editor – although she was unable to match Eastman's six-foot stature. Linda Koolish, a photographer, claims that "When I am photographing someone, I 'take her in' with a kind of active receptivity. If this process does not occur, then nothing meaningful appears on film."

This identification with subjects is taken even further by a number of women who discuss their subjects in the most personal terms, often admitting a merging of their mother and their subject. Carol Ascher remarks in a letter to her subject, Simone de Beauvoir: "just as I love my mother when she assumes her independence, I love your urge toward freedom." Myrtha Chabran's essay takes the form of a letter to her mother about her subject; May Stevens's essay is a juxtaposition of images of and words on her mother and Rosa Luxemburg. This intensely subjective perspective comes from feminists who highly value personal revelation and who believe in an inherent commonality between women that transcends significant differences. It is, however, problematic.

Barbara MacDonald argued in the plenary session of the 1985 National Women's Studies Association Conference that the writers in this collection who identify their mother with their subject are ageist. The identification assumes that older women are maternal by definition, although many of these women were childless by choice. Many of the writers seek the approval of their subjects, thereby creating a dependency relationship that gives the older woman responsibilities that do not belong to her.

The underlying assumption is that through such intense identification the writer can somehow come to better know her subject. Bonny Vaught, for example, suggests that her isolation in a new town made her sensitive to the racism suffered by her Black nineteenth-century subject, Charlotte Forten. Is there a need for this empathetic construction in order for us to appreciate the effects of racism on Forten? Is it even possible to fully comprehend

another person from another era and culture? Does the intense identification of writer with subject in any way clarify the subject's work or life? Although the collection addresses these questions, it does not fully grapple with the effects of this identification.

The majority of these essays do not address, except in passing, events outside the work itself and aspects of the writer's personal life. Meredith Tax's essay is one of the few exceptions: she deals with the connections between her work and her on-going political engagements and concerns. Interestingly, she is the only contributor to write about a group of women. The sense of distance from the rest of the world which comes from a reading of most of these essays emphasizes the fact that they are about women writing about women's writing and work – which places them at three removes from the actual text or event.

A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE: THE LIVES OF OLDER WOMEN

Susan Hemmings. London: Pandora Press, 1985.

Leah Cohen

Western society is experiencing a population explosion among its mid-life and older women. Traditionally we have quietly faded into life's sidelines or conveniently died just as our usefulness as wives and mothers ended.

A Wealth of Experience is a book of eloquent oral history, capturing the lives of eighteen older British women between the ages of forty and eighty-five. These women, of various educational levels, write vividly of the events in their lives which were most significant in shaping their ideas and their life choices.

Henrietta Hempstead, at eighty-five the oldest woman, and a life-long political activist, concludes, "I believe that cooperatives can provide the answer to many of the problems of the world . . . people are doing something for themselves where profit isn't the only motive." Vera Carpenter, who became politically active on her housing estate, fought for issues like good daycare and accessible birth control. Other voices are heard, such as that of Ann Gabriel, a retired schoolteacher who took up feminism and activism late in life after a lifetime of passivity and dependence. And Leah Shaw, a Jewish immigrant who fled certain death in Hitler's Europe, had the courage to acknowledge her own lesbianism in mid-life and to start a support group. Then there are the women like Kathy Stobart, a talented jazz saxophonist, who struggled all her life against male prejudice and obstructionism. Black and Asian women speak of their fight against the double oppression of racism and sexism, only to later contend with ageism as well. These stories are painful to read, but ultimately are uplifting in their honesty and determination.

The clear unequivocal political consciousness of many of these women is very exciting. Most of them realize that the women's movement is the single most important political force in this century and that it is women's only hope for "sanity and salvation in a misogynist world."

The many issues touched upon – poverty, racism, sexist health care, wife battering, ageism, lesbianism, etc. – graphically portray women's collective oppression from mid-life on. However, editor Susan Hemmings assumes too much knowledge on the part of the reader. In an effort to let women speak in their own voices, she neglected to group the stories by theme or to provide some very necessary transitions. As a result, the reader is jolted from one voice to the next and can easily become disoriented. The book also suffers from poor organization and a lack of comments or analysis within the stories. Unless one is very familiar with older women's issues, it is hard to pick out any unifying threads. Hemmings begins with a powerful introductory essay, but does not draw any conclusions. Unfortunately, we are too frequently left dangling, not sure what the point is and wanting to know more.

The one personal common theme that does clearly emerge is the acute disappointment that nearly all the women feel in their relationships with men – the "agonizing incompatibilities," the suppression "of their own needs and intellect." Hemmings says she did not deliberately seek out unhappily married women. In fact, she says she is surprised at how few of the women she interviewed spoke positively about the joys and rewards of marriage. What sustains and nurtures most of these women, especially as they grow older, are their friendships with other women.

On a societal level, these women quite accurately describe the female condition – one of silent endurance. Women sacrifice for and nurture and support their husbands, children, and finally their aging parents. Regardless of class, race, or sexual orientation, all women experience life as second-class citizens. The difference is one of degree.

We feel these women's courage, pain, and amazing endurance. They are wonderfully self-aware and full of the absurdity of life. At the same time, many exude hope and optimism about their own personal futures and the future of humanity. These are women from whom we normally never hear – ordinary women, struggling to find meaning in a sexist, ageist world.

Susan Hemmings has the raw material here for raising our consciousness about life as an older woman; for forcing us to reflect on our narrow options; and for harnessing our collective rage. It is unfortunate that she did not take the further and final, but difficult step of pulling it all together in a powerful concluding synthesis.

WOMEN'S FOLKLORE, WOMEN'S CULTURE

Edited by Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

WOMEN AND FOLKLORE: A BIBLIOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Compiled by Francis A. de Caro. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983.

Edith Fowke

These two books produced by active members of the Women's Section of the American Folklore Society demonstrate the recent explosion of interest in women's folklore. One provides the first substantial bibliography on the subject, and the other gives a dozen articles on a wide variety of aspects.

Women's Folklore, Women's Culture falls into three sections titled "Women in Private/Women with Women," "Women

in Public," and "Two Worlds/One World." The first emphasizes the age-old custom of women talking among themselves about family history and subjects of peculiar feminine interest. Linda Degh describes two Hungarian women in Gary, Indiana, who exchange observations about their neighbours and traditional stories in telephone chats. Rosan A. Jordan examines stories told by Mexican-American women that reveal their sense of women's place in the men's world. Susan Roach writes of a family quilting bee in Louisiana that involves a grandmother, five aunts, three cousins, and one male family member. Geraldine Niva Johnson writes of a Maryland woman who continues the pioneer craft of making rag rugs in a small room off her gas station. Margaret R. Yocum, who writes of Grandmother Yocum and her Pennsylvania Dutch family, makes the point that women's folklore is frequently overlooked because it is usually shared only among women.

The second section deals with women who operate outside the small circles of friends and family. Susan J. Kalcik studies women who are part of the community using citizen's band radio (CB). She finds significance in the names (or "handles") chosen and the development of airwave courtships. Janet L. Langlois examines a female outlaw, Belle Gunness, who is said to have killed numerous suitors and her husband and children in Indiana some eighty years ago. The legends about her raise questions of her "femaleness" and whether she was a victim of domineering men. Kay F. Stone examines the images of women in fairy tales as witches, wicked stepmothers, fairies, fairy godmothers, or passive heroines, and the way boys and girls react to them.

The third section deals with the ways men and women relate to each other. Karen Baldwin shows how her aunt and uncle together produce a family's history as they compete in telling their stories. Carol Mitchell analyzes the differences in the jokes told by men and women. Margaret Mills shows how sex change and sex role reversal in Muslim storytelling reveal the differing views of women's roles held by men and women in that culture. Elaine Jahner studies the interdependence of men and women in the rituals and everyday life of the Lakota Sioux in Nebraska, with special reference to the ancient art of beadworking.

Naturally the selection in any anthology like this can be criticized; I would like to have seen something dealing with women as singers, as well as story-tellers and craft workers. However, on the whole the editors have assembled a varied and interesting batch of articles and fitted them into relevant patterns. All the authors except one are American; the exception is Kay Stone who teaches at the University of Winnipeg.

The aim of *Women and Folklore: A Bibliographic Survey* is to provide "a reference tool which brings together knowledge of what has been published on women's folklore, folklore about women, and related topics." It opens with a very useful "Essay Guide" that discusses the various types of books concerned with women's folklore, giving examples of each and commenting on the important points they make, thus providing a form of annotation. It was a considerable task to assemble over 1,600 entries on this topic, and this bibliography will certainly be useful to anyone working in the field of women's studies.

It might have been more useful, however, if the 1600 entries had been subdivided or some system of classification had been devised. I would like to have seen a separate grouping for the fairly numerous references that are not directly relevant, and possibly separate sections for biographical material, text collections, analytical articles, etc. The Study Guide and the index help some, but not enough. It would also have been useful to have a list of the major women's periodicals with addresses. Many of those cited would be difficult to locate from the titles alone.

From my point of view the most serious fault is the almost complete lack of Canadian items. I found only one book published in Canada: Helen Creighton's autobiography. The only other items by Canadians are Barbara Cass-Beggs' *Lullabies* and several articles by Kay Stone published in the States. Granted, the editor does say "it has no pretence to being all-inclusive," but there are numerous English and Scottish listings, plus some from Germany, India, Australia, and Mexico, so it is obviously intended to be international. This ignoring of the closest neighbour is particularly unfortunate as women have played a major part in our folklore. A brief scanning of *A Bibliography of Canadian Folklore in English* would have provided a great many items. A few include Adele Wiseman's delightful book, *Old Woman at Play; Anna's Art* by Reginald Good; *More than 50%: Women's Life in a Newfoundland Outport* by Hilda C. Murray; *The Backwoodswoman* by Isabel Skelton; "Women and Folklore" by Gillian Thomas; biographical material on Barbara Cass-Beggs, Louise Manny, Charlotte Cormier, Ida Halpern, and others; and numerous books on women's handicrafts such as *Women's Costume in Early Ontario: "Keep Me Warm One Night"; Early Handweaving in Eastern Canada; 300 Years of Canada's Quilts; Ukrainian Embroidery Designs and Stitches;* plus many items on Indian weaving, spinning, knitting, basket-making, etc. This is without reference to publications since 1979, and without checking any of the fairly numerous Canadian women's periodicals. Perhaps it is time for someone to compile a bibliography of "Women and Folklore in Canada."

**Managing Editor's Note:* Edith Fowke, the author of the above review, has been respected for many years as a leading Canadian folklorist. In discussing the failure of the bibliography under review to cite relevant Canadian materials, she modestly omits any reference to her own distinguished work in the field. Had the bibliographer Francis A. de Caro taken note of the vast number of books, articles, records and radio broadcasts prepared by Edith Fowke, she would have found many items centrally relevant to women and folklore. I highly recommend to our readers her rich collection *Folklore of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976; reprinted 1982).

ERRATUM:

In our last issue (Vol. 6, No. 3) we published Joan Gibson's Review of Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: "Male and Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). The fifth sentence in the final paragraph of her review (p. 105) should read: "The material is well presented, but probably requires some background in the history of ideas."

ANYONE SKATING ON THAT MIDDLE GROUND

Robyn Sarah. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1984.

BINDING TWINE

Penny Kemp. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1984.

RED SHOES IN THE RAIN

Jan Conn. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1984.

THE SQUARE ROOT OF FEMALE

Gillean Chase. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1984.

MOTHER POEMS

Susan Ioannou. Toronto: Wordwrights Canada, 1985.

ON NIGHTS LIKE THIS

Marianne Bluger. Coldstream: Brick Books, n.d.

Margaret Avison

Anyone Skating on that Middle Ground is a title poem and the title is a line within a poem and also a motif. This is a book unified by a focus – strained for, managed, melting away, sensed again, with each phase meticulously recorded. A musician-friend explained the term 'middle ground:' invented by Heinrich Schenke it means one level of configuration of sound farther back than the music heard (the foreground) but nearer than its basic contours (the background). [And my apologies to the musician-poet and my friend, and to you who flinch at this flat-footedness since you knew all along.] In Robyn Sarah's poems very occasionally a foreground fragment intrudes, for example, with the snowman in the rain: "All's gone granular, like a news photo/ held too close to the face"; or ". . . the twinned/ and single wings copter/ off maples." Compare these with the relationships-rendering of "A Drop in the Rate of Exchange" which moves from the surface-tension section, a child's walnut-shell boat that may float or capsize, to:

we are reduced
to this currency
in which a glance
sustains.

The implicit persons, though in specific situations and places, illuminate the reader's privacy without destroying the poet's. And elegant play is going on even in the most acutely painful moments of clarity, a play of pure energy:

. . . You are a functional illiterate
among the software, the blip-blip
and the wooky-pooky. Everything's sliding,
like horizon when the plane dips . . .
. . . perhaps you bank too much
on knowing there's tomorrow.

Penny Kemp's title, *Binding Twine*, too, is elaborated throughout her book, in terms of family ties, the bind of alien social codes, a custody trial, the coming to terms with terms. From "Isaac's Story:" "The bond is the boy's/ release. The cutting/ of the bond is ours./ The twine unties us both"; or "Only the full embrace of/ loss will bind me. Empty/ armed" (a magnificent line-break); or "I am tying up loose ends./ I am binding twine", through to "The Twine" with its final couplet:

The false stories we tell ourselves,
the slack cord of hope.

Kemp says in her 'Introduction' that she is writing explicitly to "people who might not normally read poetry . . . women going through such a trial [who] think of themselves as utterly alone and indefinably 'guilty'." Maybe so. But what has been written has the sparse beauty of meeting the intolerable open-eyed; it speaks to anyone fighting off evasions or malformation under an unwanted embossing ("It did not occur to me/ to lose" gives full double value to both those verbs). The poet is ready with any means. And although she chooses compression, plain words, a poem like the "Bidding Spell" lifts the hair on your neck.

Jan Conn's *Red Shoes in the Rain* comes from the first of four sections in her book, "Choices":

our separate lives that wait like
a pair of red shoes left out all night
in the rain. it's no good. they're
shrunken . . .

Her resort to spondees is sparing, and every time effective. In the "Japanese Journal" section, she writes:

this morning I'm caught
in the landscape, a speck
in a corner of postcard
mountains. I don't belong here,
or anywhere else

or, from the final section and poem, "A Matter of Time":

graves the size of drained lakes
with bodies like tree stumps dumped/
hurriedly . . .

The rhythms make the emotional truth our own. The words in this book too bring a reader through precision into joy – joy even in that poignant poem of bereavement, "Udo Beach", full of light and tints of light. In the whole book only the word "calico", once, stuck inbetween reader and world, for me – maybe from my ignorance of the fabric not from ineptness. It must be so, from someone who sees "the low sheep-like clouds/ hanging, dropping", or "white weeds limp/ as rubber bones in the ditch." The presence of the experiencer does not embarrass her strict recording of what is out there. She makes it over to us and leaves us shivering with gratitude.

Although at odds with her title, *The Square Root of Female*, Gillean Chase's poem "Sons of the Fathers" dominates this book: the whack of axe hitting hard wood, unremittingly; bone-jarring work; an unremarked constant of pain that carries over into the angry contempt this workman expresses about his easy-going brother – a brother with whom he subsequently relaxes in a companionable evening of drinking. "Wood/ takes a long time to rot/ even in water" – though the line is from another poem. The act and impact, the unexplained contradictions, keep recurring in many contexts. Forceful and gentle by turns, this poetry is not intrepid, as Penny Kemp's is.

After the storm
what is left is anger
and the edge of a thin fear.

At one moment a lovely melancholy question rises ("what other world is there/ beside the dread tide which is Now/ bearing us forward"), but it is betrayed by gibbering rage at any of the ancient and beautiful answers. The eruption of poetic energy is a method, but a method that calls for a

good editor. May such an editor work with this poet's output, in the next book or in the Selected Poems when it comes.

The above four books give me pause in a long campaign to see some Canada Council literature-money used to develop the audience, by widening the distribution of the works of Canadian writers (and not through school textbooks). Only the following two books were prepared without Canada Council grants. They both come through muffled by preoccupying relationships and responsibilities. May the books lead now to provision of time and support for both poets to develop their powers.

In *Mother poems* Susan Ioannou traces an arc of a mother's lifetime from elating exhaustion through din, litter, hubbub, into the wistful awareness of approaching freedom – having given "herself/ for a handful of soft baby buttocks/ and an hour of quiet beside City Hall." The headlong pace along this arc permits only sketchbook poems, with no time to revise or settle rhythmic pulses. There are too many three-beaters, too may iambic pentameters, for variations to come to a trusting ear. But such a medium is part of this message.

"It comes for us all/ as we wait where we are" writes Marianne Bluger in *On Nights like This*. Her waiting is worth waiting for, *viz.* the word "pond": "as with that Greek who marvelled/ at the stars and so doing fell/ into a pond, a night, an end,/ his own especial sea/ weird with reality." The book at times communicates a sense of almost-drowning escape from the flotsam of everyday, with gulps of poetry taken from afar to sustain life. Rhythms may echo the sixteenth century ("the paths of coins the dying sun/ makes on seas for her own favoured fools"), or children's rollicking verse ("and remarkable ability/ for working upside down"). The poet's voice is finding itself among these echoes, and one looks forward to the next book.

a novel
Sharon Butala

DOUBLE BOND: AN ANTHOLOGY OF PRAIRIE WOMEN'S FICTION

Edited by Caroline Heath. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1984.

COUNTRY OF THE HEART

Sharon Butala. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1984.

Marlene Kadar

Double Bond and *Country of the Heart* are probably a thorn in the side of Saskatchewan's Fifth House press. Worthy of attention both within and outside Canada, reviewers may hesitate at the glaring typographical errors, the ungrammatical sentences and, in the case of *Double Bond*, an amateurish back cover – all, in the end, the responsibility of the editor. Not even poor editing, however, can totally obscure good writing. Someone at Fifth House must take the credit for taking risks with newer writers, and for servicing women who like to read fiction that bespeaks their experience.

No fan of Canadian prose, I have learned a lot from these two books. I do not come away from *Double Bond* or *Country of the Heart* sensing a prairie women's vision, but I do come away knowing a few things for sure. This fiction is decidedly women's; it is most certainly not of central Canada; and, with a few minor exceptions, it does women justice.

The fifteen stories in *Double Bond* tend toward realism – set in the country or the small town – or postmodernism, and a few are a bit of both. Diane Schomperlen's remarkable "Life Sentences" is probably the most experimental in the collection. Not unlike the bracketed thought patterns so common to the *nouveau roman*, Schomperlen's sentences are punctuated by parenthesized blanks the reader cannot help but fill in. One of Schomperlen's protagonists ["she"], for example, "just naturally assumed that the young man ( ) her as much as she ( ) him." "She" and "he" are, like Kafka's Joseph K in *The Trial*, sentenced to the same term as their parents. Don't be dismayed, though, because "there is no one to blame, no one to thank but ( )." The story ends where it began.

Next to Schoemperlen, Carol Shields, author of the award-winning novel *Small Ceremonies*, pushes the psychological limits of the postmodern vision in "Various Miracles: A Roundup." She organizes various, apparently mundane events in peoples' lives in order to celebrate coincidence and happenstance, and she, too, ends where she began. These events begin as the narrator's "examples" of coincidence, until one of them actually coincides with another within the text. At this point another narrative begins (in italics), and the "roundup" ends.

Even more radical is Eunice Scarfe, who uses parody and the absurd to almost bracket the whole of "In the Clearing," a story peopled by a lady-like pine cone picker, a multi-breasted lactating mother, a runner-messenger in "an emerald triple ply polyester jersey suit," and a Pete, a Joe, a masturbator, and a deft [with a boomerang] Diana. Soap opera and parable – Scarfe mocks them both.

The more realistic stories in *Double Bond* are written by women who were born on the prairies, and by women who were born as far away as England and India. But most of the stories are set in prairie towns and small cities, or on farms and ranches. And the relationship between the main character(s) and her environment and its traditions is generally central to her quest. Edna Alford's Arla, for example, finds courage in the companionship of Mrs. Dawson, a woman whose habits and wisdom represent all that is good about the prairies to Arla. Alford, born in *Livelong*, Saskatchewan, holds Mrs. Dawson in her arms as she dies, only a few days away from her hundredth birthday. "Companionship" is, unfortunately, the only *Double Bond* story which celebrates love between women as a primary episode in the plot.

Arla is an earnest hero, who learns from her experience with Mrs. Dawson and acts on what she has learned. In the most light-hearted of the realistic stories, Sandra Birdsell's Lureen ("Falling in Love") fulfills her quest without acting on it at all. Lureen has taken falling in love with Larry Cooper very seriously, but

Larry "has flown the coop," leaving a black rabbit ("Satan") and "one measly shirt" to remind Lureen of him. Lureen has no interest in acting on anything she has learned; she wants her Larry back, and she dreams about him, waits for him, and reconstructs conversations with him until Larry finally reappears in the middle of the night, and they go off and make love in the park.

This is the only story of its kind in *Double Bond*, but it is one of the stories which depends very much on its prairie setting for metaphor and dialogue, almost as much as Merna Summers does in the already much acclaimed "Threshing Time" (1982). "Threshing Time", winner of the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for its year, is wrenching in its detail of a threshing job, gripping in its presentation of ranching men and, in particular, of Max Staunton's subtle and entirely controlling molestation of little Estelle while a father paralysed by his sense of powerlessness watches on.

Joan Clark's "God's Country" is also very much tied to the land, but it's not the prairies. Set in an East Coast mining town, Clark's hero simultaneously confronts her home town and her first love. Sharon Butala's Meredith (a feminist chemistry professor in Central Canada) relinquishes her troublesome daughter to her roots – her father's prairie ranch. But the story ("O What Venerable and Reverend Creatures") closes with a touching passage in which Meredith remembers her "beautiful baby," reminding us of Brenda Riches' tender, 8-part vignette, "Snow Flurries," through which every mother will weep.

Butala and Riches focus on the experience of mothers with daughters, while Beverley Harris and Gertrude Story weave slightly eerie plots around daughters and their memories of their fathers. Story's moving "Das Engelein Kommt (The Little Angel Cometh)" is written from the point of view of "the angel's" sympathetic sister, who in imperfect English witnesses how the father crushed his daughter(s). Harris' narrator, however, is reverent of a father who "took to his bed" the day that she was born – "November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution." Harris' "The Soma Building" is the most philosophical, polysemous of the realistic stories. In the end the narrator becomes the creative writer about whom Harris writes, and the father's wisdom initiates her own revelation, her unfinished fiction, in her office in the Soma Building. Harris' narrative voice is complex, but nowhere is voice as self-consciously intricate as it is in Sharon Butala's first novel, *Country of the Heart*.

Shattering reader expectations in terms of both its moral vision and its narrative conventions, *Country of the Heart* is at the same time a most conventional novel. Short on action, Butala concentrates on the story which emerges when told simultaneously from at least three different points of view. She does this not so much to show incongruities as to illustrate both the shared experiences of intimates, and the separate and secret lives of individuals who are intimate.

One character dominates the triangle – Lannie, a university student whose mother died when she was a child, and whose father abandoned her. She returns "home" to her Aunt Iris' and Uncle Barney's when university term ends. During her stay with them, she surmounts obstacles rarely elevated to plot material, among them dysmenorrhea and abortion. Though imperfect, Lannie's point of view is sometimes corroborated and sometimes confused by the points of view of her guardians, Iris and Barney, both of whom have skeletons in their closets – where they remain. Separate narrative threads do develop and intersect, but there is always some slippage, giving Lannie enough room to set things right for herself.

Lannie's quest for intimacy is also her passive mourning after it, and in this respect, Lannie very much resembles Lois Simmie's meek and lonely night watchman in her wondrous short story in *Double Bond*. Almost too quickly Lannie resolves to act, and sets out to find her lost father, her sister and her brother. Lannie is one of a growing number of fictional daughters who is – now that women are writing more of the scripts – mis-fathered or fatherless. It is not an entirely satisfying ending because Lannie leaves too many stones unturned: we wonder what ever came of her university lover, the "boy" Tim, or her childhood friend, Angela – the only person in whom she confides. And we also expect there to be a more profound reason for getting to know Barney and Iris from the inside, but none comes.

Not as tendentious as last year's *Baker's Dozen* (Toronto, Women's Press), the stories in *Double Bond* are just as radical. Although we don't know why the editor, Caroline Heath, has settled on this title (in spite of the fact that there are some brief notes on the back jacket that try to explain), we do know that it has some meaning for her, for Fifth House, and presumably for the writers in the collection. And we also know that the bond has something to do with women and, in most cases, the land. But something else struck me about the "double bond." That woman's bond with her past (with traditions, with convention, family, and the land) is as revolutionizing as the bond she makes with her present (with experiment and change, with new morés, sexual love, society, and the city). The tremendous variety of fiction in *Double Bond* covers a literary spectrum that would stretch from one kind of bond to the other, and from one kind of literary tradition to its radical antidote.

It is primarily for this reason that *Double Bond* is radical – it has defied our expectations without making us too uncomfortable, without judging us or our sisters, even our brothers ("the night watchman," the novel's Barney, Bonnie Burnard's as yet unmentioned Allen in "Crush") too harshly, and without dismissing the ordinariness of women who have immigrants' blood, rural families, family wounds, jobs and ambitions, and illicit longings and secrets. And this is also true of *Country of the Heart* which, if condensed and filmed, would give us a graphic picture of the double bond of which we are all a part.

Books Received

Pat Armstrong, *Labour Pains: Women's Work in Crisis*. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1984.

Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984. Revised ed.

Christopher Bagley, *Child Sexual Abuse Within the Family: An Account of Studies 1978-1985*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985.