BOOK REVIEWS

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DARING TO DREAM: UTOPIAN STORIES BY UNITED STATES WOMEN: 1836-1919

Edited by Carol Farley Kessler. London: Pandora, 1984.

WOMEN OF THE FUTURE: THE FEMALE MAIN CHARACTER IN SCIENCE FICTION

Betty King. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1984.

Mariana Valverde

Feminists, like socialists, have tried to complement their bleak critiques of present-day society by cheerful pictures of the kind of future that we might find on the other side of patriarchy. In the nineteenth century this kind of visionary literature-cum-political theory was usually presented in the form of utopias; more recently, feminist writers tend to use sci-fi as the genre most suited for such descriptions of the post-patriarchal future. Despite the differences in the conventions governing each genre, then, we can speak of a single feminist utopian tradition. In the United States, this began with the kitchenless houses designed by the Fourierist feminists of the 1840s, and continues today in the sci-fi novels of Joanna Russ and Ursula LeGuin.

Reading *Daring to Dream* prompted me to re-evaluate this tradition. First, though I hated to admit it – having previously defended socialist-feminist utopianism to all who would listen – most of the selections presented in this anthology are very mediocre literature. This is not a peculiarity of Kessler's sample, but rather a chronic problem with virtually all 19th-century utopian literature. Even the acknowledged high point of the genre, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1919) is pretty weak by comparison even to Gilman's other writings, never mind compared to the 'real' novelists of the time. It would seem that descriptions of the happy future tend to be undertaken by writers who are uncomfortable with the ambiguities of the present, and who prefer to fantasize a seamless heaven rather than outlining how the contradictions of today can give rise to more creative and positive contradictions tomorrow.

The ironic result is that even though the conventions of utopian literature allow writers complete freedom from actual social constraints, the writers nevertheless choose to remain stuck in the mud of the present. Many of Kessler's feminist utopias feature cheerful Christian ladies whose lives are made easy not just by a rational system of commerce or by fancy technology, but also by devoted black maids.

A related characteristic of most American feminist utopias, and one which has been carried over into sci-fi, is an almost complete absence of humour, irony, and self-reflection. The women who wrote utopias tended to be either in the evangelical, quasi-feminist tradition so well analyzed by Ann Douglas in *The Femininization of American Culture*, or in the equally preachy tradition of American communitarianism. A few excerpts reprinted by Kessler from the turn-of-the-century 'free love' journal *Lucifer* (which sounds like a fascinating counterpoint to maternal feminism) are refreshingly critical of marriage and the family, and thus show a little more utopian imagination. But even in these stories 'free love' (read serial monogamy) is justified on mostly *ethical* grounds. The vast majority of the women authors are intent upon proving that the most radical architectural and social arrangements will not change women's role as guardian angel of humanity's virtues. It is as though a peaceful, calm life was as much as we dared to hope for. Pleasure remains beyond the pale, unimagined.

Any narrative involves a quest for pleasure and a release of desire (on the part of both characters and readers); and a fantastical narrative set in a problem-free world is even more suited to a description and vindication of pleasure. But in the utopian fiction under consideration, the content is relentlessly ethical, and thus the possibilities inherent in the utopian form are never realized. A slight smile of contentment might grace our lips as we close the book – but that's it. None of the feminist writers in the book follow in the footsteps of Charles Fourier, the French eccentric who was the unwilling father of American Fourierism; he used the utopian narrative form to release all desires and classify all pleasures, giving each and every one of them a place in the social sun. (For Fourier, the pleasure of eating ripe melons – which he saw as constantly frustrated by bourgeois society's deceitful system of commerce – was as worthy of satisfaction as the desire to work or to have children, and he organized his utopian society accordingly). But his feminist successors who, unlike Fourier, were both women and social reformers, neglect to examine or even fantasize about the possibilities for pleasure in a post-capitalist, post-patriarchal society.

What about current feminist sci-fi? Given the prevailing climate of moral scepticism, the utopian future envisaged by sci-fi authors is not obssessed with goodness, justice and order. Marge

Piercy's powerful novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, for instance, pays close attention to feelings of anger, love, bereavement, and sexual desire in a non-gendered society.

However, the reader's potential pleasure in problem-free utopias is, in the current crop of sci-fi for women, frustrated in a different way. Instead of the nineteenth-century vision of utopia as a nice lady's idea of heaven, we now read about worlds in which people are *still* struggling with loss, rejection, violence, and jealousy. *Plus ça change* . . . Piercy's vision, like those presented by Ursula LeGuin and others, is of course more 'realistic:' there is no claim that, because patriarchy has been overthrown, life is a bowl of cherries. But the point is that we already have plenty of novels, from the early Doris Lessing on, that show us strong women facing a contradictory world with contradictory feelings. The sci-fi utopias are in a sense anti-utopian, showing that even in societies with perfect birth control and without gender inequalities, love and death are very difficult and pleasure is never guaranteed. This may be fine as feminist realist literature or sober political thought; but whatever happened to unabashed utopianism, to Fourier's "harmony of the passions"?

Kessler's anthology is very well researched: we get biographical information about the fifteen women writers, most of whom have been 'discovered' by Kessler, and there is an excellent annotated bibliography listing 137 American feminist utopian works. The selection is thoughtfully made to represent various strands of nineteenth-century feminist thought. However, many of the selections are brief, three-or-four-page excerpts, which barely give one a glimpse of the author's politics and style. Plot summaries would have helped to make up for the inadequacy of the space available for selections.

Betty King's book is not, and does not claim to be, a scholarly work. It is designed to help women who love reading sci-fi to find woman-positive books. However, even at this level this idiosyncratic book does not do its job well: the selection is arbitrary, and the choice of the main character as the only criterion for the classification gives a slanted view of the novels which do not have single strong characters.

The first chapter, claiming to be a "historical perspective," is completely inadequate. There are plot summaries of all of H.G. Wells' sci-fi stories, but Gilman's *Herland* is ignored. One wonders if Betty King has simply gone through her own (admittedly large) collection and produced a catalogue for it. It may be somewhat useful to sci-fi addicts, but it does not shed much light on the genre, the writers, or the readers.

THE RADICAL FUTURE OF LIBERAL FEMINISM

Zillah R. Eisenstein. New York: Longman, 1981.

FEMINISM AND SEXUAL EQUALITY: CRISIS IN LIBERAL AMERICA

Zillah R. Eisenstein. Monthly Review Press, 1984.

Naomi Black

Feminists spend far too much time sorting out who is a genuine feminist (including oneself) and who is outside the fold. Discussions of this sort have identified as many as fifteen or twenty sects or subsects of feminism. But in the contemporary classifications, there is a tendency to end up with about three main categories, where "liberal" feminism is distinguished from "Marxist" and "radical." Roughly speaking, the liberal feminists are the mainstream in North America, the ones fighting for the ERA, for the Canadian Charter of Rights, and for equality of opportunity. The Marxists are committed to an analysis which sees capitalism as the cause of women's oppression and a revolutionary change of system as the necessary condition for women's liberation. Radical feminists are those who see biological differentiation, and particularly women's reproductive capacity, as the material base of a system of male domination. A fourth group, who identify themselves as socialist feminists, attempt to reconcile Marxist and radical feminism; they are the ones concerned about the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism.

All of the above is, of course, grossly oversimplified, and feminists of every persuasion mentioned would be justified in protesting. Not to mention the anarcha-feminists, third-world feminists, black feminists and feminist women of colour, as well as lesbian feminists. But the basic trinity is nevertheless a division that corresponds to the practical boundaries between the different sorts of feminists; it roughly defines the groupings within which analyses are felt to be shared and action can be agreed upon. In particular, the division between "radical" and "liberal" feminists seems a real one. Which is why the title of Zillah Eisenstein's first book – *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* – is so startling, and its contents even more so.

I shall discuss *The Radical Future* . . . along with its sequel, *Feminism and Sexual Equality*, which takes its important argument one step further. These two books together cast doubt on some widely accepted ideas about liberal feminism. They also give some hope for a "radical future" even in a world where all sorts of feminism are now under attack. Eisenstein is writing particularly for and about Reagan's America. But we must all be concerned about the situation of women in these times of recession. All over the world, unemployment is in part blamed on an enlarged labour force – which means working women. It is an explanation that fits very comfortably with the financial burden of social service budgets. All too many policy makers would like to solve both problems at once by "privatization" – putting the physically and mentally ill back into the home along with the women to take care of them.

Zillah Eisenstein fits into the category of socialist feminists, though she is really too independent and imaginative to stay comfortably in any doctrinal slot. As she explains it, patriarchy is older than capitalism, but today patriarchy and capitalism work hand-in-hand. White middle class men run the combined system, and benefit disproportionately from it. But unlike feudal and slave societies, capitalism is fundamentally in conflict with patriarchy. Capitalism and patriarchy both need women in the home to do the housework and raise the next generation. But capitalism also needs women in the labour force as secondary workers. So the ideology of liberalism – that all human beings are free, equal wage-earners – comes into conflict with the patriarchal ideology of women being "different," needing protection, and therefore dependent and unequal.

Out of this emerges liberal feminism, demanding that women be treated as equals. It is the start of the ideas and the social movement with the capacity to des-

troy both capitalism and patriarchy. The only problem is how to move from the real but limited possibilities of liberal feminism to a wider feminism that can be the base of a radical mass movement. Eisenstein's books are therefore addressed to radical, Marxist, and socialist feminists to tell them how to understand and work with liberal feminists, and to liberal feminists to tell them how to transcend their own ideology and movement.

I will not try to summarize Eisenstein's complex and fascinating argument more than very briefly. There is a useful short version in an article by Eisenstein entitled "Reform and/or Revolution: Towards a Unified Women's Movement," in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (South End Press, 1981), but everyone interested in feminism or feminist theory should read the two books reviewed here. *The Radical Future . . .* is basically a rehabilitation of the theories of liberal feminism as it developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Eisenstein argues that, from Mary Wollstonecraft to the present, such feminist theory has implied the "radical" idea of women as a "sexual class." She writes: "The early liberal feminists had a sense of women's collective existence; they did not view women merely as individuals but as individuals differentiated from men in terms of the power men had."

For Eisenstein, feminism thus poses a group opposition to the individualist hierarchies of patriarchy and capitalism, a collective opposition reaching across class and racial barriers. Men cannot be expected to organize such a challenge to patriarchal capitalism; if capitalism benefits some of them, still, patriarchy benefits them all as individuals and as a group.

More specifically, *The Radical Future . . .* discusses the work of liberal feminist theorists in nineteenth century Britain and North America: the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Harriet Taylor, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In this volume Eisenstein begins her discussion of women's situation in the work world, of modern feminists (such as Betty Friedan, whom she considers reactionary), and of specific liberal feminist reforms such as the ERA. In the second book she also discusses recent anti-feminism, and spends more time on unsatisfactory theories of modern feminism and on reforms and resistance to reforms. There are useful discussions of Phyllis Schlafly (of Stop ERA), of leftist feminist Jean Bethke Elshtain, and of Carter's and Reagan's policies related to women.

In these two volumes Zillah Eisenstein argues persuasively for the radical *potential* of liberal feminism, for the real achievements it has had, and for its limitations in both practical and theoretical terms. It is an important argument. It is also a heartening one, reassuring us that the foremothers were not all fools after all. And all feminists should take to heart Eisenstein's plea for cooperation among the different sorts of feminists: "We can draw from liberalism its commitment to freedom; from socialism its commitment to egalitarianism; and from feminism its demand that these notions of equality and freedom apply to the realm of sexuality and personal life."

FACE TO FACE: FATHERS, MOTHERS, MASTERS, MONSTERS-ESSAYS FOR A NONSEXIST FUTURE (CONTRIBUTIONS IN WOMEN'S STUDIES, NO. 36)

Edited by Meg Mcgavran Murray. Westport, Connecticut, and London, England: Greenwood Press, 1983.

Johanna Stuckey

Florence Home in her "Foreward" to *Face to Face* comments on the nature of this difficult but rewarding book:

> *This collection brings together a number of theoretical and practical perspectives drawn from scholarship in several disciplines in the hope of making accessible both the arenas and terms of the dialogue. "Facing the fearful fathers" was the way (the editor) put it . . . To which has been added . . . "Facing the fearful mothers" (p. xiv).*

This book concerns itself with the nature of gender relationships in Western (mainly American) culture and the desperate need for their revision if we are to survive as a culture – or even as a species. The editor expresses the hope that "the essays will work toward (our) finding positive ways to neutralize men's anger as women assert themselves more openly . . ." Their aim, she says, "is to suggest a vision of a better society . . . a non-sexist and democratic community" (p.xix). To that end, she argues that we must face "our fathers, mothers, masters, and monsters," "an imperative for our social and psychic freedom" (p. xx).

A number of scholars have contributed essays to this volume, among them Jean Baker Miller, Elise Boulding, Christopher Lasch, Jesse Bernard, and Dorothy Dinnerstein. There are five sections covering the topics of parenting; myth, religion, and psychoanalysis; work; politics; and implications for the future. While not consistently brilliant, these essays are thoughtful, thought-provoking statements by scholars on the central problems of our culture as we face the future: fatherhood (and motherhood), God the father, male as provider, pornography, women in power, and women-hating. It is interesting that most of the authors build their arguments on a base in Freudian thought which, for the most part, they use in a way that Freud himself would not have considered probable – or necessary. And, after reading *Face to Face*, no one could doubt the influence of feminism on intellectual life in our culture, though she would have to be worried about how effectively feminist ideas and theories are reaching most people – or even the "right" people – since *Face to Face* makes it abundantly clear that fundamental and drastic changes are needed if our world is to survive.

Changes particularly in our "prevailing gender arrangements" are desperately necessary, for as Dorothy Dinnerstein says, "our traditional uses of gender . . . have helped us postpone adult acceptance of the responsibilities intrinsic to humanness: responsibility to and for each other, and joint self-responsibility, as a species, for our position in nature" (p. 295).

Face to Face is in places hard going, not easy to read, but it is an important collection of feminist essays, both practical and theoretical, on perhaps the most important issue of our day – our future.

NOT AN EASY CHOICE: A FEMINIST RE-EXAMINES ABORTION

Kathleen McDonnell. Toronto: Women's Press, 1984

Lorraine Gauthier

In her attempt to analyze the complexity of the abortion issue Kathleen McDonnell raises fundamental questions concerning feminist theory and feminist politics. The questions raised, however, go far beyond those expressly stated in her book. One of the most important of these is the theoretical and political import of addressing – or not addressing – the complexity of any specific issue within a particular socio-political context. It is undeniable that most issues facing feminists are complex. But complexity has certain predeterminations and implications, not only theoretically, but in the socio-political arena as well; all of these elements are intricately interrelated.

McDonnell's analysis bypasses most of the socio-political context of the abortion struggle. Her arguments are twofold: 1) that we address the profound ambivalence surrounding abortion and 2) that we must develop a feminist morality which "lets in" the "right" of the fetus while upholding the "right" of women to control our own bodies.

The starting point for her first argument lies in her claim that "Our politics cannot afford to be divorced from our authentic feelings no matter how vague or contradictory they may seem" (Preface). But what, in fact, are these "authentic" feelings or, rather, what is "authenticity?" Our conviction that the personal is political should immediately give rise to a critical view of "authenticity" in individual experience and should allow us to recognize the extent to which these "authentic" feelings are politically *constructed*. McDonnell's analysis only addresses the political *implications* of feelings, leaving totally unexplored the immense social complexity which precedes the emergence, and shapes the form of personal feelings. It is this gap in her analysis which makes her arguments dangerously one-sided and apolitical since women alone are made to pay the price of the political implications of their feelings.

McDonnell's claim that "It is not simply a case of throwing off the shackles of our inculcated female guilt" because "abortion involves a web of complex physical and psychological processes that themsleves pull us in two directions at once" seems to suggest that these processes lie outside the realm of our "inculcated female guilt" (p. 31). It is, in fact, precisely a case of throwing off our guilt: how are we ever to recognize the "complex physical and psychological processes" supposedly inherent in pregnancy, when they are so deeply ingrained in our socio-political definition of ourselves as reproducers, as nurturing beings? That we are forced to choose between self and others is the key problem. In the very articulation of this choice we are reproached, scapegoated.

Where, in all this, is the equal guilt of men who abandon pregnant women to poverty and emotional distress? How many abused, traumatized children has male abandonment and irresponsibility caused? Where is their guilt for murdering the potential in these children? To speak of women's guilt without acknowledging its socio-political sources, without analysing its male counterpart, has dangerous political repercussions for women. A commitment to deal with guilt *is* essential for a feminist discourse, but it must be approached with care so that acknowledging guilt does not end up validating it.

Bonding is also not immune to a socio-political analysis. It may well be that mother and child bond in a deep psycho-emotional way, and that this is inherent in pregnancy. But what is inherent is not always activated. One does not bond with a threat, an enemy, a shackle, a prison warden – except in ways that deny one's self. Pregnancy is an oppression for many women in many circumstances: the slip from antagonism towards pregnancy to hostility towards the child is easily made (though not easily recognized or admitted). McDonnell admits as much when she says: "in the context of unwanted pregnancy of course, the notion of bonding is much more problematic." What does it mean, then, to say that "it is an important aspect of our response to the fact of pregnancy whether it is ultimately continued or terminated" (p. 32). It is only important when the child is wanted: we must differentiate. We must also recognize that bonding begins much earlier than pregnancy. Women are trained to bond (take a close look at all those little girls with Cabbage Patch dolls in tow). How, in such a context, do we differentiate the biological from the social? How can we even assert the presence of the biological?

The distinction between wanted and unwanted pregnancies is also crucial in the analysis of grief. The grief-stricken feminist who has just aborted is not so difficult to understand: being a feminist does not preclude wanting children. But a feminist understanding of male-dominated society makes motherhood exceedingly problematic for us and often leads us to abortion, understanding as we do the costs, both to ourselves and to our children, of attempting to raise children in our society. This does not mean we did not want them. Grief is not inherent in the loss of a fetus: it is socially determined when the denial of motherhood becomes imperative for survival.

In a feminist discourse, what does one do with McDonnell's statement that "regardless of what our minds or our emotions tell us, our bodies want to stay pregnant, because they are programmed to ensure the reproduction of the species" (p. 31)? She criticizes Freud's claim that a woman's aversion to pregnancy is a denial of our basic feminine drive, yet she states that "this deep-seated drive towards life and its creation sometimes clashes painfully with our decision to abort" (p. 32). Has only half of the human race been programmed to ensure its reproduction, expressed through a "drive" for the creation of life? Are we not flirting here with biological determinism which ensures that guilt and trauma over abortion remain forever with us, totally exonerating men for the part they have played in making motherhood both undesirable and actually impossible?

On the basis of these questionable assertions concerning the inherent ambivalence surrounding abortion McDonnell moves on to her second argument:

> *We need to reclaim morality in its positive sense and see it as a way of ensuring that we are responsible in our actions, that we seriously consider the consequences and that we take the needs and rights of others into account as well as our own. In this sense, "morality" need not be inherently repressive, but can be an important tool to help us live with each other and with the rest of the planet. We do need to acknowledge that abortion is a moral issue as well as a health issue and a political issue (p. 52).*

The notion of a morality of responsibility rooted in the reality of "interpersonal relations" and the consequences of actions is contrasted to what she calls men's "ethics of rights" imbued with universal moral categories of rights and wrongs. But there is something disturbing about the way it is presented here. To begin with a morality of responsibility is not merely a different notion of ethics which needs to be recognized as complementary to an ethics of rights: it is a totally different definition of ethics which is striving to overthrow and replace the prevailing ethics of rights. Abortion can be seen as a clear statement of that struggle, a refusal to bring children into this world as it is constructed and an insistence on putting the blame for this refusal squarely where it belongs – not on women, but on a phallocentric social organization which emphasizes death over life, ends over means, things over people, men over women and children.

Why, we must ask ourselves, is a feminist extolling us to take seriously the consequences of our acts? Have women as a group been irresponsible, historically, in regards to the needs of others? Let us direct this criticism where it belongs and stop joining ranks with the political right in faulting women for what McDonnell recognizes is a choice which we have little choice in making. The struggle to lift the aura of guilt and responsibility from our backs and to place it where it belongs is long and arduous. Let us make no mistake about it. We have barely begun to put a dent in this edifice of male power, as can be seen in the large number of women in the "Right to Life" movement. Denying the fetus is politically necessary at this time. Philosophical inquiry and soul-searching can be debilitating in a situation where our survival (psychological, emotional as well as physical) depends on action.

I am not claiming that ambivalence does not exist, nor that its existence should be ignored. But surely to discuss it in terms of "our responsibility for the consequences of our acts" is to miss the depth of our oppression. The fetus exists in all its manifold complexities and potentialities. If we do not let it into our discourse it is because it does not enter alone. And we have a deep responsibility for the effects of what else comes in with the fetus, for the effects on individual women, in terms of psychic trauma, and on the feminist movement, in terms of political inertia.

McDonnell demands that, on the one hand, we recognize our guilt (and in her way of doing so, validate it) and, on the other, that we include men in the process of decision-making with respect to all aspects of reproduction. We are told we must place them at the center, where they belong, not on the fringe to which we have tended to relegate them. Well, we did not relegate them to the fringe: they abdicated, they chose the fringe in their own apparent self-interest. If men want a central part to play they will have to earn it, collectively as well as individually. When they show themselves responsible in all aspects of reproduction, we may grant them the expression of their desire when it comes to abortion. At this particular political conjuncture men have *not* earned their say. Men are excluded from the abortion decision because they have excluded themselves from reproduction generally.

To develop a feminist perspective based on the *angst* of a few 'liberated' and supportive men is to deny the reality of the daily inter-relationship between children and pregnant women on the one side, and men on the other. McDonnell admits as much when she quotes Barbara Ehrenreich, "Over the past decade and a half men have begun to 'take off' in unprecedented numbers, abandoning their traditional breadwinner roles, defaulting on support payments and leaving women to be the sole financial support of their children;" or again, when she claims that "this demand (to not abort their child) is rarely accompanied by an offer to raise and support the child" (p. 59); and yet again, "It is an uncomfortable fact that pregnancy is one of the situations in which wife battering is most likely to occur and some men have been known to respond to the news of an unwanted pregnancy with rage and violence because they feel 'tricked' or blame the woman" (p. 63). Where is the ethic of responsibility in all this when a reality, uncomfortably acknowledged, is then ignored theoretically and politically?

As insidious for feminist politics is the banal notion upheld here that it takes two to make a baby and "it takes two to create an unwanted pregnancy" (p. 58). Pregnancy as a consequence of rape, of forced extraction of "conjugal" right, of male irresponsibility vis-a-vis contraception, is the creation of *one* not two. An "unwanted" pregnancy due to the woman's impoverished, unstable and/or untenable position, despite her wanting a child, is the creation of *many* in which the man involved has played his own role.

Again, what does it mean to say that we must always come back to the inviolability of women's right to choose while "we also do not want to propose an entirely private morality in which the individual retreats into isolation and receives no input from outside herself or her immediate circle" (p. 55). If we trust that a woman is the best judge of her situation, then we respect her decision whether it is made solely by her or in collaboration with others as she sees fit. If we do not respect this decision, if we even vacillate on this point, then the implication that we mistrust her ability to make it "lets" in more than we bargained for. We might wish for a thoroughly conscious, thoroughly thought out decision, but we must recognize the validity of a strong "gut" reaction that refuses immediately and totally even to entertain the possibility of carrying a pregnancy to term and refuses to engage in soul-searching agonizing over such a decision. Our work consists in allowing women to articulate for ourselves our concrete situations. While theory and its dissemination can be a tool for such an articulation, we must never question a women's basic right to decide for herself – with or without a theoretical and/or philosophical basis.

If McDonnell returns to the affirmation of this right, what then has been accomplished in between? I would argue that, despite her desire to give breadth and depth to the abortion issue, she has succeeded only in diffusing it, in obfuscating its socio-political dimensions. Nothing is a clearer indication of this than the political programme she sets out.

When she asks whether a feminist can be anti-choice, her response ends up an implied yes. She extolls us to look closely at the many-faceted aspects of the "Right to Life" movement "to discover what lies

at the roots of their commitment" (p. 89). She quotes four anti-abortion activists who compare "the modern day status of fetuses to black slaves in the nineteenth century and the Jews under Hitler" or to "black genocide in the U.S." and "a class war against the poor" (p. 87). But the analogy just doesn't hold: the protection and defence of the fetus is achieved at the cost of the non-oppressor, indeed of another category of oppressed. The analogy also completely bypasses the real oppressor – a male-dominated society.

It is on the basis of their purported altruism that she identifies "progressive" elements in the "Right to Life" movement, elements which supposedly defy our overly simplistic equation of that movement with traditional right-wing politics and elements with which we should seriously consider allying ourselves. But what is "progressive" when it stops short of recognizing women as autonomous beings who have the right to self-determination and self-fulfillment? If "our knee jerk response against right to life issues" is a political catastrophe, so is a coalition with forces which deny our basic demand. We can become politically active in issues which the right has taken up, but a necessary element in that activity is a clear articulation of our differences in premises and goals. McDonnell suggests as much when she analyses our coalition with population control institutions. Why is no similar reservation expressed vis-a-vis the "Right to Life" movement? Finally, how does she reconcile the last sentence of Chapter Six, "A reconciliation of some segments of the pro-life movement is unlikely but it is a possibility to which we in the pro-choice movement should remain open," with the first sentence of Chapter Seven, "The Right to Life movement continues to do all in its power to deny women the right to abortion?" I suggest that they are irreconcilable.

If the "control of our bodies is the bedrock issue of modern feminism," then to attenuate this fundamental demand through the pretense of giving it breadth and depth is more than political suicide: it is political irresponsibility. The issue is, after all, not only the control of our bodies but of our minds and emotions. Of what use is it to win the right to abortion on demand if we so shame women, so traumatize them with guilt that the effect of their "choice" is to damage them permanently? Is our notion of violence so restricted that we cannot look at anything but the violence done to the fetus? What unfathomable violence has been done to women by saying, from a supposedly feminist perspective, that "what this acknowledgement of the fetus leads us to is a profound *taking of responsibility* for *our choices*, for the fact that *we have* with full consciousness *terminated life*." And if "this is most emphatically *not* the same as blaming ourselves or burdening ourselves with an unnecessary load of guilt" (my emphasis), then it is encumbent upon her to explain exactly how, in this socio-political conjuncture, such guilt and blaming is not the inevitable consequence of these words (p. 54).

Though it is a basic tenet of feminism that we must theorize from our own personal experience, it is nonetheless imperative that we place that experience in its context and that we refuse to universalize what is, in this case, a minority experience. To begin a book with the statement, "I marvelled that I now looked with such love on what 'it' had become and I could no longer easily separate the two," and to proceed to develop an analysis based on this experience, is to ignore the fact that the author's experience is not common to all women and, within a global perspective, probably not even to most. We have a responsibility not to impose upon other women our version of their reality; we must avoid distorting that reality and rendering them individually and/or collectively unable to act. When women find their place in the sun there will be more than ample room for fetuses. Now there is room for neither: letting the latter into our discourse may have the political consequence of keeping it this way for a very long time yet.

THE COLLECTED STORIES OF EUDORA WELTY

Eudora Welty. New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Toronto: Academic Press, 1982.

Fran Beer

This great collection, which includes all forty one of Eudora Welty's published short stories, really deserves nothing less than a thesis. To set out to review the collected stories of a writer who has been so justly honored for her literary achievements over the years feels a little presumptuous. Early granted both Guggenheim and O'Henry awards (1942), Welty has been regularly honored on up through 1973 when she won the Pulitzer Prize for her novella *The Optimist's Daughter*. She has received honorary degrees from universities ranging from Smith College (Massachusetts) to the University of the South (Tennessee).

Born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi, Welty lives there still; the deep South provides the setting and atmosphere for her stories. This edition actually consists of four separate volumes, published in 1941, 1943, 1949, and 1955, plus two uncollected stories from 1963 and 1966. The first volume, *A Curtain of Green*, dazzles immediately, and displays as well as any her special array of short-story skills – though, by the way, she has also authored five novels.

Welty's sense of detail is extraordinary: the waiting room of a remote train station is quiet "except for the night sounds of insects. You could hear their embroidering movements in the weeds outside . . . or listen to the fat thudding of the light bugs and the rushing of their big wings against the wooden ceiling;" "a little girl lay flung back in her mother's lap as though sleep had dealt her with a blow;" a suitcase was "strapped crookedly shut, because of a missing buckle, so that it hung apart finally like a stupid pair of lips." Welty brings her characters alive and gives them voices so that you can clearly see, and as often hear, them: "'Reach in my purse and git me a cigarette without no powder on it if you kin, Mrs. Fletcher honey,' said Leota to her ten o'clock shampoo-and-set customer. 'I don't like no perfumed cigarettes'." She has a sense of humour that can make you laugh out loud or bring a lump to your throat. Her flair for the grotesque combines with a skill for filling the most common situations with wit and feeling: "Petrified Man" takes place in a beauty parlour; the story's action is the stinging and dripping of setting lotion, the combing out of the perm, the banging of the screen door – but the punch line has to do with the unmasking of a phony man of stone in the freak show who turns out to be wanted in California on four counts of rape.

Welty doesn't need 'plot' in any contrived sense of the word: she knows how to isolate a meaningful configuration of

character, situation, emotion, incident. The ability to present the special point of view of a limited character and still let her audience know what is 'really' going on can be a rich source of irony – as in "Why I live at the P.O." – or of pathos – as in "Death of a Travelling Salesman."

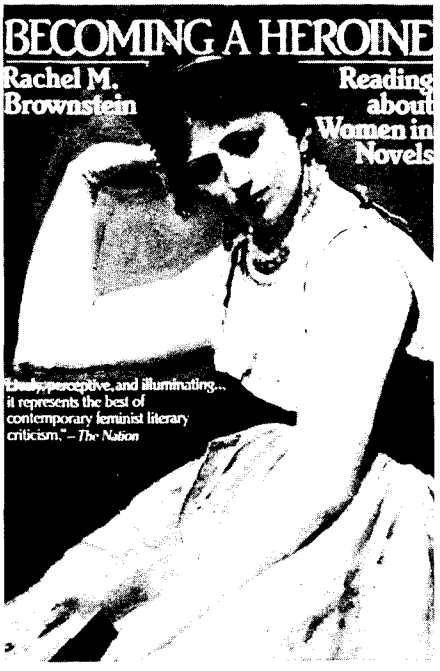
This awesome combination of skills means that the reader is captured quickly by these stories, by their voices and images; and given the combination, one is not surprised to learn that during the Depression Welty worked as a photographer and reporter. She also worked for the W.P.A., and these Depression jobs must go some way towards explaining her great compassion and her political independence, her tenderness towards the outcasts, the lonely, the poor and ignorant, the old, the black. These are the characters she loves; the 'enemy' is the complacent, comfortable, conventional middle class.

"A Visit of Charity" tells of a young girl sent by her Campfire troop to do her good deed at the old folks home: she is terrified; the old ladies are grotesque and cruel to each other; the nurse is cold and mechanical. There is no contact, no sharing, no alleviation of misery. In the fine title story, a woman, spiritually and emotionally dead since the loss of her husband, seeks release by working obsessively in their garden, and her final crisis comes, not in rational terms, but in a surrender to the growth and the rain. In "A Worn Path" an ancient Negro woman, Phoenix Jackson, makes an astonishing, arduous journey into Natchex to get medicine for her little grandson. Her heroism becomes more affecting as she must connect with the white world, contacts even more difficult than her journey. But her mission, and her vision, are sustaining, and she heads home with the medicine and a little paper windmill she's bought him, a fragile symbol of their hope: "We is the only two left in the world. He suffer and it don't seem to put him back at all. He got a sweet look. He going to last."

The trail that old Phoenix follows, called the Natchez Trace, lies between the Pearl River, which runs through Jackson, and the Mississippi. It winds through the second volume, "The Wide Net," like some kind of fateful lifeline. Welty has chosen a wide range, socially and historically, as if to show how strong its force is: a deaf orphan boy, an embittered old Southern belle, a wild-eyed visionary, a young love-lorn recluse – these lives, and others, are all bound by the common link of the Trace. Geography also plays a role in the third volume, "The Golden Apples," but here Welty has created a fictional town, Morgana, Mississippi, and a cast of characters – the main families – all of whom figure in the stories.

"The Bride of the Innisfallen" again shows a bold range of time and place: a Northern man and woman meet in New Orleans, ferry over the Mississippi and drive deep into bayou country; their family home burned by Northern soldiers, their menfolk gone, two sisters hang themselves; a compartment full of travellers jostle each other on the boat train headed from London to Cork; the story of Odysseus' visit is retold from Circe's point of view. But a nagging sense of dislocation and alienation has crept into these stories, the humour is gone. And of the last two, written in the 60's, Welty says, "they reflect the unease, the ambiguities, the sickness and the desperation of those days in Mississippi."

These last disturbing stories do not offset the tenderness, the compassion of the whole: "What I do in writing of any character is to try to enter into the mind, heart, and skin of a human being who is not myself." And she does. There's nothing for it but to read these stories yourself.



BECOMING A HEROINE: READING ABOUT WOMEN IN NOVELS

Rachel M. Brownstein. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

Lori Farnham

Every woman who has read *Pride and Prejudice* or *Wuthering Heights* knows the vicarious thrill of living intensely, if only temporarily, the life of a heroine. In her provocative, sometimes highly amusing study, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels,* Rachel M. Brownstein examines the origins and consequences of the myth of the heroine.

Brownstein's central thesis is that novels help determine the lives of those who read them. The heroine-centered novel presents "the ideal of the integral self:" heroines are sensitive, witty, supremely coherent and self-aware (p. xxi). Wanting to become a heroine means wanting to be special, unique. Girls, not being brought up to dream of succeeding through direct action and achievement, "tend to live more in novels than boys do, and to live longer in them" because there is no other way for them to feel significant (p. xv).

Although the heroine-centered novel is positive in its insistence on the value and importance of a young girl's quest for happiness, it is also dangerously seductive. "In life as in novels, women read romances, and look up from the pages with their visions blurred" (p. 32). Novels encourage women to believe in the illusion "of the self perfected through a resolution of female destiny" (p. xxiv); in other words, they push some women into thinking themselves superior to others, while accepting a conventional view of women and of the possibilities open to them. The purpose of an exemplary heroine like Richardson's Clarissa is to "inspire girls to be like her and thus keep the world pleasant and safe for its owners" (p. 43).

Brownstein's intention is partly, she says, "to warn women against the seductive idea of the heroine" which can "organize the self, (but) can also enclose it" (p. xx). A heroine can be trapped in her own book, like Clarissa, who has to die in order to remain exemplary, or Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady,* who "is obliged to choose the past over the future, stasis over process, art over life because she sees herself as a heroine and her story as a story" (p. 272).

The book combines two forms, autobiographical and literary essay, in a way that is characteristic of the best in feminist criticism. Brownstein's analysis of the myth of the heroine begins with a fascinating chapter entitled "My Life in Fiction," which shows "the effects on real people of images." From the *Roman de la rose*, with its inaccessible maiden, to *Mrs. Dalloway*, which "looks retrospectively at the tradition of the novel and its heroine," through Richardson, Brontë, Meredith, Eliot and James, Brownstein analyses the role of the heroine and the shape of myth in each novel.

Some chapters, such as the one about *The Egoist*, seem more like essays in general criticism than thematic discussions. Others, especially the ones devoted to Jane Austen and to *Villette*, are delightfully relevant. Jane Austen's work, according to Brownstein, illustrates the parallels between heroine and novelist: both can "convert the least promising of lives into art, by the way (they) look at it" (p. 91). Charlotte Brontë goes further still, choosing plain heroines for whom marriage is neither the only problem nor the final solution, refusing the traditional happy ending. Virginia Woolf chooses to create Mrs. Dalloway, a woman of fifty-two, breaking with the tradition of the heroine as a young, as yet unformed woman, thus writing "a brilliant coda to the heroine's story" (p. 273).

Brownstein writes clearly and well, frequently with wit (she calls Clarissa "the spinach of heroines," served up for our own good). Her book is full of insights into familiar novels, and she is sensitive to contradictions such as the opposition between the chaste heroine and the sexually-oriented marriage plot.

Her thesis breaks down, however, when she insists on the danger of novels for girls. Do girls still read novels? In any case, they are not likely to choose *The Egoist* or *Clarissa*, even in their abridged versions. For the same reason, Brownstein would have done well to treat *Wuthering Heights* or *Jane Eyre* instead of the less-read *Villette*. The novels she studies here seem unlikely to endanger anyone, except perhaps a few English majors! The choice of novels thus reduces the size of the group concerned, partly invalidating the thesis. It is hard, however, to fault Brownstein's overall perceptions of the novel when she says that, although the genre makes us feel "the pull of a seductive, reactionary dream" rather than offering "a blueprint for a feminist utopia," heroine-centered novels are "full of useful information about what must be kept in mind if we would try to change" (p. 296).

OUTRAGEOUS ACTS AND EVERYDAY REBELLIONS

Gloria Steinem. New York: Holt Rhinehart and Winston, 1983.

Fran Murphy

That any book by Gloria Steinem would be written from a feminist perspective is obvious. Her first book is much more than the collected harangues of the founding editor of *Ms.* magazine. *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* is a compendium of Steinem's articles written over the twenty years she has worked as a journalist. These articles are presented in chronological order, and in a way that reveals both her style of writing and her gradual awakening to feminism. What makes the book particularly interesting is the manner in which it also unravels the life of Gloria Steinem.

Educated at Smith College, Steinem spent a year in India before moving to New York to make her living as a freelance writer. She contributed many articles to such magazines as *Ladies Home Journal*, the *New York Times*, *Show* and *McCalls*. In 1968 she became one of the founding editors of *New York* magazine. In her Introduction, Steinem writes about this time in her life: "It wasn't until *New York* was founded and I became one of its contributing editors and political columnists that my work as a writer and my own interests began to combine."

Her interests in politics, feminism and journalism culminated in 1973 when she founded *Ms.* She says of her conversion to women's issues: "The first flash of consciousness reveals so much that it seems like the sun coming up. In fact, it's more like a first candle in the dark." Since *Ms.* was founded, she has travelled extensively and overcome her fear of public speaking by talking to encounter groups about topics of interest to all women. The climax to this facet of her feminist commitment occured at the First National Women's Conference in 1977 in Houston. This experience is related in the articles, "Houston and History" and "Sisterhood." Also included are pieces on Steinem's involvement in politics – she worked for George McGovern in his 1968 Presidential campaign – and some written during her days as a "girl reporter." The piece that made her publically well known is her exposé of the Playboy Club, which she infiltrated as a Playboy Bunny in New York. Although this article was written twenty years ago, it is still painfully relevant today; Steinem reveals the phony glamor and exploitation of these Bunnies by their chauvinistic employer.

If one were to read only one piece from this book, it would be "Ruth's Song," written especially for this book. Steinem relates her life with her "crazy" mother, who was forced to be institutionalized for nerves. After her mother was released, her father deserted the family. With her older sister away at college, Steinem was left to care for her mother from the age of ten until she was seventeen. Afraid that she would be committed again, they moved from pockets of poverty to more poverty in Toledo, Ohio. Finally, her mother was admitted by an enlightened psychiatrist to a Baltimore hospital where she received treatment and was allowed to live near the grounds as an out patient. As well as revealing why so many promising women in the 1940's and 50's "cracked" under the pressure of conforming to their husband and children's needs and ambitions while suppressing their own, this moving story displays Steinem's courage and drive to succeed. "Ruth's Song" may also be an exercise in exorcism. She writes of her mother:

> *At the hospital (in Baltimore), I used to say to her: "But why didn't you leave?" "Why didn't you take the job?" She would always insist it didn't matter, she was lucky to have my sister and me. If I pressed hard enough, she would add, "If I'd left, you never would have been born." I always thought, but never had the courage to say, "But you might have been born instead."*

This informative collection is a personal book that is, like the woman, intelligent, articulate and human.

PATRIARCHY AS A CONCEPTUAL TRAP

Elizabeth Dodson Gray. Roundtable Press, 1982.

Patricia Froese

In this book Elizabeth Dodson Gray attempts to analyze the origins and workings of patriarchy in western society. She believes patriarchy arose as a male attempt to compensate for their gender's inability to give birth. She illustrates this thesis by using language and religion as two examples of patriarchy in action.

Men's control over the world is illustrated in language and in the process of naming: the Bible describes Adam naming everything in the world, a practice that has continued to the present. She cites as an example of male-given labels a reference to contemporary technology – a computer is described as "up" when it is working and "down" when it is not. However, in discussing this illustration with a small sample, I found that my respondents did not associate these descriptions with male anatomy. One person suggested that erecting towers would have been a better example of an activity corresponding to anatomy. The implication of who names and describes things is that women's experiences are not described in our own terms: in every aspect, language has been, and largely still is, exclusively male-oriented.

Although Gray describes the Judeo-Christian tradition as a "male fertility cult" (p. 26) which worships men's blood and has a distaste for women's blood, she is nonetheless an adherent of Christianity. For her, religion "is flawed by a serious distortion – and that distortion is its patriarchal character or shape" (p. 27). Despite the enormity of saying the character and shape of religion must be changed, Gray does not discuss how to bring about these tremendous, necessary changes.

The author also describes patriarchy as a source of myths and the basis of a hierarchically-based world view with humans at the top. Such a world view sees anything people do as the best possible action to which all of nature in turn must adjust. Nature is viewed as a compliant woman to be exploited and raped – a perception that corresponds directly to the ranking of men over women.

The solutions offered are less than concrete, with only a vague discussion of the need for a different philosophical approach being offered. Men have devised paradigms that emphasize separations such as body/mind and have defined these as 'normal.' Women, on the other hand, stress being *connected*, and they mature *within* relationships rather than through breaking away from relationships. Gray wonders why men cannot be more like women, turning Professor Higgins' song in *My Fair Lady* on its head. She describes the needed philosophical change as "atunement," thereby making the world sound like an orchestra, only on a large scale. We have to get in tune with the earth, learning along the way to honour diversity and feminine values. This quasi-mystical "attuning" is the book's only alternative to patriarchy. This simplistic "solution" is presented in isolation, with no concrete guidelines for its application.

In the final analysis, Gray's book does not succeed as the introductory text it is meant to be. Her lack of focus with respect to avenues of change is frustrating. She does not have good working definitions of patriarchy, feminine values, or attunement – although she does sniff around these concepts somewhat. She emphasizes that mothers, simply because they give birth, would be best equipped to govern the world in a peaceful and holistic way. She does not mention mothers, such as Margaret Thatcher, who contradict her belief. Overall, the book lacks any cogent, in-depth analysis or any description of alternatives. *Patriarchy as a Conceptual Trap* is, at best, a seriously flawed contribution to an important topic.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

Michele Landsberg. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982; Penguin Books, 1983.

Marilyn Morton

I wish a copy of this wonderful book could be distributed to every household in Canada. It provides excellent reading for the committed feminist, but its greatest value lies in its potential to reach and influence the uncommitted.

Michele Landsberg was a *Toronto Star* columnist for several years; this book includes material reprinted from her columns, plus much new material. Landsberg's goal is to show that no woman in our contemporary society "is really anything more than a second-class citizen." By quoting from studies and statistics, and also by providing her own astute analyses of contemporary situations, she makes her point very persuasively. She often focuses on a particular individual and describes how that person has been affected by a situation, thus rendering more personal her discussion of an issue.

Almost every topic of concern to feminists is covered: wage disparities, maternity leave, pensions and elderly women, child-support payments, battered women, incest, abortion, parenthood, daycare, child abuse, and much more. There is a discussion of pornography and its possible effects on the minds of the young. In an excellent chapter on rape, Landsberg writes about the social conditioning which causes the victims of this crime to feel responsible for what has happened to them. She also provides disturbing examples of police and court attitudes towards rape.

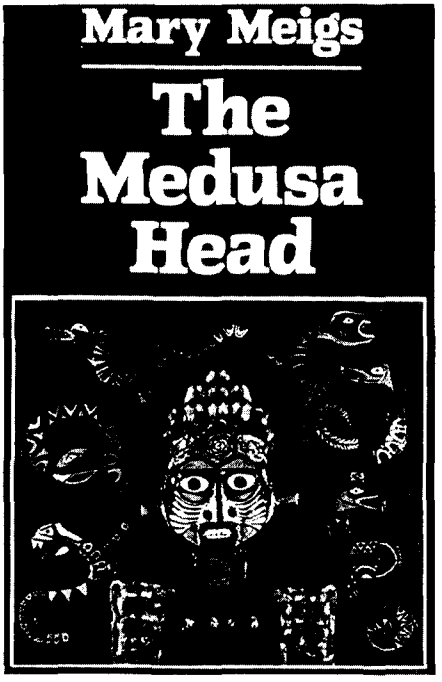
In other articles she discusses the excessive use of technology in childbirth, and the lack of government testing of women's health care products. She quotes statistics to show how poorly Canada and the United States rank among nations in such areas as infant mortality, male-female wage disparities, and paid maternity leave. She convincingly justifies affirmative action programs, and points out that "affirmative action for women" is a misleading term: "Men have been enjoying affirmative action all along. Now it is time, not for affirmative action for women, but for the de-privileging of men." Landsberg has a gift for putting widely-accepted sexist notions into perspective by turning the tables and showing how unacceptable they would seem if the male and female roles were reversed, or if certain circumstances were altered.

Landsberg describes herself as "a committed feminist who is also a monogamous wife and devoted mother" of three children; herein lies much of her potential for gaining an audience among traditional women. She is obviously a loving parent with a genuine concern for all children, and some of the best chapters in the book deal with the emotional rewards, as well as the challenges, of parenthood. In several columns reprinted from the *Toronto Star* she describes, in a light, self-mocking tone, some of the trials in her own domes-

tic life. She notes that these columns turned out to be some of the most popular pieces she has written because even the most adamant non-feminist could recognize themselves here. It is important that these pieces are placed near the beginning of the book, because the non-feminist reader's recognition of shared experience may encourage her to read on. And it is difficult to imagine how anyone could read this book to the end without gaining some sense of the injustices to women and children that are perpetrated in our society. Two groups of women who are not mentioned, however, are lesbians and native women.

Landsberg is a pleasure to read because she comes across as a friendly, gentle, sensitive human being. She appears to take great pleasure in people and life, and she has a wonderful sense of humour. She reveals a good deal about herself in this book: the reader gains a feeling of knowing her as a friend. No matter what the topic, her writing style is always engaging and her comments well thought out.

One can only wish that every major newspaper in Canada employed a feminist columnist. Michele Landsberg, with her literary skill, keen intelligence, and warmth, was the perfect person to hold such a potentially influential position.



THE MEDUSA HEAD

Mary Meigs. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983.

C.M. Donald

The situation that Meigs describes in *The Medusa Head* is a highly charged one, the changing balance of power in a relationship involving three women, Meigs herself, Marie-Claire Blais and the French writer known in the book only as Andrée. The action plays itself out with astonishing energy and intensity – and over two continents.

Into Meigs' relationship with Blais is introduced Blais' passion for Andrée and, shortly afterwards, Andrée's passion for Meigs. Andrée is then seen as the tyrant of the constellation. One's first reaction to such a summary of events is, I think, to push it away, to deny that one would oneself ever . . . And Meigs' task in this book is to render the situation not only a comprehensible one for these three adults, but an altogether human one.

Synopses such as this have a habit of rendering unlikely events which flowed perfectly naturally at the time. Any two years of one's own life, taken at random and thus reduced, will look more than slightly peculiar. This merely provides a skeleton of events and its shape can change considerably as it is fleshed out by the sheer wealth of detail involved in daily life, by one's perception of what is happening, and by the role one allots oneself.

It is to this tangle of everyday manoeuvres that Meigs directs our attention. In every transaction we consider, more is at stake than the thing itself. We act according to what we want to have, get or achieve, how we would like to see ourselves as a result of it, what light we think our actions will cast on the actions of others, what is expedient. All our habits of action, avoidance, memory, fantasy come into play.

This is perhaps exacerbated in a situation involving two novelists and a painter (and embryo autobiographer). It was important to Andrée to be in control of the interpretation of events, from her demand that they all three not have identical eggcups at breakfast to her untruthful assertion (partly because she did not like children) that she did not have any. Every slight inflicted by Andrée's emotional banishment of her served to reinforce Blais' chosen position of generous self-denial and her attitude of noble suffering.

The stumbling block that eventually brought the whole proceedings to a halt was the fact that Meigs herself was not sufficiently malleable. She persisted in her habit of withdrawing into her shell at regular intervals to consider events, rather than engaging directly in the situation. Further, she refused either to throw herself into the role allotted her by Andrée or to create a corresponding one of her own.

In some ways, this same reluctance is evident in the autobiography. Both Blais and Andrée brought out novels dealing in some measure with the relationship, transforming and resolving it, each in turn making herself, unquestionably, the defining consciousness. The form of autobiography allows Meigs to remain, still, somewhat uncommitted, still reserving final judgement. This derives in part from the distancing effect of Meigs' scrupulous detailing, but it leaves me with a strong feeling that the central nexus is not really resolved.

Into Meigs' cautious, practical, daily accounting is tossed the vivid, mythological figure of Medusa – represented on the cover of the book in a marvellous fresco by Jovette Marchessault. The Medusa Head of the title is Andrée, one of whose most effective tactics was a total rage, which paralysed and terrified Meigs and Blais. This image, devastating at the time, never entirely lost its power. "At least a year after I last saw her," Meigs writes (pp. 8-9), "I dreamt that I held in my hand an ivory figurine of a woman with closed eyes, which, as I held it, opened its eyes, while its mouth turned up in a Mona Lisa smile. It was Andrée, tiny but potent and still alive, despite the fact that she was a statue."

It is, to say the least, disconcerting, among all these human actions and emotions, to come upon a figure so much larger than life and to whom Meigs refers in the most forceful terms. There's a sense of inexplicable disjunction, a leap of lack-of-faith, when one set of Andrée's responses are thus singled out as more (or less) than human, the Medusa mask on the human body. (Ironically, in Meigs' dream, it is she who turns Andrée to not stone but ivory, and Andrée who refuses to be ossified.)

I find myself unhappy with the distribution of responsibility in this central image. Certainly the force of Andrée's concentrated will was considerable and, time after time, it worked. But it only worked because it had scope to work, and I'm not

convinced that even now, three books later, that mechanism is explained. For all the particular analysis, I missed some discussion of power, of the extent to which power simply *is* (that is to say, someone has it) and the extent to which it is given to whomever, by us.

Two other curious omissions: in the first summer that Blais was with Andrée, Meigs was consumed with jealousy to "a state bordering on madness" (p. 21); then Meigs describes her *volte-face* "from hate to love" of Andrée as "an unpredictable alchemy" (p. 22). I should like to have heard more from Meigs here (though there is discussion of them in her earlier autobiography, *Lily Briscoe).* These omissions seem strange to me in a text that depends upon its thoroughness for its powerful analysis. Does analysis, finally, lead one to the place where mythology and alchemy take over? Is this the transmutation that twines all the connecting threads Meigs presents into the strong bond that she describes but I, somehow, do not *feel?*

Yet Meigs' ruthless scrutiny, with its wry humour, of things people do, things we say, is a source of intense pleasure. Her picture (pp. 109-110) of Andrée's favourite Parisian tea-place where "five live cheetahs...lay in depressed attitudes a few inches from the tea drinkers, separated only by plate glass" while the "fashionable people..daintly sipped their tea..saying, *'Tiens, il se lève'* or, *'Dommage. Ils sont tous endormis,'* is something I treasure. Her image of the vaulting ambition of the cosmopolitan European o'erleaping herself and falling on the plodding, partial comprehension of this thorough American is also a delight.

Meigs is cheeringly honest about the facts that autobiography can only be an *attempt* at the literal truth, that the autobiographer, despite the spurious authority given her by the non-fiction category, is no more omniscient than anyone else. Who can tell, after time has passed, whether an event appears clearer in our minds because the cluttering details have fallen away, or because vital but disturbing ones have been forgotten?

It is possibly this delving into social and personal details which has led to an odd reaction in many of the readers (and reviewers) of the book – they tend to judge Meigs, rather than the book or the subject. The issues with which Meigs so unflinchingly deals - passion, personal advantage, self-image – cut very near the bone for most of us. Wanting to see ourselves in a good light, we find it hard to cope with Meigs' excellent attempt at honest appraisal. Yet it is surely this direct speaking, this rejection of the 'official version,' this advance towards self-definition which should appeal to us most as feminist readers, and which can make autobiography such a powerful form.

The lesbian writer, of course, finds herself further bound by conflicting pressures: the pressure to 'tell it like it is' and the pressure not to. As a feminist and a lesbian, it is impossible to be unaware of the context in which the book is being published. More or less conscious hostility to lesbians will influence many readers and, in reaction to that, many lesbians and feminists will flinch from presenting lesbians in anything other than a favourable light. Indeed reviews have already appeared which over-use words such as 'bizzare,' 'embarrasing' and 'self-indulgent,' often apparently synonyms for 'lesbian,' meaning that which is shocking, and shouldn't be talked about in front of self-respecting heterosexuals.

We cannot allow these tactics of disparagement and punishment to dictate our quest for self-definition as lesbians. But it cannot be denied that they take their toll. Meigs' candid, hard-working, insistently human book is one of the bravest things I've seen in print for a long time.

SOMEBODY HAS TO DO IT: WHOSE WORK IS HOUSEWORK?

Penny Kome. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982.

Judith Posner

Readers may recognize the author of this book as a frequent contributor to *Homemaker's* magazine, in which she writes about a variety of women's issues. This book is based on a large questionnaire involving *Homemaker's* readers. While there are several things I do not like about the book, I conclude on the positive side by stating that it is a good review of the literature, deals with an important and too often ignored topic, is the only *popular* book on the subject.

Somebody Has to Do It is based on a ten per cent sample of the *Homemaker's* survey which elicited over three thousand responses. (This fact alone suggests an interesting change of attitude among women who have been socialized into thinking that housework is not a significant subject). The original survey included sixty questions and encouraged respondents to express their views beyond the scope of the actual coded answers. It is also relevant to note the self screening aspect of the survey – that is, who takes the time to complete the questionnaire, and the general demographic profile of respondents:

> Homemaker's *is the largest circulation women's magazine in Canada, reaching some twenty-two per cent of households nationally, mainly in urban centres. Almost half the respondents were in the thirty-to-forty age group; more than half had three or more children; and only five per cent were single parents* (p. 12).

Kome indicates the magazine is aimed at high income families, but she does not sufficiently acknowledge the implications of the sample's non-representative character.

Ann Oakley, probably the best-known primary researcher on the topic, points out that a lack of interest in housework as a legitimate academic subject is merely a reflection of society's devaluation of woman's work. This is a contributing factor to the notion of the "invisibility" of housework and expresses the crux of the homemaker's dilemma. On one hand, she works like hell, sometimes in a never-ending day work cycle, mothering and housecaring. On the other hand, she is not paid for her work, it is undone quickly and so doesn't look as though it ever existed in the first place.

The devaluation of motherwork and housework lies at the heart of women's oppression, her low status and – what's worse – her low self-esteem. Issues which Kome and others raise in relationship to this theme include the double work load which women carry (often working at home and at the office), the split between housework and motherwork, the fragmentation of time, the social isolation, the lack of privacy (from children), and the "on call" component. The latter, important concept looks as though it might be Kome's original contribution to the housework literature:

> *Perhaps the most obvious example of a duty that is regarded as not-work (in the home) but is at least nominally compensated in the workplace is the on-call component . . . The children may be old enough to*

fix their own snacks; the husband may be working shifts and not expect dinner; the house may stay tidy because it is empty – yet part of housework is maintaining a communications link for others. Someone has to be there in case the metre-reader comes or the school calls or a pipe bursts (pp. 110-111).

For me, the "on call" component stretches far into the night when, in anticipation of a child's arousal, I find that I sleep less deeply than my spouse.

Kome's book touches on most of the relevant issues even if she sometimes does it in an irritating fashion. For example, while Kome pays rather casual lip service to some of the pioneers in the field, she is less than modest about her own contribution:

It's been very helpful to have Ann Oakley, Jessie Bernard, Gerder Lerner, Rae Andre, Meg Luxton, Barbara Ehrenriech, and Deirdre English as reference points. But I do not think that any other book covers exactly the same territorty as this one! (p. 14)

In actual fact, her book is really a popular précis of relevant academic literature. Most of her concepts are not original and any claim to Canadian content is not really valid. While I frequently recommend popular books over academic ones, in this instance Ann Oakley's work is so readable that it renders Kome's book unnecessary (to be fair, Kome does include ideas from several more recent pieces on housework published after Oakley).

A second criticism is methodological: Kome does not make much use of her newly acquired survey data. Rather, she rambles on in an anecdotal, unsystematic fashion with little reference to numbers. While I'm not personally partial to the numbers game, it does seem a bit strange to organize a massive survey research project and then end up reporting in detail on only thirty four women. Kome offers us little in the way of statistical generalizations and concomitant explanations and she is somewhat vague about her methodological objectives.

In spite of these stylistic and methodological criticisms, and the book's general redundancy, Kome's book is an easy read and is readily affordable as a paperback. It is therefore an excellent gift for friends and neighbors (of both sexes). In fact, why not give a copy to your spouse or "roommate," or try taking it next time you're invited out to dinner instead of a bottle of wine?

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