

Smart must battle the angel in the house and the guilt of wanting to write rather than care for others' needs. Smart asserts that "the pen is a furious weapon. But it needs a rage of will." She must work to conjure up this rage so she will "leave the washing up and take a look around." Like so many other women writers, Elizabeth Smart looks at the classics of Western literature and wonders: "Are they (the writers) hidden in veils or strait-jacketed by domestic lives or hammering at their sores in lonely rooms?"

Escaping the legendary blank page of the writer, Smart as narrator goes to Soho pubs. But there she is confronted with the creative woman's albatross: thinking that others' needs are greater than her own:

But look how ruthless other people are, following faithfully the rigid roads of their own neuroses. Why can't I insist on what suits mine, instead of standing there with this hopeless boring neurotic egotistical middle-aged sailor, having my strength slowly syphoned off, for nothing, for nothing at all? (p. 27)

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Back in the business world she is told not to get too above herself. She is harassed by her boss and is too tired from mothering babies (and trying to write) to compete effectively for a better job. And in one powerful sentence Elizabeth Smart utters the cry of women trapped between their nurturing and creative selves: "The womb's an unwieldy baggage. Who can stagger uphill with such a noisy weight."

The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals is a collage of emotions and observations. Its intensity lies in its juxtaposition of the author's deep feelings and the mundane, everyday life around her. The poetic style and vivid imagery of *The Assumption* are enhanced by rage. It is the rage of a woman becoming conscious of herself in a world de-

signed by and more comfortable for men.

In *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, literary brilliance and emotional intensity are enhanced by narrative tension. The tension is related, I think, to an essential contradiction: the *subject* of the work is woman's vulnerability (falling in love, sexual awakening, pregnancy), while the *author* or cultural authority of the work is a woman speaking man's language. In *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, Elizabeth Smart struggles to come to terms with the linguistic and cultural restraints imposed upon her as a woman writer. While traditional imagery is still used, it is used less, and there are anecdotal stories of women's lives as well as women telling their own stories. As Elizabeth Smart relies more on women's own stories and less on established patriarchal images, she is concerned less with woman as victim — although woman's "cruel sexual bargain" is dramatized — and more with woman as writer, as transcender of limitations. In *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, woman's identification with Nature is a negative association, resonant with powerlessness and pain. In *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*, woman is celebrated as a social being confronting a harsh environment with anger and strength.

Cy-Thea Sand's critical prose has appeared in journals such as Maenad, Fireweed, and The Radical Reviewer. For the past three years, Cy-Thea Sand has edited The Radical Reviewer.

Further Reading:

Elizabeth Smart, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. Foreword by Brigid Brophy. New York: Popular Library, 1977.

Elizabeth Smart, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*. New York: Panther Books, 1980.

WORKING GENDER

Searching for satisfaction while working for pay is the acceptable way to get on.

But in this unequal age of spurious enlightenment which voices female entitlement for anywhere else, the wage gap 'tween male and female's not narrowing. The experience is harrowing. Stasis abounds.

Still half work at half pay and half, not at all. Deplorable conditions fit to appal any fair-minded soul.

In a nation of 20m, where we're ten million strong, acting together, should it take very long to eradicate poverty as a feminine noun?

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