

### Daughters of Copper Woman,

Anne Cameron, Press Gang (Vancouver), \$7.95.

Connie McCann

Transplanted from the canals of eastern Ontario, I have lived on Vancouver Island for only six years. Now I have developed a love for the place. In discovering the Island I have hiked the west-coast trails, driven tour buses to Port Hardy, sailed to Hot Springs Cove, and read every west-coast author I could find.

There are definitely characters here on the west coast and Anne Cameron is one of them. Her latest work, *Daughters of Copper Woman*, is a west-coast book. Cameron combines age-old Nootka tales and modern social realism with contemporary feminism, in a highly lyrical style.

The first ten chapters are Nootka myths which have been shared with Cameron over the years. She recently said in an interview with *Room of One's Own* that "One of the reasons the native people are now sharing as much with me as they are is because they know that if it doesn't get down on paper within the next short period of time, it's gone."

I appreciate the shared stories and the traditional myth-like style Cameron develops at the beginning.

The book opens with the Nootka version of the creation theory. Copper Woman was brought to the Island by the Old Women who sacrificed their lives so that she could create. Copper Woman lives on this coast "alone with her secrets, her mysteries and her Self" until she creates herself a Snot Boy. He is an interesting and revolting character who gives Copper Woman her daughter, Mowita.

Perhaps the most fascinating of the myths developed that of Qolus, the Changeable. Qolus, the wife of Thunderbird, falls in love with Mowita and then changes form to descend to earth to become the first man. I find that creation theory very refreshing after years of Catholic teaching that God made man first as an image of Himself.

The children of Quolus and Mowita disperse in four directions and "from them all the people of the world" came forward. Central to these first chapters is the unfolding of the Society of Women. Beginning with Copper Woman who taught her daughters the secrets, the sequence moves on to the character of Old Woman, "who is watching. . . is guarding, and with her all things are possible." Within the Society of Women "some are born, some come in search, and if they Know they are welcomed. . . ." This society knows neither age restrictions nor those of wealth or social status. This Society of Women is the foundation of the entire book. Although the changes that were brought about in the

native culture were severe, this society exists today; it is Cameron's privilege to celebrate it in print.

In the first section of the book, Cameron captures in print the visual impact of the west coast of the Island. The following paragraph has been stamped on my mind: "on a coast dominated by rock and cliff, where mountains spring from the sea and rivers run unchecked through deepcut channels, on a coast where even in warm weather the ocean is cold and human life cannot long survive, where the water is unfathomably deep, on a coast bathed in the beauty of a harsh and stark reality. . ."

"And then the world turned upside down" with the coming of the white man. From a woman's point of view, the transformation that took place was overwhelming. Not only was there the liquor and the sickness, but the European priests claimed the "Society of Women was a society of witches." When the female children were sent away to schools, the educational ways that had been developed by the women were undermined. When the children returned, all the spirit and strength had been taken from them. In this manner, the Women's Society was battered. In fact, in less than a generation, the white men had shattered a strong female culture.

The remnants of those overwhelming changes are visible in the 1980s, especially in native childcare. Cameron has given us a heartening view of how a culture raised its

children. "The education of all girl children was the duty of the members of the Women's Society. They taught with jokes and with songs, with legends and with examples. . . ." The girls were taught about pregnancy and childcare and respect for their bodily functions. All orphans were the responsibility of all people, especially those who were better off. Because everyone tried to make the orphan feel wanted, often the orphan was in a favourable position of wealth and status.

But today native children are taken away from their homes because families are deemed unfit. Recently, native children in Manitoba were sent to the United States for adoption. Not only did the white man decimate the native population but he also destroyed a strong matriarchy and the relationship of mother to child.

*Daughters of Copper Woman*, written from a woman's viewpoint, tells strong women-oriented tales and pointedly crosses the border into contemporary feminism. Those of us who came to feminism since the early sixties will applaud and find strength in the Warrior Women. I find the concepts from the Nootka tale relevant today. Like the Warrior Women, women still must "recognize the face of the enemy and (be) prepared to do whatever (is) necessary to defeat it."

In the last chapter, Granny, who has been the modern-day storyteller, sums up aptly when she says, "This stuff is for women."

### Teenage Mothers/ Teenage Fathers,

Anne Ross, Personal Library,  
1982, pp. 128, paperback, \$8.95.

*Sybil Shack*

Anne Ross is a woman with a mission. She fulfills that mission as long-time executive director of the Mount Carmel Clinic in Winnipeg, which serves a large clientele in the city's multi-ethnic core. Her work in the clinic provided her with the material for *Teenage Mothers/Teenage Fathers*, a book prompted by her "many encounters with the devastating effects of teenage pregnancy and parenting." The stories she tells to illustrate her theme are real and the characters come alive in the telling. Their predicaments cannot help but move the reader.

The blurb on the back cover says that the book "is aimed at teenagers, parents, teachers and every concerned citizen." But because Ross writes as one might speak, her style tends to confuse the reader's perception of her target. At times I was not quite sure whether I was being exhorted as a pregnant teenager or addressed as a concerned citizen. Paragraphs like these in chapter 18 are not uncommon:

. . . Millions of such youngsters become mothers. And unless

something positive is done to help these youngsters and their children society will reap the whirlwind.

We have seen the hazards a pregnant teenager faces both during and after pregnancy. In order to minimize the dangers you need proper medical care. . . . See a doctor as soon as you realize you are pregnant.

The first paragraph seems aimed at the reader as a concerned citizen or at least as an adult. The *we* of the second paragraph embraces reader, writer, and pregnant teenager, while the last sentence speaks directly to the teenager. A good editor would have helped the writer establish consistency of style and point of view.

Further, the title, while eye-catching, is misleading. Only 4 of 128 pages and another passing reference deal with the teenage father. The proportion is equitable respective to the responsibility of the teenage parents for the care of their child, but if one of the purposes of the book is to give help to the young male parent, that purpose is not served. Though the material in the book should be required reading for boys, not many of them, initially attracted by the title, are likely to look much beyond the illustrations of contraceptive devices when all but one of the cases presented are of girls.

So much for fault-finding.

Ross writes warmly and convincingly, with an ear for dialogue. Her

book carries a message that is not new but that obviously has not been received and acted upon: there are too many teenage pregnancies; the numbers are increasing as the average age of the young mothers-to-be is decreasing; the problem has to be addressed and sensible, realistic solutions supplied; above all, the children of teenage mothers always suffer and often grow up to create problems in their turn.

The seemingly sophisticated teenager is basically ignorant about sex. In spite of the apparent openness of our society on sexual matters, teenagers receive little information of the kind they need — direct, accurate, and personal. Adults are ambivalent about providing this kind of information. The media, especially television, send contradictory messages about the acceptability and meaning of various types of conduct and give no useful instruction. This book, while it reflects the author's biases, does try to explain the menstrual cycle, the reproductive process, and the various methods of birth control, their advantages and drawbacks. It is questionable, however, how well young girls, many of them without previous knowledge and poor readers to boot, can understand the diagrams and accompanying text without help.

Ross deals adequately with the hazards of pregnancy for the very young and the dangers that lie in wait for mother and child if prenatal information and care are not available. So Ross urges the preven-

tion of teenage motherhood through early education about sexuality, through making contraceptive information and devices available to teenagers on request. She points out rightly that supplying accurate information does not encourage sexual activity while it can prevent undesirable and dangerous pregnancies. If such pregnancies do occur, there should, she says, be the option of early abortion.

Some of the sensible solutions the writer outlines for the future are unfortunately unlikely to be adopted, partly because of economic constraints, partly because of the deep-seated, often unacknowledged feelings toward "erring" girls. It would be good, for example, if every pregnant teenage could be assigned a health worker "to serve as coach during labour and delivery and as a knowledgeable friend throughout pregnancy." It would be good if, as Ross suggests, special apartments could be built in which pregnant teenagers and single teenage mothers could live, apartments with built-in daycare facilities and education in childcare and home management; some nurseries should accommodate children overnight for mothers who work shifts or cannot care for children on their own; there should be a five-year follow-up program that includes birth-control instruction and medical and nutritional counselling, especially since far too many teenagers now have more than one pregnancy each.

Some of Ross's suggestions could

be carried out through a realignment of currently available resources, through greater cooperation among various health agencies and professions, and greater government support for adolescent pregnancy programs. A co-ordinating body of doctors, public-health workers, nutritionists, social scientists, educators, and representatives of agencies and clinics working with teenagers could be established to educate the public on prevention of pregnancies, care of pregnant teenagers, responsibilities of parenthood, and the pros and cons of adoption, as well as adolescent sexuality.

In summing up her recommendations Ross writes:

Through these programs and services it would be possible to reduce the number of teen pregnancies. Through proper prenatal care, we would greatly reduce the number of problem-ridden, low-birth-weight infants being born to teen mothers. With comprehensive programs for single mothers the future for both the children and their mothers will be brighter and the long-term burden placed on society will be lessened.

It is encouraging that Ross, despite her long years of coping with authorities seemingly indifferent to her concerns, is still so optimistic. She believes that the future *will* be brighter and the burden on society *will* be lessened. This reader of her book hopes her optimism is justified.

### Teenage Romance or How to Die of Embarrassment,

Delia Ephron, The Viking Press,  
1981, pp. 109, \$10.95 hardcover.

*Lilian Rukas*

Remember the days when our biggest problems were hiding a pimple, avoiding smiles because of braces, and finding a good spot for your diary away from Mother's prying eyes? I do, and to me, growing up was analogous to dissecting frogs in science class. I did it but I do not know how — and if I thought about it I would throw up.

We repress the whole business of being a teen for good reason. It is a time of insecurity, self-consciousness, fear, doubt, and guilt — loads of it. Delia Ephron's book made me laugh for sure, but I laughed with an ache in my heart. As a famous psychoanalyst once pointed out, laughter is a release from tension and the amount of laughter is related to the degree of repression. After we have "died" many times from embarrassment, we learn to deal with it through laughter.

*Teenage Romance* is written like a "how-to" manual for teenagers, with chapters that include: How to Attend a Slumber Party; How to Have a Crush; How to Talk to Your Mother; How to Go Out on a Date; How to Worry. With the inclusion

of boys' as well as the girls' stories we find (lo and behold) that boys suffer from the same insecurities, fears, doubts, and bouts of self-consciousness. Given my generation's notorious lack of real communication, I am not surprised that I never realized this while I was growing up. My problems, as far as I could tell, were the result of my own special brand of inadequacies.

What does surprise me, however, is that today's teenagers are still fumbling and groping their way towards adulthood much as the previous generation. Why, I ask naively, in an era that prides itself on its information networks, open education policies, self-help books by the score, and group encounters of every sort, do we have to watch our youngsters suffer needless anxieties in the process of discovering selfhood? Adolescence is a trying time under the best of circumstances yet our society compounds the problem by sending out a constant barrage of confusing and conflicting messages. But the bottom line (and what teenagers plainly see) is our preoccupation with image. Our ideology says it is what is on the outside that counts. No wonder teens spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about their appearance. No wonder they die of embarrassment when they fall short of the unspoken ideal.

Pimple panic was prevalent in my youth, except that I tried to deal with it by growing my bangs down to my upper lip. Ephron offers such advice as, "While casually playing with hair, pull strand across at pimple level. Secure hair in

mouth.'" Boys have an added advantage in that they can apply a Band-Aid to the offending pimple and claim they cut themselves shaving. Of course, we girls had the added worry about breasts (usually the lack of) and I think most of us will relate to an episode at the beach. Ephron writes: "Lower blanket onto sand. Flop down on your stomach and rest weight on elbows. Look down to check cleavage — the Kleenexes are showing."

Modern teens are still getting the message that it is not good enough to be themselves. With its emphasis on image, our society erodes self-confidence and, with it, our creativity and flexibility. As adults we must struggle all over again to free ourselves from the hang-ups we acquired in our teens. The sad part is that many of us never do.

Ephron has done a marvellous job of capturing the teenage perspective, at least for the middle-class teenagers of North America. What most of us have succeeded in forgetting, and what this book points out, is that it is not easy being a teenager and our forgetting our own growing pains accounts for that ever-present generation gap. Ephron's chapter on "How to Talk to Your Mother" so typifies the misunderstandings between teen and parent that I felt an old knot in my stomach tighten. With all our modern expertise on communication techniques, we are still focussing on facts instead of dealing with feelings. Facts are defined by the prevailing ideology. Feelings are everpresent in the human experience, the only frame of reference that remains constant

with each succeeding generation. When are we going to set priorities that acknowledge human needs? When are we going to learn how really to communicate?

Of course, what is a teenage manual without sex? Sex is still one of the most bewildering areas for a teenager in our society, caught as she/he is in that ambiguous area between child and adult, in possession of a full-fledged sex drive with no acceptable outlets. What is an essential and healthy part of every teen's life is virtually denied by the establishment, perhaps in the misguided hope that if it is not acknowledged it will somehow go away.

Teens pick up remarkably early that parents are uncomfortable with sexuality and consequently take the

behind-the-barn approach; they rely on friends' experiences for enlightenment or, worse, just hope for the best. Here is an entry from a teen's diary: "A very important issue is weighing on my mind. Can a person get pregnant without doing it? Specifically, can sperms travel through underpants? If you get them on your hand and touch yourself, can they swim up you? When two people lie close together, can they seep through from one to the other? What about if you swallow them?"

There is an epidemic of teenage single parents in our decade. We can tell our children that we have 650 muscles in our body, about 206 bones, over 100 joints, 60,000 miles of arteries, veins, and capillaries, thirteen billion nerve cells but somehow, when it comes to talking

about emotions and sexual attractions, we are at a loss for words.

Books like *Teenage Romance* or *How to Die of Embarrassment* help us to keep in touch with the younger generation. What can we do to alleviate the painful transition to adulthood? Granted, there is an evolutionary purpose for personal and social disequilibrium. It provides the impetus for change, the need to examine and redefine roles and relationships in an effort to create a healthier society. But true revolutions occur from the inside out. Instead of dissecting frogs (yuch!) let us concentrate on baring our souls to one another, sharing those feelings that are common to each and every one of us. I guarantee we could learn a lot more about love and life and forego a lot of unnecessary embarrassment.

## GIRLS TURNING WOMEN

*Frances Davis*

lifting a single foot among rushes  
listening for leap of enemy or prey  
like shorebirds carving naked silhouettes  
against the less courageous outlines of the day  
girls turning women hood their eyes to see  
where bubbles rise from secrets in the cells  
and where the deeps lie waiting for the chill  
reminders of the savagery of selves

here at the estuary of one life  
stalking the cold beaches of another  
fine fierce and terrible their pride and greed  
pressing their thirsty lips to time, their lover

shattering expectation as they fly  
all mystery and death-defying cry