

rescues the books that have been fading at the back of library stacks, the texts of feminists who have tackled the issues and have been either villified or ignored for doing so. There have been two cover-ups, one of the long history of gynocide and another of the work that wanted to expose it and Daly has blown both cover-ups sky high.

Perhaps because the subject matter is too close to home both culturally and temporally, Daly's section on gynecology does not work as well. What distinguishes gynecological practice from the other sado-rituals is that none of the others' proponents could argue so loudly that the practices were good for us. What further complicates matters is that while practitioners have performed unnecessary radical mastectomies (and no doubt gleefully watched Happy Rockefeller and Betty Ford do the promotional footwork for them) and while gynecologists have zealously cut away our genitalia at the slightest hint of a minor malfunction, the lives of thousands of women *have* been saved by gynecological medical practice.

This is not to say that the excesses of gynecology ought not to be exposed, or that there are not dangerous repercussions to the physician as God syndrome. But Daly doesn't focus clearly enough. She remarks that 'experimentation is part of the routine procedure of gynecology' while failing to mention that experimentation is part of the routine of all medical practice (witness the medical establishment's dilemma over whether to lionize Christian Barnard or to censure his ambitious surgical risks). Of all the experiments, Daly chooses to examine the DES Tests which, in a rare hysterical lapse, she calls the DES Massacre. Since the DES data is just filtering in, her case is not very strong and it is curious that Daly chooses to go after the DES syndrome and to give short shrift to what could be one of this century's more grizzly excesses—the megadoses of estrogen consumed by women taking oral contraceptives.

Elements of the sado-ritual syndrome can be found in the gynecology establishment, with nurses playing the role of token torturers, but Daly's description of the gynecology conspiracy is somewhat over-stated. Unfortunately Daly doesn't stop there but leaps headlong into a comparison between gynecological practice and Nazi medical murders; one begins to regret Daly's need to stretch a point that was shaky from the start. My own regrets were exaggerated by the fact that up to this point I had been sailing along, certain that I was finally reading that illusive definitive feminist text. Daly *is* splendid but, and this is written with a mixture of sadness and relief; perfect, she is not.

From the female condition, Daly moves to the feminist condition. This third passage is more visionary than analytical and the loose structure gives added meaning to Daly's definitions of spinning and weaving. The last passage is not the end of the journey but a 'defining theme' that keeps us in tune with all the passages. After emerging from the demoralizing second passage we are urged to 'spook back', 'unpaint' and get to the business of Gyn/Ecological process. The section entitled 'The Fire of Female Friendship' in particular, helps to give us the terms that can make friendships between women radical and creative. Daly doesn't deal with the problems and pain of 'sparking' but this third passage is meant to inspire, not to offer a blueprint for revolution. One of the reasons why the second passage is so moving is because the information Daly harnesses is hard fact. Her task of rendering the ecstasy of a third passage that is vision and not historical event is much more difficult. As a result, this last third of *Gyn/Ecology* is more fragmented than the rest of the book. Daly has so much to say and charges from theme to theme so swiftly that one wishes she would stay in one place for a while longer so that we could catch our breath.

But most of the time Daly is in control and her account of the 'Disassembly of Exorcism' in which Revolting Hags and crones unravel the seven deadly demons could stand on its own as a prose poem dedicated to our power.

Gyn/Ecology is a difficult book. For one thing, it contains big words. Daly warns us of this in a footnote in which she states with characteristic concision that 'Amazing Amazons have no patience for downward mobility of the mind.' As you can see, *Gyn/Ecology's* footnotes are as rewarding as the text and they should be read just as carefully: *Gyn/Ecology* is amazingly dense, brimming with ideas. Consider the fact that during her discussion of Chinese footbinding, Daly dispenses with Chinese socialism handily — and in a footnote. Daly is good for ten ideas per page and that doesn't include the words that she can pull out of her bag of tricks at any time, each of which requires a slight pause, just to think it over.

It is an extremist book, radical, challenging while at the same time inviting readers to join the ranks of spinsters and hags who can live, love and create ourselves, and pushing us towards a feminist vision which Daly makes virtually irresistible. Scattered among the 'Women and Everything' books that have been written by feminists, we have seen only the occasional foray (Juliette Mitchell's and Shulamith Firestone's come to mind) into the realm of honest-to-goodness overview. This is not surprising considering the amount of material one would have to cram into a single book in order to depict patriarchy. It isn't easy. Add feminist vision to a description of patriarchy — and do it all with clarity — and you have something awesome. And Mary Daly's book is awesome. Just how much farther beyond *Gyn/Ecology* anyone can possibly go remains to be seen. I have a feeling, though, that Daly will find some way to continue the journey.

This review also appeared in *Emergency Librarian*, V.6, no. 2.

Women and Aging: A Report on the Rest of Our Lives, Louise Dulude, Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Box 1541 Ottawa K1P 5R5. Free.

Ella Manuel

This report is an important contribution to Canadian Women's Studies. It is a meticulously documented study on the condition and the expectations of 'a large group of highly deserving, hard-working and dedicated wives and mothers who are one of the most destitute classes of citizens in Canada.'

It asks how such a situation could have come about. It answers by examining pension plans, social assistance, old age pensions, present living conditions and the choices available to old women who wish to change them.

It states: 'Canada's old women have not yet started to be politicized . . . nor have old women's interests been properly represented by the senior citizens' organizations that presently exist in Canada.' It points the way to improving the lot of old women, not revolutionary but requiring the combined efforts of all women, which all of us should consider as part of our on-going struggle.

Editorial note.

A group of my friends decided to get together and read some feminists books. The first text suggested was *Fat is a Feminist Issue* — and frankly I didn't believe it was. After three fiery meetings I knew I was wrong. And when CWS/CF received two reviews of this same book I knew I was really wrong. This is a 'burning issue' for women! So the editorial board decided to print both of them. ENJOY.

Fat is a Feminist Issue, Susie Orbach,
Paddington Press, 1978, pp. 193, hardcover \$11.25.

Judith Posner

A few years ago I came across a fascinating article in the Journal of Radical Therapy called *The Fat Story or Eating as an Act of Revolution*. The authors of the piece (Cathy Fat-woman and Deborah Berson) linked obesity to women's lib, arguing that fat women have opted out from the traditional weak and passive feminine role. In letting their bodies go they assert their physical territoriality and thumb their nose at the slim femme fatale convention. Around the same time that this article appeared the mass media was reflecting increasing interest in a strange and controversial disease called anorexia nervosa, a psychosocial malfunctioning of the appetite which affects girls around the time of puberty. Anorexics starve themselves in an effort to become unbearably thin. It is within this context that Susie Orbach's recent publication should be viewed.

Orbach, a feminist psychotherapist and women's studies lecturer describes herself as first and foremost an X compulsive eater. Her book reflects her egocentric interest. It rings true. All women who have ever questioned their figures should be able to identify with it. And while the book is too brief, a little repetitive and lacks depth from a theoretical or conceptual point of view it definitely offers a new model for looking at weight problems, one which Orbach calls demystifying. In the final analysis, however, her book will be more useful to those with pragmatic rather than academic interest in weight loss although it is no mere diet guide.

In fact Orbach's major theoretical contention is that all existing diet approaches are inadequate due to their failure to redefine one's relationship to food. Existing diet programs actually exacerbate one's symbolic attachment to food by treating foods as good and bad, legal or illegal, treats, rewards, etc. Therefore diets accentuate one's food obsession as anyone who has ever dieted can tell you (all you *do* is think and talk about food all day long — boring yourself and your friends). Thus, diet plans and workshops fail to help the individual alter her relationship to food in a substantial way, accounting for the high rate of recidivism among fat people.

... the compulsive dieter knows two realities; compulsive eating (out of control) or compulsive dieting (imprisonment). p. 106

Orbach contends that the only way out of this neurotic food dichotomy is through examination of the roots of the problem — and the roots are not surprisingly societal and sex role related.

It is the thesis of this book that compulsive eating in women is a response to their social position. As such, it will continue to be an issue in women's lives as long as social conditions exist which create and encourage inequality of the sexes. Any treatment for overweight women must address this fact. p. 165

Some of her contentions include the notions that gaining

weight is rejection of the female role; that women's sex object role in our culture causes such severe self-consciousness that women cannot help being fixated on their bodies and its nutrients; and that the role of wife and mother necessitates so much nurturing of others that one way in which women learn to cope with daily life is through extreme self nurturing in the form of food intake. While Orbach's arguments are convincing one cannot help but wonder about male obesity which she never mentions and which is likely more statistically prevalent than female obesity. We can assume however, that its causes are quite different, reflecting discrepant sex-role socialization problems.

In addition to the issue of the psycho-social roots of over-eating, Orbach offers a variety of therapy techniques that can be used in breaking the neurotic food chain. For example, she reiterates what obesity experts have told us for years, that fat people seldom experience hunger because they are eating for other reasons and tend to preempt this primary experience. Gradually then, they lose touch with their own physiological sensations and desires. Since diets tend to dictate when and what you eat they don't alleviate the problem. So Orbach suggests non-structured anti-diet eating which enables the individual to get in touch with her desires and learn to exercise discrimination. She also suggests doing therapeutic work on a variety of 'guided fantasies' — imaginary situations involving food into which members are supposed to project themselves. The main purpose of the therapy is to demonstrate to women that they have an interest in being fat. Until they recognize this fact all attempts at permanent weight loss are doomed to failure.

While the book offers many useful suggestions in the practical realm, it is deficient in taking into account existing relevant material. For example, Orbach only gives brief discussion to the topic of anorexia nervosa which is very centrally relevant to the notion of fat as a feminist issue. For those who would like to look more deeply into the issue of women's body image and culture they will not find a wide range of bibliographic materials available here. (You would do well to consult recent books on anorexia nervosa in this regard). But if you want to have your interest nudged on some fresh feminist insights or you're just interested in losing weight, Orbach's book is well worth the cost (10.57 at Toronto Women's Bookstore). Less than a spaghetti dinner at *George's*!

Fat is a Feminist Issue, Susie Orbach, Paddington Press, New York, 1978, pp. 193, hardcover \$11.25.

Greta Hofmann Nemiroff

Susie Orbach sees fat as an issue faced by many women and as one which calls for a feminist interpretation. My own observation has also indicated to me that obesity is a condition experienced by many feminists. Over the ten or so years that I have been actively involved in Women's Studies and women's issues, I have gained about forty-five pounds. Not that I was emaciated before, let us say that I was always somewhat ample and cannot recall a time this side of childhood when the Standard Life Insurance Company would have been totally enchanted by my height/weight index. In the 'movement' however, I was not alone. Many of us were overweight and if we weren't, as a group we were not over-solicitous about our general appearance. Concomitantly I—as were so many other women of my vintage—was rising in a managerial hierarchy due primarily to the vast bureaucratic expansion of the late '60's and early '70's in Canada. We women were being asked (in small numbers, mind you) to 'fill' more important or 'weighty' jobs than we'd had before. A cursory review of upwardly mobile female contem-