

what better represented in the university than in government, and despite her stated belief that women's issues won't be dealt with adequately until women are in government, she nevertheless concludes that we must look to government intervention to force an improvement in women's status on campus.

Her proposals to effect improvements in the university are thorough and could be effective. Upgrading of part-time courses, recruiting and counselling directed specifically to women, and 'redirection' courses, particularly in maths and sciences (thus allowing women to move into 'male' fields without high-school preparation), would all lead to some improvement in the outlook for women. One can only hope that women currently involved in the university will take a slightly more optimistic view of the possibilities than Vickers does, and begin themselves to implement some of these changes and lobby for others.

Women: a Psychological Perspective, Elaine Donelson and Jeanne E. Gullahorn, eds., Toronto, Wiley, 1977, pp. 342, hardcover \$13.95.

About Men, Phyllis Chesler, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978, pp. 281, hardcover \$13.95.

Merle Wallis Bolick

I become increasingly irritated by women who say, 'Oh, I've gone beyond women's liberation now; I'm into human liberation,' as if the two were mutually exclusive. Often we hear these women speaking sympathetically of the hardships imposed upon men by their sex role. After their professed 'feminist' stage, they 'advance' toward knowing their place, toward comforting and worrying about (male) children.

My heart bleeds for tyrants, hereditary or otherwise. It was therefore with much trepidation that I began to read *About Men*, the beautiful, lively, and daring new book by Phyllis Chesler, author of *Women and Madness* and *Women, Money and Power*. I also wondered if such a work merited notice in a Women's Studies journal, since we already spend too much time in Women's Studies discussing men and male attitudes. But Chesler's new book forms part of a consistent corpus that deserves a place on any Women's Studies bibliography.

Paradoxically, a major focus of *About Men* is women, for Chesler's concern is 'with displacements of male-male rage and grief onto safe targets, namely away from stronger men, away from envied and feared men, and onto weaker men, onto children, onto women.' It is these displacements, argues Chesler, that have led to wars, pollution, slavery, and mass psychoses of all kinds, in the service of the male religion of death. Chesler seems to be saying what the most cynical of us have always suspected: that women are no more hated for themselves than loved for themselves, but act rather as pawns in the deadly male 'homosexual' power game known as patriarchy. Women are not important enough to be hated for themselves. Rather, we are hated as mothers (mothers-in-law, aging wives), for failing to protect our sons (husbands) from the violence of their fathers (bosses, political leaders). Male bonding is a way of identifying with, and thus earning rewards from, father-figures.

Alternatively, Chesler posits womb-envy as the basis of men's resentments of women. How we can be at once envied and despised is a problem for others to deal with, and I sometimes think that womb-envy, while plausible, is a hypothesis based on female wishful thinking.

The main strengths of *About Men*, and its major weakness, lie in Chesler's mytho-poetic and visual account of the interactions

of men with men, and men with women. The implications of intended filicide and unintentional parricide in the Oedipus myth are inescapable. However, it is indeed a rare Father who sacrifices His Son in western mythology. Isaac is spared and Oedipus escapes with a limp, whereas both Jephtha and Agamemnon sacrifice daughters for the war effort, and in patrilineal societies female infanticide is much more common than male infanticide.

The Bible [says Chesler] is haunted by the ghost of a missing son, a firstborn son, a most-beloved son: a murdered son.

This is so only because the lives of sons were already more highly valued than those of daughters. While Chesler is right in rejecting the notion that male hatred and contempt are based on actual qualities possessed by women, she has not gone deep enough. Women are 'safe' targets for transferred rage because at some point in prehistory they were deprived of the real powers they held in matrilineal society. Chesler's model is thus weakened by her assumption that the power structure has always been as it now is.

Because of its non-linear approach, *About Men* may not break through to the very men and women who most need to read it. Perhaps they will prefer the more traditional psychoanalytic section, with its excerpts from interviews.

Women: a Psychological Perspective suffers from precisely the opposite approach. Set up in bland textbook format, this book is relentlessly left-brained in its effort to undo illogical and emotional stereotypes of women, and to promote androgyny. There are elaborate apologies for any statements that might be viewed as political. Anger, radicalism, emotion, are not part of the method. Significantly, the only reference to Chesler's *Women and Madness* is to the statistical basis of her argument, not to the impassioned argument itself. Yet *Women: a Psychological Perspective* ought to be read by everyone.

Women is not as meticulously edited, designed, and proofread as *About Men*. It is riddled with typographical errors, and its editors cannot decide from sentence to sentence whether 'data' is a singular or plural noun. But it is full of distillations and reinterpretations of the most up-to-date research on female psychology. For example, the editors suggest in one chapter that famous studies proving women's 'fear of success' actually reveal that women, perhaps realistically, have low expectations of success. For such insights and for its bibliography, the Donelson and Gullahorn should become a standard first-year text.

Rather than being more limited in scope than the average 'human' psychology text, Donelson and Gullahorn is in fact much more comprehensive. It appears to be impossible to provide a psychobiological profile of women without providing background information on males, especially since the data on males are much more complete. Many times the contributors have had to report the inadequacy or nonexistence of findings on vital matters of female development.

Generally, however, the main fault of this work is its very scope. I wonder if yet another four-page table on the relative advantages and disadvantages of the common methods of birth control is necessary here, although I applaud efforts to get this information into the hands and heads of all young women and men. Then too, there are overstatements of the obvious:

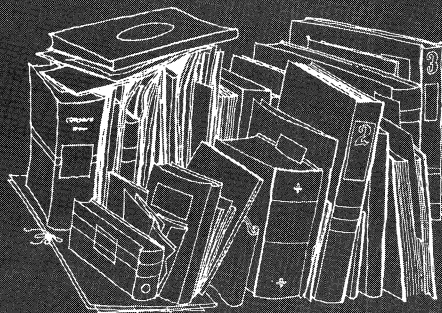
Because lesbian women usually do not have husbands to provide financial support, losing their jobs [through 'coming out'] could be economically disastrous.

The real point to be made is that women's salaries are so low that lesbians (like all single women) tend to live perpetually on the brink of financial disaster if they forgo male support.

Women: a Psychological Perspective seems dedicated to the Quixotic task of fighting unreason with reason. Since we are so accustomed to the brainless, circular, anatomy-is-destiny arguments all around us, to read it is to emerge into a healthy

atmosphere. But there is nothing here to make the comfortable liberal squirm. By contrast, Chesler views the breaking of taboos as an essential part of her enquiry. 'Perspective' will be needed in the future. A battering-ram may be more appropriate now.

Des Écrivaines à connaître: des livres à lire



1. *Antre*, Madelaine Gagnon, Les herbes rouges, Montréal, juillet-août 1978, 52 pages, \$2.00.

Michèle Mailhot

Sur un coin de table, près des vêtements et des livres empilés pour un autre déménagement, l'*Antre* de Madeleine Gagnon. Tout en continuant de ramasser mes affaires, je vais chercher des phrases d'accompagnement dans le livre. Elles suffisent à redonner un sens à mes gestes, à effacer la fatigue, le doute, et le ridicule aussi, de partir encore.

Pas de modèle pour qui cherche ce qui ne fut jamais trouvé.

Quitter mon antre que je voulais ancre et qui n'est qu'un entre deux sorties finalement. Malgré tout, l'espoir:

Tout est possible, même moi, m'appropriant ma plus lointaine étrangeté, dont je n'aurais voulu aucune barrière. Songes pourpres, yeux rauques de corbeaux tout autour, stridente taupe, vautours écarlates, tissus de mes craintes archaïques, ils me prêchaient la métaphore logique et les images cohérentes. Je m'abreuvais de leurs non-sens aux portes des folies admises et des meurtres absous, méprisant mes propres entendements de déroute, ma vertigineuse raison d'être, comme s'il eût fallu ajuster tous mes sens au langage boueux.

Mon propre entendement de déroute. . . . Saurai-je jamais le transcrire, réinventer mon propre langage quand vivre s'impose avec cette urgence?

Emergent des mots signifiants, jamais appris nulle part. Ce sont les mots de tous les jours.

Ce jour s'écrit en gestes perdus que Madeleine Gagnon, elle, réinscrit dans la vie, dans l'amour, dans la littérature avec un tel bonheur que ce bonheur devient mien. Elle parle pour nous toutes 'les prolétaires ménagères'.

Ce qu'autour ils nommèrent délire m'apprit le danger du silence. Ce vertige de l'entre-nous de nos sevrages forcés. Nos servages à ne pas le dire. Nos mots tombés du ventre. Notre apparent désordre. Nos paroles enfin signifiantes. Notre oasis rouge.

Les poèmes se posent en haut des pages bleues comme des nuages lourds, pleins, menaçants comme tendresse et colère emmêlées, retenues. Le cri reste sourd, il ne perce pas encore le ventre qui berce encore, c'est si dur d'accoucher de soi quand on naît l'enfant de femme muette. C'est ici, dans ce réseau de cordons mère-fille-mère, que la parole de M. Gagnon trouve ses plus fortes pulsions. C'est beau, émouvant surtout. Je reprendrai le livre demain, ailleurs, dans un autre antre. Je crois, Oh! la force de la vie, que mes plus beaux souvenirs sont devant. J'achève de ficeler mes paquets, je souris, je sors avec la dernière merveilleuse page:

j'ai décoré de petits oeufs de chocolat, cousu des insignes sur la chemise de christophe, porté la violette africaine et le bégonia dans la meilleure fenêtre, à l'est, pour eux, descendu la rue rachel entre saint-laurent et parc lafontaine, il pleuvait fort la dernière neige de l'année, les flaqes me rappelaient tous ces avants pâques de mon enfance où enfin nous pouvions chausser nos bottes radeaux et manger du bonbon, je me trouvais parfaitement heureuse soudain et m'entendais dire toute cette journée.

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2. *La Chrysalide, Chroniques algériennes*, Aicha Lemsine, Editions des femmes, Paris, 1978.

Nadia Ghalem

Aicha Lemsine raconte au jour le jour la vie d'une femme algérienne que le destin ou les décisions des autres ballottent au gré des événements familiaux; mariage décidé par les parents, naissance de l'enfant qui sera unique, partage de l'époux avec des femmes plus jeunes ou plus 'fécondes'. L'héroïne de *La Chrysalide*, Khadidja, traverse le récit au milieu d'une fresque pittoresque et colorée de personnages passionnés, curieux, déroutants et profondément humains; tout ce monde évolue; toile de fond l'atmosphère coloniale, l'agitation sociale qui laisse prévoir ce que l'on appellera d'abord 'les événements' puis 'la guerre d'Algérie' et qui deviendra 'la révolution algérienne'.