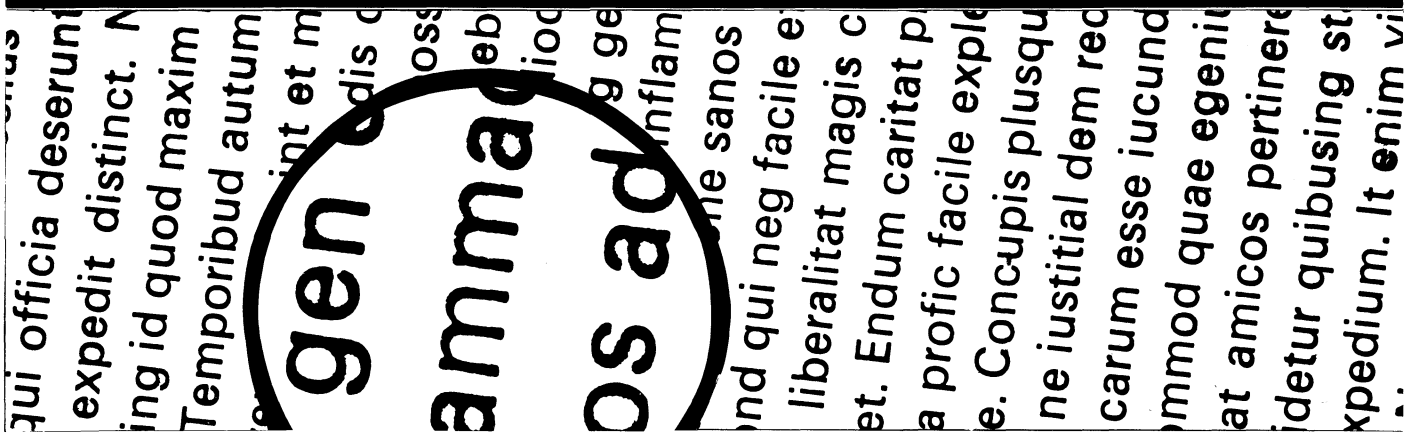
Book Review



Right Hand Left Hand, Dorothy Livesay, Press Porcepic Ltd., Erin, Ont., 1978, pp. 280, paperback $6.95.

Shirley Davy

This book has something for everyone. Using a loose autobiographical framework, liberally punctuated with poetry, prose, letters, and political writings, Livesay succeeds in conveying something of the flavour of the era she writes about. The work is, as the cover promises, 'a true life of the thirties: Paris, Montreal, Toronto, the West and Vancouver. Love, politics, the depression and feminism'. Her three major themes—feminism, socialism, and a theory of art—are woven together in such a way that the book may be approached at many levels, from light reading to a deeper consideration of her social and literary theory.

The author's experiences as a young upper-middle-class woman 'finding herself' demonstrate the influence of older women on younger ones, and remind us that there was a strong and relatively effective feminist movement in those pre-war years. Many young people of the period were participating in a quiet rebellion against received opinion in such areas as sexuality, religion, and politics.

Livesay's own leftist politics seemed to grow out of a humanitarian instinct for fair play and an educated insight into the nature of social problems. Her commitment to change, however, was neither dogmatic nor academic. After completing her education in the general arts the author took a diploma in social work and gave up what promised to be a successful career in journalism to work with families who had been materially, psychologically, and socially displaced by the Depression. Neither did her affiliation with leftist movements of the thirties blind her to the fact that feminist issues were of low priority even in the more radical political organizations. 'In theory', she writes, 'we were free and equal as comrades on the left. In practice, our right hand was tied to the kitchen sink!'

Art, for Livesay, is an expression of those social conditions that form the material and psychological environment of the artist. The juxtaposition of poetry and prose (her own and others') with autobiographical material attempts to demonstrate such a dialectic between life and art. For that reason alone *Right Hand Left Hand* will undoubtedly make its mark in Canadian letters.

A random sampling of the subject-matter illustrates the rich diversity of Livesay's concerns: the national women's anti-war movement, anti-semitism in Montreal, attempts to organize white-collar workers, the situation of Negroes in New Jersey, the differences between American and Canadian Marxism, and the Spanish Civil War.

In a 1967 interview, one of Livesay's long-time friends was asked if she thought the writer represented the woman's point of view. 'For me that's a rather meaningless generalization', the sensible friend responded. 'I don't know what *the* woman's point of view is'. Livesay's view of the thirties is sensitive, intelligent, amusing sometimes, and sometimes just a little bitter. She avoids the temptation to romanticize — unlike her editor, David Arnason, who in his introduction presents the period as a sort of leftist Paradise Lost. Arnason's little essay is unnecessary to the work and only detracts. That aside, *Right Hand Left Hand* has lots to offer a broad range of readers.

World Literature Written in English, Vol. 17, No. 1 (April 1978), Special Issue: *Women Writers of the Commonwealth,* eds. Wendy Keitner and Lois C. Gottlieb.

Johanna Stuckey

In their Foreword, the editors of *Women Writers of the Commonwealth* (WLWE 17, No.1, April 1978) state their 'conviction that more women were writing than they either knew about or could readily uncover'. The material they have collected indeed corroborates their conviction. Their stated aim is 'to explore the variety and quality of contributions by women writers of the Commonwealth both from well known and little known national literary traditions'. In accomplishing this aim — and they have indeed accomplished it — the editors have provided three extremely useful bibliographies — of Contemporary Women Poets of Australia, of English Canadian Drama Written by Women, and of Women Writers in the Eastern Caribbean. In addition, they have gathered together many articles on Commonwealth women writers and their work, women from Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Hong Kong, India, New Zealand, the Pacific, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies. The collection

includes essays on well-known women writers of the Commonwealth, such as Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Flora Nwa pa, Marian Engel, Joyce Carol Oates, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Han Suyin, Jean Rhys – as well as essays on the less well known; surveys of women writers of New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and the South Pacific add to the usefulness of this work. The collection on India includes an interesting article by Selma Meyerowitz on Bharati Mukherjee and the one on the West Indies a first-class account, by Clara Thomas, of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

The Canadian section contains the largest number of articles; Rota Lister's 'Interview with Carol Bolt' gives considerable insight into the playwright's origins as dramatist and her motivations; only towards the end of the article, however, does Lister ask Bolt about her heroines. Lister suggests that Bolt is 'writing about women as winners'; Bolt replies that a feminist criticized the play *Shelter* because 'she didn't like the woman's flaws'. 'I don't like writing plays about gods and goddesses', Bolt says. 'I'm more interested in the characters' flaws'. Unsatisfied, I could have wished that Ms Lister had pursued Bolt's views of women more thoroughly than this, but she was clearly interested in Bolt as dramatist, perhaps wisely. Patricia Morley's 'Engel, Wiseman, Laurence: Women Writers, Women' Lives' is, on the other hand, a highly satisfactory analysis not only of the writers' work but also of their depiction of 'women's lives, their fears and hopes and needs, their strengths and weaknesses, the occupational hazards peculiar to being female'. Morley's analysis of Engel's *Bear* is, to my mind, an excellent piece of elucidatory criticism and, further, an important contribution to the theory of sexual politics, as, to be sure, is the analysis of the work of Wiseman and Laurence. 'Women writers', she comments in conclusion, 'reveal the intimate relationships among the many facets of female personality, the need for sex, but above all the need for wholeness'. Bonnie Lyon's article, ' "Neither Victims nor Executioners" in Margaret Atwood's Fiction', applies Atwood's own 'victim/victimizer' theme to her poetry and novels: 'Both *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* are about the immense difficulties of achieving the state of creative non-victim – refusing to be an executioner or a victim'. This exciting article, a good piece of literary criticism, is also a contribution to the theory of sexual politics.

In her article, 'Mr. Rochester's First Marriage: *Wide Sargasso Sea*', Clara Thomas expands the scope of her literary analysis to show the interrelationship among sexism, racism, and imperialism, a link which Jean Rhys's novel explores in depth. One or two other articles in the collection also begin the exploration of this interrelationship, for instance, Gerner's essay on Gordimer and Lessing. It is this sort of article that makes *Women Writers of the Commonwealth* of interest to the non-specialist, for it is in such analysis that such larger issues become focused and the hope, expressed by the editors in their Foreword, may find realization – that the collection 'will give impetus to further exploration of such issues as the themes common to diverse cultures especially as underscored by universal female experiences, the social and economic conditions under which women write, and the question of a female, feminine, or feminist style'. These themes are implicit in almost every essay in the collection, but only in occasional flashes of brilliant insight do they become explicit. Those occasions, however, make *Women Writers of the Commonwealth* an important addition to any library.

Indian Women and the Law in Canada: Citizens Minus, Kathleen Jamieson, Ottawa, Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1978, 108 pp, Free

Elizabeth Weir

Kathleen Jamieson's book is the result of a co-operative effort between the Indian Rights for Indian Women organization and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Its title might suggest to some women a subject of limited appeal. Such an assessment may unfortunately lead them to ignore a salient contribution to the writings available on Canadian women's issues. Although the book concentrates on the legal rights of Indian women, the issues raised by Jamieson's analysis of the treatment accorded these women are of concern to us all.

Jamieson documents the ways in which Indian women have been adversely affected through the years by discriminatory government policies and legislation. In particular, she details the unsuccessful struggle of some Indian women to have a section of the *Indian Act*, s. 12 (1)(b), struck down by the courts. This section operates to strip an Indian woman of her status and rights in the event of her marriage to a non-Indian. Jamieson approaches the current dilemma of Indian women who 'marry out' of their race by using a historical analysis, and considers not only the development of the legislation but also the social and political context from which the legislation was drawn.

The consequences of 'marrying out' are far-reaching. Under s. 12 (1)(b) an Indian woman is no longer entitled to be registered as an Indian when she marries a non-Indian. As a result of this loss of status as an Indian she can non longer live on reserve lands, nor may she retain any property rights in such land. Any children of the marriage are legislatively denied status as Indians, exiled from their people and heritage. Despite changes in marital status such as divorce or becoming a widow, the woman may still be prevented from returning to her family home. This loss of status is permanent and irrevocable unless the woman subsequently marries a man recognized as an Indian under the *Indian Act.* There is no parallel provision that applies to Indian men; they may marry outside their race without fear of repercussions. The *Indian Act* is now in the process of revision in consultation with Indian groups. However, Indian women who have lost their status by virtue of s. 12 (1)(b), Jamieson notes, are excluded from participating in this discussion.

Prohibitive restrictions on marriages by Indian women were first incorporated in legislation in 1869. The real motivation behind such legislation, Jamieson argues, was not to punish Indian women for marrying outside their race or to prevent white men from duping unsuspecting Indian women into marriage in order to gain their lands – a paternal form of protection. Although variations of this line of reasoning are still heard from time to time, she suggests that the real aim of the section was to further the government policy of assimilation of Indian peoples into the European culture, thereby effectively reducing the existing number of Indians and easing the management of reserves. Fewer Indians meant a smaller 'Indian Problem'. Jamieson contends that one of the main tenets of the assimilation theory was the view of the superiority of European culture. The reserve system, it was thought, would force a more settled way of life on the Indian, facilitating the process of 'civilizing' the 'savage'. Complete absorption of European culture by the Indian peoples was the ultimate goal. In this discussion Jamieson makes effective use of contemporary letters and reports.

But the question remains: why were Indian women and not Indian men singled out for this treatment? Jamieson feels the answer to this question lies in nineteenth-century perceptions of the role and place of women in society. The Victorian woman had no visibly autonomous social existence. Her identity was drawn through her relationship with the male, whether as wife or as daughter. The Indian woman's loss of status on 'marrying out' can then be understood as a concrete application of such thinking.

In this context, Jamieson also forcefully illustrates the devastating effect of the imposition of a patriarchal structure on Indian society. Citing recent anthropological studies which negate theories of male supremacy in Indian society, Jamieson examines evidence of a significant matriarchal structure. Women apparently held economic power as a result of thier control and allocation of food resources. In the light of these findings Jamieson points out the incongruity of recent statements made by federal government officials to the effect that the *Indian Act* merely reflects discrimination inherent in Indian culture.

In 1973, Jeanette Lavell and Yvonne Bédard, two victims of s. 12 (1)(b), brought a case before the Supreme Court of Canada which now represents one of the major decisions under the Canadian Bill of Rights. They alleged that the loss of status and consequent loss of rights specified by s. 12 (1)(b) of the *Indian Act* directly contravened the Canadian Bill of Rights passed by Parliament in 1960. Among other things, the Bill guarantees the right of individuals to equality before the law. The essence of the argument in the Lavell case was that in the application of s. 12 (1)(b) men and women clearly received different treatment under the *Indian Act.* In their reasons for judgement, the majority of the Supreme Court gave a very narrow definition to the words 'equality before the law' by interpreting this phrase to mean 'equality of treatment in the enforcement and application of the laws of Canada before law-enforcement authorities and the ordinary courts of the land'. Accordingly, the Court concluded that no such inequality of treatment was involved in s. 12 (1)(b), and thus seemed to imply that this section of the Bill related to criminal or quasi-criminal offences. No such offence was at issue in this case. The Lavell decision has had the effect of further muddying the extent of the role of the Canadian Bill of Rights in providing substantive protection against discrimination, and, more specifically, sexual discrimination.

Jamieson outlines the political intrigues and alliances provoked by the Lavell case. She shows that Indian leaders, on the one hand, regarded the *Indian Act*, however discriminatory, as a bargaining tool to be used to wrest further concessions from the government in negotiations for new legislation. On the other hand, the government feared that a decision striking out s. 12 (1)(b) might undermine the entire *Indian Act.* As a result, the Attorney General of Canada intervened in the case to make submissions on behalf of interested Indian groups who were opposed to any changes to the Act without their participation.

In conclusion, Jamieson's book amounts to a powerful indictment of past and present government policy and its failure to rectify the blatant inequities that exist for Indian women who 'marry out'. Liberal platitudes about the 'Just Society' ring hollow in light of her discussion. In spite of having to tackle the onerous task of tracing legislative development and judicial decisions, Jamieson has written an intelligent and readable account of the active discrimination, political indecision, and undisguised subterfuge that Indian women have been subjected to as a result of s. 12 (1)(b). Much work of this kind, on the relationship of women in Canada to the legal system and legislative control, remains to be done. Jamieson's effort on the position of Indian women is more than a good beginning.

Shadd: The Life and Times of Mary Shadd Cary, Jim Bearden and Linda Jean Butler, Toronto, NC Press, 1977; 233 pp. Paperback, $7.95.

Marsha Mitchell

'Listen', the book begins.

> Listen. W. E. B. DuBois, calling the roll of great black women, reaches the story of Mary Shadd, and there is a rhythmic heartbeat in the words.

Thus the voice of the oral storyteller begins the biography of Mary Shadd Cary. It is a compelling and highly appropriate voice for this biography of Shadd: teacher, newspaper editor and publisher, public speaker for abolition and feminism, recruiting officer for the North during the Civil War, first woman law student at Howard University, practising lawyer at the age of sixty. She raised two children, supporting herself, her schools, and her newspapers, through lecture tours, travelling alone at a time when both her sex and her race were tremendous stumbling-blocks.

> First, there was love. Then there was. . .
> Mary Ann Camberton Shadd. Wilmington, Delaware. October 9, 1823. First of thirteen. First issue of Abraham Doras and Harriet Shadd. Free negroes in a slave state. Mary Ann Camberton Shadd.
>
> First child in a world gone wild. A time of tight constricted throats, pinched nostrils, and held breaths. Mary Shadd: light brown skin, dark shining eyes, softly waving hair. The Underground Railroad thundered through her childhood in Wilmington, Delaware.

The authors of this biography have done a thorough job of research, and a vast amount of material is here, presented in this vigorous prose, meticulously footnoted, shedding light not just on Shadd, but on the activities of other contemporary Black leaders, on the Black community in Canada, and on the role this community played in events to the south. It is an interesting sidelight to Shadd's story, for example, to learn that John Brown did some of the planning and recruiting for his Harper's Ferry raid among the Black people of Chatham, Ontario.

Historical biography, however, is a strange beast, requiring not only a fascinating subject to begin with, not only the ruthless research of the historian, but also the selectivity and style of the novelist. It is in the matter of selectivity that this biography shows weakness. While Shadd spent only three years out of seventy in Windsor, as schoolteacher and activist, the biographers have chosen to spend almost half the book on these years, concentrating largely on a quarrel between Shadd and Henry Bibb, editor of the *Voice of the Fugitive*. Even conceding that this period was crucial in forming Shadd's determination to edit a newspaper herself, this section is overlong, and the quarrel is described in much greater detail than is interesting. Shadd's years as editor, recruiter, feminist lecturer, and lawyer are more interesting and deserve more detail.

It is also in this section, 'The Windsor Years', that the authors have chosen to use badly-written jingles and cartoons to introduce some of the chapters. These add absolutely nothing either to the style or to the content of the book. On one occasion they even acknowledge this, stating:

> The above is no sillier than the Voice article which described the influence of Mary Shadd upon the Reverend. . . .

While it may have been no sillier, the *Voice* article would certainly have been more relevant to the story of Shadd. Indeed, throughout the book, there is a tendency to break

up or paraphrase original documents. When dealing with a woman who was a noted speaker and writer it might have been wiser to allow more of her documents to speak for themselves.

In summary, however, I excuse the annoying cartoons, jingles, and lack of sensitivity, because the book presents a vivid picture of a dynamic woman achieving greatly. After reading it I remember Shadd as a living person, and find bits of her writing and philosophy surfacing at appropriate moments. Making a historical figure so alive for a reader is the ultimate job of the biographer. Bearden and Butler have achieved it.

The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation, Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, New York, Mentor Books, 1977, 262 pp. paperback, $1.95.

Judy Posner

Until relatively recently the subject of menstruation was a topic for esoteric anthropologists interested in the ritual taboos surrounding it, or a few lone medical researchers who were attempting to substantiate cyclical physiological changes in the female. In fact, in many ways, the topic of menstruation, or The Curse as it is so aptly referred to here, can be seen to exemplify the subjugation of women as reflected in Delaney et al.'s phrase 'menstrual politics'.

> The enemy is within every woman, but it is not her menstruation. Rather, it is the habit of mind regarding menstruation into which she has been led by centuries of male domination.

The Curse, first published in 1976 in hardback and fortunately quickly followed by the present paperback edition, is enjoyable and informative reading. More specifically, it is an excellent choice for Women's Studies course reading lists. While there are a few other books on menstruation (Dalton, 1969, and Weideger, 1975, to mention a couple of the more comprehensive ones) the Delaney et al. book is somehow more relevant and has a less dry academic tone than these other studies. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the authors themselves have transcended their own oppression, thus enabling them to see the stigma of womanhood with a sense of irony and humour. In short, it is a highly personal book that clearly stems from their own experiences as woman.

The personal tone of the book is best exemplified in the final chapter, where the authors discuss recent feminist artforms focusing on menstruation, and the inspiration it gave them to initiate their own Bleed-In.

> We chose Friday July 13, 1973, for our 'Bleed-In' because Friday, the number 13, and the full moon (it shone on us that night) are all ancient female symbols . . . . For the occasion, Mary Jane had decorated the bathroom with the signs and symbols of menstruation . . . . Stained pads (tomato sauce) were lying at random on the floor . . . . Red yarn dangled from the rim of the toilet . . . . We told anecdotes of our first periods . . . .

The more usual topics are covered, including origins of the menstrual taboo, a brief mention of menopause (too brief really), and some discussion of various psychoanalytic theories about the menarche. There are however, many more novel and interesting topics of analysis. One is menstruation images in literature, which includes extensive reference to Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women.*

Another is a chapter on the image of menstruating women in the popular imagination which includes a wonderful section on red humour or the menstrual joke, an excellent analysis of the menstrual-products industry, and the depiction of menstruation in advertising. In speaking of Modess ads in the forties and fifties the authors state:

> They [the models] were so attractive that Del Jordan's boyfriend in *Lives of Girls and Women* used them as pinups: along with movie stars' pictures, he had 'ladies in lovely ethereal dresses advertising sanitary napkins'.

They go on to discuss sixties and seventies ads, which still persist in employing a variety of euphemisms such as 'those special days', 'for difficult days' and 'that time of the month'.

The only criticism I have of the book is that it doesn't give as much attention to the physiological aspects of menstruation as I would have liked. It does, however, refuse to espouse the commonly-held feminist position that there is little biological basis for premenstrual tension. Rather, the authors accept the hormonal basis for mood change that accompanies menstruation but ask why it is that only the negative side of such changes is dealt with to the exclusion of the positive.

> Rather than reduce or eliminate the menses, that visible sign of woman's otherness, we could instead psychologically embrace the blood that is ours, making of menstruation an affirmation instead of a denial.

For example, they specifically refer to the feeling of general well-being that often accompanies the beginning of menstrual flow, and the heightened energy and awareness that sometimes accompany the pre-menstrual phase. They comment still further on the negative basis that has been built into research questionnaires which ask women about cyclical mood changes. This is followed by their own charming alternative entitled 'Menstrual Joy Questionnaire'.

> Note: In answering the questionnaire, reflect the experiences of your *most recent* cycle.
> 1. High spirits
> 2. Increased sexual desire
> 3. Vibrant activity
> 4. Revolutionary zeal
> 5. Intense concentration, etc.

Rather than dysfunctional or incompetent during the menstrual cycle, their questions reflect the notion that women might indeed be more competent, i.e., employable assets during certain phases of their cycle.

As previously stated, *The Curse* ends on a highly personal note, genuinely concerned with redefining the menstrual experience and its socio-political implications. Furthermore, the authors in their own light-hearted way are successful at the consciousness-raising they set out to do, proving once again that humour is a powerful tool in breaking the chains of oppression. They end their book:

> We believe that this generation of women will ultimately exorcise the curse over us all as we pass "Eve's blessing" on to our daughters.

The Curse is an excellent start on the task – which reminds me: 'Did you ever hear about the girl who had such heavy periods that . . .'

New books:

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Dionne Brand

Khoisan Artists, is pleased to announce the publication of *'FORE DAY MORNING,* a new book of poems by Dionne Brand.

Dionne Brand was born in Trinidad in 1953. She came to Canada eight years ago. She is a regular contributor to *Spear* magazine and has read her work widely throughout the Black community, at feminist groups, on radio and TV, and most recently at the Royal Ontario Museum.

'Fore DAY MORNING (a common Trinidadian expression meaning "before day breaks") is her first published work in book form.

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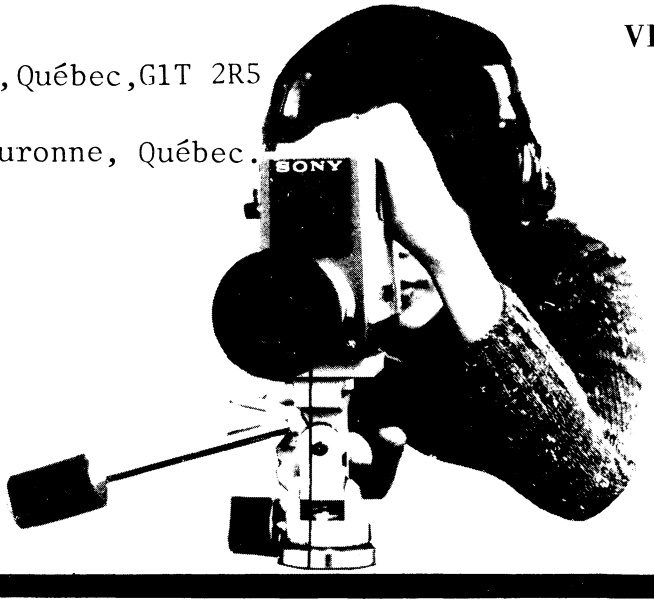

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