

have indicated that some collections may be restricted while others may contain material that is yet to be processed, since additions to collections are acquired regularly through individuals and donor organizations. The suggestion to write prior to visiting Ottawa is good counsel and will save researchers time and effort upon arrival at the NAC. Material available on microfiche or microfilm may be borrowed through the Interlibrary Department of university libraries.

A Bibliography included at the end of the *Guide* is particularly helpful to scholars who are pursuing work on women in Canada and who may be unaware of the breadth of the NAC's holdings. I would like to single out for special mention Jeanne L'Espérance's *The Widening Sphere: Women in Canada, 1870-1940*, a catalogue of an exhibit mounted in 1982 by the NAC. The catalogue charts the lives of Canadian women during this period in our national history and its materials are drawn from the NAC's collections. Such publications ensure that further work in the largely unexplored field of Canadian women's studies will continue to be undertaken by researchers and scholars at all levels. The NAC is to be commended on its publication of *Women's Archives Guide* and for its ongoing commitment to advancing the study of women in this country.

## AMERICAN APHRODITE: BECOMING FEMALE IN GREEK AMERICA

Constance Callinicos. New York: Pella Publishing Company, 1990.

*By Evangelia Tastsoglou*

*American Aphrodite: Becoming Female in Greek America* is an important, candid book of Greek American women's voices as they struggle with Greek patriarchal legacies and the contemporary realities of their lives. The "Greek experience in America" has been one mostly written by men and about men's experiences. It is time therefore that we tune in to the Greek-American woman's voice, as she tries to

make sense of her own experience growing up as a female, caught between two cultures. It is especially time that we hear that voice coupled with an explicitly feminist analysis.

*American Aphrodite* is a book of oral histories, interspersed with the writer's autobiographical memories and experience. As well as feminist analysis, there are popular poetry and songs from different regions of Greece illustrating folk beliefs about women, and beautiful old wedding and family photographs.

In "Search for Beginnings" Callinicos traces the origins of a problematic in childhood memories of her grandmother and mother. Through their stories as well as those of others, four types of female reaction to the "Greek village mentality" of immigrants clearly emerge. First, there is the frustrated, bitter matriarch, very demanding of her children and at the same time terrified of being abandoned. Then, there is the woman who unquestioningly accepts her 'fate' and passes on the 'Greek heritage' to her daughters. These daughters end up living an almost schizophrenic existence, with several personalities, depending upon the sex, age and ethnic identity of the people they happen to be with at a given time. Finally, there is a defiant, angry and proud woman, who rejects the stereotypical role she is assigned by her culture and strives to create a place for herself in the world. One wonders here whether the last two 'types' are more frequently to be found among younger generation, American-born women.

In "Mama Transplanted: Our Role Model for Learned Helplessness," Callinicos describes the voyage to America and the social world of the Greek immigrant woman. Being given in marriage by her father to a stranger who crossed the Atlantic to fetch a Greek wife, she goes through the traumas of separation from her family and her tightly-knit village community, and of isolation in strange, new surroundings. The boundaries of her social world in America are defined by her family and church. She possesses a great deal of power within the domestic sphere, "lobbying in the bedroom." However, she is not allowed to make contacts and friendships with outsiders lest her morals be endangered. Her behaviour is closely monitored by the Greek commu-

nity, effectively curtailed and controlled through gossip.

In "The Teenage Years: Becoming Female in Greek America," women recount their memories of growing up: the obligatory, parallel education in the Greek language and culture, embarrassment at the rude behaviour of parents toward their 'foreigner' classmates, training in serving the males of the family, prohibitions against dating, restrictions on free movement lest the young woman lose the appearance of purity and become less marriageable. With menstruation, she is set permanently apart in the ghetto of the "filthy," the "weak," and the evil power-possessing (because of an ancient fear of the powerful Vagina, symbol of Death). She is trained to feel contempt towards what is most 'womanly' about her; she becomes acceptable only by adopting a 'virginal' demeanor.

There is of course a double standard in the upbringing of boys and girls. While the woman should not even come into contact with American women, the man is given unlimited freedom to date as many as possible, in order to prove his 'manhood.' Education, one of the most respected values in the Greek culture, is reserved for sons. It is unthinkable for young women to leave home to pursue higher education. Parents and family start making sure very early that their girls will never develop serious intellectual interests.

"An Arranged Wedding Day: Greece 1977" relates the stories of young women shipped to Greece to meet their prospective husbands, chosen by their fathers in advance. There is tragedy in the simplicity, impersonality, and repetition of the basic plot. Women stoically accept their 'fate.' When life turns sour, they have already internalized so much blame and guilt that they see suicide as the only way out. The shame of the 'used' woman after divorce is a control mechanism sufficient to keep some of the most compromising marriages intact.

A growth-limiting relationship for the Greek-American girl, according to Callinicos, is that with her mother. This tends to be a relationship of cultivated dependency, a culturally conditioned inability to live without Mama and outside of the family. The daughter is not encouraged to grow, but simply to move from

membership in her father's blood clan to membership in another clan of Greek origin.

Callinicos concludes optimistically with stories of defiant Greek-American women who are struggling to live meaningful lives, "peeling off, layer by layer," the Good Greek Girl, coping with their culturally ingrained fears of being outsiders and alone. In the writer's analysis, "Sleeping Aphrodite must be her own Kiss of Life." She has to re-invent herself, to kill the fearful child she has been taught to be.

There are some important questions that Callinicos either leaves unanswered or fails to raise at all. Can gender oppression be accounted for by the Greek culture exclusively? How have the structural-historical conditions of Greek emigration (isolation, language difficulties, chain migration, scarcity of women among early immigrants) contributed to the transfer and maintenance of the "Greek village mentality?" In her life histories there is always a suggestion of violence, but she does not point explicitly in her analysis to the threat of violence as a factor in the oppression of women. Her vision is that of individual self-realization in so far as this is what her "defiant" women are striving for. But how is this self-realization to be achieved? What are the responsibilities of these "defiant" women towards their less fortunate sisters? Where does the women's movement come in? Finally, in this analysis there is an absence of differentiation in terms of class, sexual orientation and generation among Greek-American women.

Despite these shortcomings *American Aphrodite* makes an interesting read. To Greek-American and immigrant Greek women in particular, the book may offer a painful and much needed catharsis.

## NO ROOMS OF THEIR OWN: WOMEN WRITERS OF EARLY CALIFORNIA

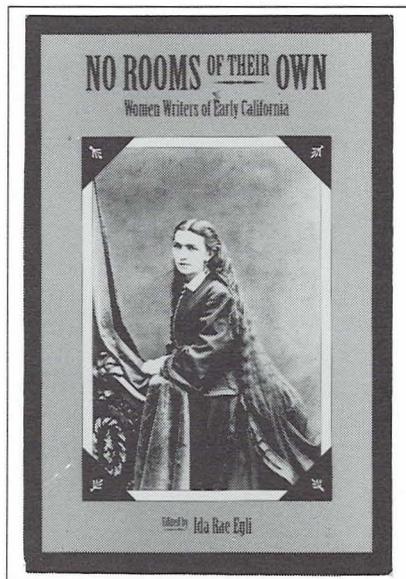
Edited by Ida Rae Egli. Berkeley: Heydays Books, 1992.

By *Fairlie Ritchie*

A pioneer who undertook the arduous,

exciting trek across the United States with her husband in a lone covered wagon. A Lassik tribal matriarch who fled Euro-American onslaughts as a girl and lived into her nineties. A Black woman who went to court for her right to use California streetcars. All of these women lived in California during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And all of them were writers in that milieu. In bringing their work together in this anthology, Ida Rae Egli shares with readers a stimulating array of individuals.

In her Introduction, Egli sets the scene by telling us what kind of women inhabited California in that era, and how their experiences there affected them. The discussion is divided into three historical phases: "First Contact," "Making Room," and "Questioning Roles."



"First Contact" was spawned by the 1848 Gold Rush. Women who came in that flood were generally of an adventurous mien and shed many social norms as they approached the new environment. Native Americans, African-Americans, people of Spanish, Chinese and European descent were all here, and for many of those from the eastern states the move was a baptism into multiculturalism.

Fuelled by wealth from gold, Californians undertook farming and business endeavours. For a long time California retained a free spirit of its own. Women could pursue careers and lifestyles which were closed to them elsewhere; they could run boarding houses, be doctors, artists, and writers. Californians as a whole hun-

gered for a literature of their own, to help them define this unique culture. Authors of both sexes found an eager audience open to ground-breaking creative practices. A distinctive literary genre called the Sagebrush School emerged, comprised of "storytellers who mixed reality with a little western mythology and a bonanza hyperbole."

The "Questioning Roles" phase gradually appeared in this setting. When the 1869 Transcontinental Railway connected California with the east, however, the state was also linked up with a conservative trend that would stifle some of California's cultural independence. At this point, Egli writes, "the golden era of the California frontier was dead, and buried with it were the budding lives of Sagebrush Realism and frontier California literature."

The diversity of genre gives us a very wide range of writings, from Sarah Eleanor Royce's memoir of her trek west, to the legal testimony of Charlotte Brown, to Adah Isaacs Menken's probing poetry. Egli provides an introduction and a bibliography for each writer, in which she warmly invites us into their lives and works; photographs accompany all but one of the selections.

The collection also presents a multitude of perspectives. Lucy Young's Native witness, for instance, declares: "I hear people tell 'bout what Inyan do early days to white man. Nobody ever tell what white man do to Inyan. That reason I tell it. That's history. I seen it myself." Others see differently: Jessie Benton Fremont, for instance, who writes condescendingly of the young Native women in her employ. Or Ella Sterling Cummins Mighels, who says of women that "they have no caution, no principles, when it comes to voting." (This writer of editorials and essays also found occasion to invoke the "purity of the white race" and the "benign dominance of men.")

One wonders whether the title of this book—alluding to Virginia Woolf's well-known essay—is appropriate. True, few of these women had rooms of their own for writing, or for anything else. But while Woolf's women lacked their own rooms in a social structure which provided such sanctuaries for men, in early California neither men nor women were likely to have a room to themselves. Instead, they had open horizons, new freedoms and adventures.