

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

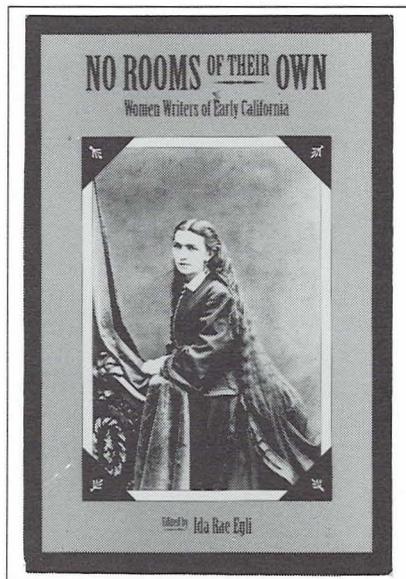
Edited by Ida Rae Egli. Berkeley: Heydays Books, 1992.

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.