the '40s through '60s, the reality of culturally-induced madness was dissected by sufferers who came forward to describe what turns out to be a widely occurrent phenomenon: occasional, and often early, debilitating episodes of breakdown or dysfunction in the lives of girls and women.

Perhaps the most celebrated of these womaniacs is Sylvia Plath, a classic overachiever with an unresolved Electra complex and a smoldering resentment of her mother. She wrote two separate diaries of her madness in the early '60s; one, *Ariel*, in poetic form, the other *The Bell Jar*, as a novel. Plath quickly became a martyr for the rising women's movement, a victim of the "depradations" of the patriarchy, when she killed herself after a prolonged depression aggravated by the failure of her marriage. In both texts Plath's personas, like Shakespeare's Ophelia, display an insistent and often confusing preoccupation with the weight of words, the primordial cauldron of language and meaning.

When the larger patterns of living prove too unwieldy, the need develops for absolute control of even a small portion of social discourse. One fixates on words, their constituent and mysterious parts and beginnings. How have they come to have such power? So, too, Jade King, the young heroine of Jodi Lundgren's novel *Touched*, begins her unravelling tale with lessons in etymology. The title itself is *noir* playfulness suggesting all the variants of its meaning: insane, felt up, affected with feeling and emotion and ripped off. All of the above apply to the dissolving- before-our-eyes narrator as she is sucked downwards into a maelstrom of repressed sexual memory.

Despite the fact that Lungren wrote the novel in her early '30s, this is a survival manual for young adults confronting the lethal cocktail of drugs, alcohol, sex, and unfamilies that contemporary North American society serves up to them. Jade barely manages to stomach this concoction and it produces in her a wealth of hallucination, dissociation, and paranoia. But just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you're not being followed. Lundgren suggests that all help, except self-help, is ultimately of limited use. Teachers, parents, lovers, and friends, many playing multiple roles here, are unable to help Jade with the necessary body and soul work of crash and recovery.

The velocity of her disintegration is signalled in the text through the almost complete breakdown of language use. As Jade sorts through word fragments, the reader, too, is subjected to loss of comprehension, a difficult task of versimilitude for any writer to control effectively. If narrative meaning resides in words linked purposefully together, what happens when this purposefulness is lost?

Counterposed intertextually with this syntactical chaos is the even more disorienting publications of The Mental Health Act, which make the fragmentary sound bites of Bedlam seem preferable. Our heroine's struggle to regain control of her soul and body is, unsurprisingly, not helped by bureaucracy. The harder she works to forge "the new sexual revolution"the more she is drawn back into the primal, historical roots of her "illness." Neither is she allowed the luxury of casting her father in the role of unmitigated villain in her story, but must acknowledge that his sin is a sad collocation of the quotidien and the catastrophic. The true tragedy here is the banality of the destructive forces in our lives—that the apocalypse arrives, not in the form of a rough beast but in the postmodern guise of a shuffling, defeated man whose mother didn't love him very much. And like naming, like dominoes, the legacies of abuse topple down the generations.

The mad, throughout history, have often been possessed by the "delusion" that they have the power and the duty to save the world. So have the sane. Indeed, when that world shrinks to the size of a single human consciousness, like Hamlet's nutshell, if the mental traveller is "touched" in the right way, she may succeed in her vocation. Lungren argues that both body and mind are consecrated to this work; only in tandem can they creatively transform the pain that induces hysteria and her handmaidens. The kitchen, the bedroom, the attic; women need to get out more.

COVER ME

Mariko Tamaki.
Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2000.

BY STEPHANIE DICKISON

Here lies a work of fiction by one of the most intriguing personalities and fascinating writers in Toronto today—Mariko Tamaki. You might know the name from her participation in the Scream in High Park festival, as performer and co-creator of the Strange Sister Cabaret at Buddies in Bad Times theatre, or as co-creator of the fat activist group, Pretty, Porky, and Pissed Off.

Mariko is rebellious to the extreme and, as a sex toy sales clerk, was named "Amateur Sexpert" by *NOW Magazine's* Susan G. Cole.

However, while she might be a force to be reckoned with in person and on stage, her prose is remarkably quiet and poignant, but simultaneously sparkling, funny, and smart. And her use of language is awe-inspiring.

> I emerge, out of breath, from the toothless mouth of the cool musky subway station, and walk briskly, bangles pumping on my wrists in the clammy palm of early summer heat.

Mariko has the ability to put both

her message and personality forth all the while speaking in pop-culture terms that both fascinate and intrigue.

> King Street, a Mecca of concrete contrasted by a few, small, ill-looking, token trees in little grey corporate cubicles. It's a land without pity, sucking the life out through the souls of my shoes as I puff thoughtfully on my cigarette and survey the secretaries in their business suits and Nikes, basking like seals in the sun. Modern seals, with protein drinks and outrageous Visa bills.

This tale is of a girl (Traci — supposedly not her) who is trying to get by in this world filled with a Starbucks on every corner and the continuing pursuit of the all-mighty dollar.

> 12:13 pm. I extinguish my cigarette and push through the thick slabs of heavy glass that serves as doors. It requires all my strength to wedge them open. I'm sure there's an entrance with normal doors. These doors are probably just here to intimidate people like me and make clients feel important. Mission accomplished.

Trying to deal with her mother's nervous breakdown, Traci visits her father's office in Toronto and relives times of her upbringing where she tried to fit into the family's mould, but ended up being a square in a circling eddy of strange family behaviour:

> My father bristled. "If either of you kids ever screamed like that I'd have you in the car faster than you could fart." I wondered if that meant farting in the restaurant would be OK.

Moments of complete honesty and utter nakedness are notes that ring true to most of the thirteenth generation (those born between 1961 and 1981): "I held special status between Loser and Pot Hole."

This is a book that will not only make you think, make you laugh but will fill your entire senses to capacity, will leave you reeling with lightheadedness from Mariko's ability to spin images and fragrances before your very eyes and nose.

> If my father was a rock, my mother was that rock candy, pop candy, we used to buy at the convenience store for the thrill of oral demolition. Slick plastic pockets with a smattering of sweet, sour dust that would blow your taste buds to pieces, as you sat on the porch and let them go to town on your tongue. Sizzle Pop Kablam. Rice Krispies on dextrose.

It is a book that will appeal to any 20/30-somethings who has ever felt like they are smarter than their surroundings but the rest of the corporate world just hasn't caught up yet.

> At recess, I retreated to the shady spot in the back of the schoolyard with a book and my lunch. I learned that being smart was a suitable explanation for being weird, and I became the best version of smart I could muster. The first lesson of smart: always have a book in your hand.

This book, like the films *Ghost World* and *Clerks*, shows that to be different is still to be celebrated. And if Mariko is going to celebrate it, we are going to be right beside her, with book in hand and a feeling of belonging to an elite, albeit eccentric, crowd.

IS THAT A GUN IN YOUR POCKET? WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF POWER IN HOLLYWOOD.

Rachel Abramowitz.
New York: Random House, 2000

BY SHARON FERGUSON-HOOD AND MARIE TOVELL WALKER

Rachel Abramowitz, in her book, *Is That A Gun In Your Pocket*, exposes the power that has controlled, manipulated, and destroyed women in Hollywood. She tells us what it is like to be a woman in Hollywood. Abramowitz interviews women who have been there: actresses, directors, producers, agents, and studio producers, and they openly tell how they view the world they live in. The picture they give is not a snapshot view because Abramowitz covered the period from the late 1970s to the present. She interviewed, to name only a few, Jodie Foster, Barbra Streisand, Meryl Streep, Callie Khouri, Paula Weinstein, Sherry Lansing, and Sue Mengers.

Many of the women interviewed shared the belief that their parents played a significant role in who they were and who they became. Paula Weinstein said,

> Our parents reflect for us the possibilities of the world. I never knew any other way than to assume that anything was possible and to go after it.

But most of the women interviewed gave mixed reviews of their parents, citing both helpful and damaging interactions. Nearly every one of them talked at length of her many years in therapy.

In Hollywood power was, and still is, very individual. It was the late '80s