

all strands of feminist theory currently rest.

Grant performs a particularly astute analysis of Marxist-feminism. She maintains that the use of Marxism has been detrimental to theoretical feminism because of a misreading and analogical misuse of Marxist concepts which go against the very core concepts of feminism. For example, though Marxist-feminists may borrow many of their ideas from traditional Marxist writings, their origins stem from 19th-century feminist activism, not from left-wing political structures which refused to accommodate feminist requirements. With a firm grounding in the history of first wave feminist activism, Grant asks each form of hyphenated feminism, "What is *feminist* about Marxist-feminism? Why not just Marxism? What is *feminist* about liberal-feminism? Why not just liberalism?"

In the last section of the book, Grant advocates a more critical, self-reflective feminism that, for its own health and survival, must eradicate dangerous forms of essentialising. In its place, she proposes the possibility for a feminism no longer based on the "core concepts," but structured on the idea that gender is an independent, ideological formation that must be razed.

In an attempt to abandon all forms of feminism based on *epistemology*—a further perpetuation of the core concepts—Grant posits a "neo-humanist" or "neo-enlightenment" feminism akin to first wave, radical feminism (though she is careful to transform its racist and classist roots). She firmly rejects the core concepts, "woman" and "experience" in her new feminist vision, while maintaining the category of a personal politics. To supplant the two core concepts she calls for the creation of a "feminist lens," highlighting the difference between "women" and "feminist," basing her new theory instead on a subject defined by political feminist practice (both personal and public politics) rather than on a monolithic, transcendental category of "women." She terms her new phi-

losophy, a "feminist-post-enlightenment-humanist vision," calling for the complete abolition of gender structures.

Despite providing the reader with an intricate and complex analysis of the major tenants of feminist thought in the first two sections of the book, Grant neglects to bestow upon her own theory the same care and attention. Her new feminism appears instead as a jumble of poststructural, liberal, Marxist, socialist and humanist thought, generating more puzzling questions than it answers. Based on her own critique, is her "feminist-humanism" not just a new form of the hyphenated feminism that she so thoroughly rejects? Her humanist-feminist theory begs the question, as Grant asked of Marxist and liberal feminists earlier, "What is particularly *feminist* about humanist-feminism? Why not just humanism?" Perhaps her next book will elaborate the new theory she merely introduces in this text.

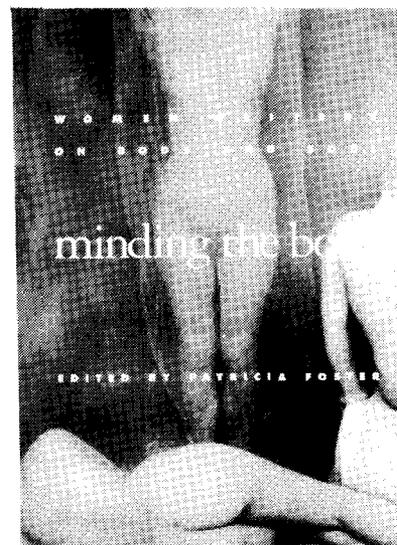
MINDING THE BODY: WOMEN WRITERS ON BODY AND SOUL

Patricia Foster, Ed. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

by Shannon Gillies

Despite the social, political and economic advances women have made in the last century, it seems we are more dissatisfied with our bodies and our physical appearance than ever. Certainly not every woman is preoccupied with her weight, the size of her breasts or the shape of her nose, but it's likely most women have at least one physical attribute they would like to change.

While Patricia Foster, the editor of *Minding the Body*, was teaching Women's Literature at a state university, she was astonished at how unhappy the young women were with their bodies. One student confessed, "I'd rather have five pounds off my thighs than an A in this class." She discovered that most of the women would choose physical perfection over mental stimulus, if given the choice. Ms. Foster wondered,



"How and why women returned to such a fragile status?" She hoped those young women would eventually realize that "the body is not only a sexual statement, but a social one as well, an ongoing story with multiple plots that women individually and collectively must speak."

With these ideas in mind, Ms. Foster decided to compile an anthology—a collection of women's experiences with their bodies. *Minding the Body* contains a broad spectrum of stories and essays by twenty international women writers. Contributors were asked to "probe what seemed disturbing or exhilarating in their personal lives, what had snagged, invalidated, buoyed, or surprised them about their bodies." In response, the contributors explored topics as diverse as breast implants, infertility, disfiguration, anorexia, dieting and breast cancer to name only a few. Almost every female reader of *Minding the Body* should be able to find at least one essay of particular

relevance to her own life.

Margaret Atwood uses her unique brand of disturbing humour to illustrate some of the absurd ways the female body has been manipulated and commercialized. For example, "It's been used as a door knocker, a bottle opener, as a clock with a ticking belly, as something to hold up lampshades, as a nutcracker, just squeeze the brass legs together and out comes your nut."

An especially moving story is Lucy Grealy's "Mirrors" which describes her experience with facial disfiguration caused by jaw surgery she had undergone as a child to prevent cancer from spreading. After several unsuccessful reconstructive surgery operations, she went for almost an entire year without looking in a mirror—too afraid to see what others saw: "Society is no help; the images it gives us again and again want us only to believe that we can most be ourselves by looking like someone else, leaving our own faces to turn

into ghosts that will inevitably resent us and haunt us."

In "Out of Habit, I Start Apologizing" Pam Houston contemplates the "if I were really thin I would be happy" theory until she faces the possibility of having cancer. Waiting for the doctor's diagnosis, "a wave of love for my body that is as unfamiliar as it is terrifying washes over me. I'm afraid at first it is desperation love... but this is more penetrating, all encompassing; a love so sad and deep and complicated I am left, for a change, without words."

Every contribution in *Minding the Body* is thought-provoking and charged with sincere emotions. It's hard not to feel a sense of sharing—each writer talking openly and honestly about an intimate aspect of her own body. The book is not so much about each individual topic, whether it be cosmetic surgery or multiple sclerosis, as it is about learning to understand the connection between our physical and emotional selves.

THE DIFFERENCE: GROWING UP FEMALE IN AMERICA

Judy Mann. New York: Warner Books, 1994.

by *Sharlene Azam*

"Somewhere in adolescence, our daughters are silenced. They are overwhelmed and submerged, just as we were. They become uncomplaining and compliant. They learn to wait." In her book, *The Difference: Growing Up Female in America*, Washington Post columnist, Judy Mann says young girls are emotionally and spiritually "disabled" in their adolescence. They become women who are in denial in their twenties, in depression in their thirties and in recovery and discovery only in their forties and fifties.

Although Mann is writing about the experiences of American girls, according to Mary Templin, Executive Assistant at the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, "Canadian girls also experience a loss of self-esteem around the time of puberty."

What happens? Why do girls between the ages of 11 and 13 lose their self-confidence? Why do they believe they have fewer options about what they can do in life than boys do? Mann lays much of the blame for the "disabling" of young girls at the steps of the public school system. "From the first years of elementary school through college and graduate schools, girls receive destructively different treatments in their classrooms. Boys are at the centre of the whole educational process, while our daughters sit on the side lines, waiting their turn, after all these years." Kari Dehli, Assistant Professor of Sociology of Education at OISE in Toronto says that, "there are many indications that either overtly or in the hidden curriculum teachers talk to boys differently and they are given far more attention than girls either positively or negatively."



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