

répond par des mots porteurs de musique et d'images.

Non qu'elle crée pour nous un univers parallèle moins problématique que le nôtre. Pour elle, le poétique est non pas un ailleurs mais une autre appréhension de la vie. Et si l'on trouve dans *Entre l'outil et la matière* une évocation du paradis, c'est celle d'un paradis perdu, celui de l'enfance, sous des cieus plus cléments :

O mer des jours heureux
forte insouciance de l'enfance
dans mes malheurs tu étais là
(...)
Loin de toi aujourd'hui
je refroidis
(« Amilcar », p. 98)

Ce qu'elle nous offre, c'est, comme elle le dit ailleurs, « un regard lucide sur la fragilité des choses ». Ses textes dénoncent le « cancer atomique » (titre d'un de ses poèmes), les horreurs de l'Histoire, l'usure de la culture dominante :

O pâle enseignement
les traits tombent dans la nuit
Il n'y a pas de jouissance
dans l'empire branlant
d'une mémoire muette
(« Le coursier magique », p. 42)

On ne peut opposer aux angoisses et aux frustrations que la plénitude de l'amour et de la poésie, chantés tous deux en des « mots qui font naître », qui nous rendent le « torrent des merveilles » perdu depuis l'enfance.

Les images sont souvent fortes et surprenantes, comme celle qui ouvre ce poème :

Du côté de l'essentiel
un oiseau aveugle
sous les vents
habite l'aile d'un faucon
Du côté de l'essentiel
il se dresse un barrage
et
à l'extase de l'être
où sommeille l'éternité
s'ouvre

le monde de l'abrégé
(« Du côté de l'essentiel », p. 13)

Poème puissant, qui ne se laisse pas déchiffrer aisément. Il garde sa part de mystère, de par l'étrangeté de l'image. C'est d'ailleurs l'inattendu des images et de certaines alliances de mots qui retient le plus dans les poèmes de Lélia Young. En la lisant, on pense au précepte de Verlaine :

Il faut aussi que tu n'aïles point
Choisir tes mots sans quelque
méprise :
Rien de plus cher que la chanson
grise
Où l'indécis au Précis se joint
(Paul Verlaine « Art poétique »,
Jadis et Naguère)

Sauf que ce recueil n'est pas gris mais plutôt moiré, évocateur de moments et d'humeurs variés, allant de l'horreur à la sérénité.

Toutefois, si les thèmes sont parfois tragiques, le dernier mot est à la vie, et à la poésie qui l'incarne :

Le poème est le rappel
du vivant
(« Mailles », p. 129)

Un beau recueil, qui nous ramène « du côté de l'essentiel » et devrait toucher les lectrices des *Cahiers de la femme*.

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU: ESSAYS AND POEMS AND SIMPLICITY, A COMEDY

Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy,
Eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

by Miriam Jones

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) is an intriguing character. She

was an aristocrat and a well-travelled woman of letters, a self-educated scholar concerned with women's education, a conservative political journalist and a medical pioneer who helped spearhead the smallpox inoculation campaign in Britain. This new edition of the 1977 collection of her writings, revised and with an excellent new preface by Isobel Grundy, is particularly topical in light of Grundy's forthcoming biography and the widespread growth of interest in the writing of 18th-century women in general. Many texts have been unavailable until recently and non-fiction, with few exceptions, has been even less accessible, so this edition of Montagu's poetry, essays and a play is most welcome.

Enamoured as we currently are with finding the subversive or radical voices from the past, to immerse ourselves in the writing of someone as comfortable with her privilege as Montagu may initially seem less than congenial. These pieces are politically conservative and emphatically situated within clearly defined 18th-century generic conventions. Given this double-axis of containment, Montagu's critical stance as a woman—a stance that helped her, as Grundy indicates, to transform the functions of the various literary forms she practised—stands out in stark relief. Montagu's play, *Simplicity*, is emblematic of the difficulties in reading her now without grappling with our own received ideas about "originality" in art. *Simplicity* is a loose translation of Marivaux's *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, about a quarter of which, according to the editors, is original. Many of her poems also use borrowed or conventional themes and must be read in the context of the classical education of her class; the interest for the critic lies in the uses to which these inherited literary discourses are put.

Of her poems, Grundy remarks that they "set out to explore multiple viewpoints rather than define a normative one; but complaint against men is a *leitmotif*." Her writings could be termed a series of explorations that

return again and again to women's experience. Halsband and Grundy each calls her "feminist," but perhaps "proto-feminist" would be more accurate. An example of her engagement, the poem "Epistle from Mrs. Y[onge] to her Husband" is explicit in its negative assessment of contemporary divorce laws, and its justification of an adulterous wife:

Are we not form'd with Passions
like your own?
Nature with equal Fire our Souls
endu'd,
Our minds as Haughty, and as
warm our blood,
O're the wide World your pleasures
you persue,
The Change is justify'd by some-
thing new;
But we must sigh in Silence—
and be true.

Her sharply critical view of 18th-century gender relations at times extends beyond sexual politics and indicates an indictment of masculinist social institutions. For example, her writings on smallpox inoculation privilege a feminine, non-Western tradition over the interventionist model of Western medicine. She rejects outright the misogynist satires so common in the 18th century:

Such a paper, either to ridicule
or declaim against the Ladys, is
very welcome to the Coffee
houses, where there is hardly on
Man in ten but fancys he has one
reason or other, to curse some of
the Sex most heartily. Perhaps
his sisters' fortunes are to run
away with the money that would
be better bestow'd at the Groom
porter's [in gambling], or an old
Mother good for nothing keeps
a Jointure from a Hopefull son,
that wants to make a settlement
on his mistriss; or a Handsome
Young Fellow is plague'd with a
Wife, that will remain alive to
hinder his running away with a
great Fortune, haveing 2 or 3 of
them in love with him. These are
serious misfortunes that are suf-

ficient to exasperate the mildest
tempers to a contempt of the
sex....

Her criticism, however, is doubly-veiled, first by an irrepressible humour that for the most part sweetens the potential violence of her scenarios here, and also by her adoption of an anonymous male persona.

This writing across gender is one of the most fascinating aspects of the collection. Montagu turns what was essentially a necessary strategy in the literary market of her day into a vehicle for the exploration of multiple subject positionings: a vehicle, moreover, with immense potential for irony. One anonymous editorial essay opens thus: "I have allways... profess'd my selfe a Freind thò I do not aspire to the character of an admirer of the Fair sex," and in another she writes:

I am very much entertain'd with
the variety of Censures that are
pass'd on my harmless paper,
which I hear allmost every day
with an Indifferent Face, and to
say truth without much violence
to my selfe, not feeling the paternal
Affection that most Authors
do for their productions, neither
my Fame or Fortune being any
way affected by their Success.
My Acquaintance think me no
more qualify'd for a writer than
for a General....

She is here tweaking the readers' noses with their own prejudices about who may write and publish. The joke is no less rich for being essentially private.

Grundy pays particular attention to the production and publication of the texts, and the collection is noteworthy for its scrupulous scholarship. The preface contextualizes Montagu's work within current critical traditions, broaches questions of censorship and self-censorship, alludes to Montagu's critical reception and calls for scholarly reevaluation. Grundy locates this collection as part of the ongoing recuperation of a tradition of women's writing, and ar-

gues persuasively that Montagu was herself conscious of her position of a woman, writing.

EDUCATED AND IGNORANT: ULTRAORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR WORLD

Tamar El-Or. Translated from Hebrew by Haim Watzman. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.

by *Katherine Side*

I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes.

—Maxine Hong Kingston

It was El-Or's title that immediately caught my attention. Education and ignorance are often considered paradoxical companions. Furthermore, the blatant characterization of a community of women as "educated and ignorant" seemed to me to be a bold statement. Yet, El-Or, in this detailed ethnographic study of women in the ultraorthodox Jewish community, cogently demonstrates that education and ignorance are conceivable, and in this case, desirable companions.

El-Or worked, as a doctoral student, among Israel's Gur Hasidim, on the outskirts of metropolitan Tel Aviv. The Gur Hasidim are a Jewish religious sect, conspicuous by their strict adherence to mid-18th-century dress and customs, and characterized by Gur mens' devotion to religious study.

El-Or's research revolves around the core themes of women, literacy, and education. Gur Hasidim, recognizing that girls and women who do not receive religious education are susceptible to assimilative practices, have established an elaborate educational system for a population that,