



# Women in Libraries

Volume 26, Number 4

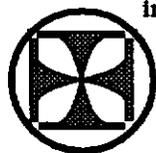
*The Feminist Task Force—26 Years*

Fall 1997

## Feminist Authors' Breakfast:

*Enthusiastic audience gathers to hear four authors*

Ginu Kamani, Jewelle Gomez, Margarita Donnelly, and Shirley Geok-lin Lim spoke at FTF's annual Feminist Authors' Breakfast Sunday, during ALA's conference in San Francisco. Kamani and Gomez read excerpts from their works, and Donnelly and Lim spoke on the issue of women's expression in literature, in keeping with the breakfast theme, "The Patchwork Quilt of Feminism."



### *Intracultural clash*

Kamani kept a rapt audience laughing as she read from "Ciphers," a short story included in her anthology, *Jungle Girl*, excerpted here:

The woman claiming the berth across from mine in the train compartment must have been my age, but she looked older, more self-important. She had the red mark of the auspicious married woman in her hair parting and three young children to prove her fertility. She stopped her children from sitting on the long hard seat, motioning them to wait.

"It's dirty," she scolded them in Gujarati, pointing to the dull green vinyl which had worn away in parts to reveal the coarse padding underneath. She reached into her oversized plastic shopping bag, pulling out a printed cotton bedspread that she snapped open with a quick flick of her wrist. She covered the seat and tucked the edges in. The woman nodded in satisfaction, patted her hair into place, then sat down and lifted the three children up beside her so they sat propped up against the seat back. The four of them sat squashed against each other in the middle of the seat, with ample room on either side.

The train whistle, blew, and the tea and snack vendors who droned their wares by the windows suddenly switched into high gear, running from one window to the next, shouting out Hot tea! Hot tea...! Fresh puri-bhaji...! Hot samosas! Thin porters in bright red shirts raced by with tottering mounds of baggage balanced on their heads. I

was sitting on an Indian train for the first time in a decade, but the scene was just as I remembered it from childhood. The big difference was that, this time, I was traveling alone.

The train slowly pulled out of the station. The woman across from me looked at me then for the first time. In her quick look, she took in my short hair, my knee-length dress and ringless third finger. Her evaluation made, she avoided my eyes. She looked over my head, through my feet, at the door and windows, but not into my eyes. Though her children were staring at me, through a series of subtle cues from their mother, they had understood that I was to be given the silent treatment.

I remembered being that young age, and staring at strangers in that same fascinated way, knowing that they were humans like us, but knowing that they were not from our family. If, by some chance, it was determined that these strangers were friends of friends, or hailed from our parents' natal villages, or were otherwise established as people of good family, then the ice would break quickly, and food would be offered from both sides, followed by the sharing of board games or card games or amusing pastimes like guessing the names of Hindi film songs. But until then, the adults sat stone-faced and the children stuck to their own.

The young mother across from me spoke to her children in a shrill Gujarati punctuated by such endearments as greedy, idiot, blackie and pig. The children were obviously used to these mocking asides and did not respond. But it had been years since I was immediately flooded with memories of shouting matches when our group of young cousins would exhaust the usual English insults: You stupid! You idiot! Fool! Crackpot!, all of which had a peculiar weightiness that would quickly tire up out. But then we would switch to our reservoir of delicious Gujarati insults: Pigs! Monkey! Cockroach! Elephant!, and somehow these abuses from our mother tongue were so much more raucous and full of abandon that they elevated us back into good humor and collaborative play.

Giggles rose up in me like bubbles as the woman chided her children. I stifled the first few, but I couldn't

*Excerpt continued, page 2*

### *In this issue:*

Feminist Authors' Breakfast: Excerpt from one author's work

"Patchwork Quilt" book review section, beginning on page 3

*Excerpt, continued from page 1*

help but smile when the woman called her son a goat, and I finally had to guffaw and cough when she called her daughter a donkey. The woman looked up at me sharply and I pressed my twitching lips shut.

She opened her mouth to speak, but then turned and frowned at the window, unsure of whether to engage with me. After all, I was a stranger, and it was probably best not to get involved. But then as I snorted and cleared my throat again, she took a deep breath and sat forward.

"You are Christian?" she snapped. I shook my head apologetically. She looked pointedly at my dress, or frock, as she would have referred to it.



"You are Muslim from Delhi?" She was still cross.

"No," I replied politely.

"You are Madrasí," she sneered.

"No. I've never been to Madras."

"Then you must be Punjabi," she taunted.

I smiled faintly. She was bent on pinning me down.

"Where you are from?" she rasped.

"From right here in Bombay," I said sweetly. She nodded and waved her hand.

"Now I know. You are Malayali." She looked away, signaling that the discussion was over. But from the corner of her eye she saw me shake my head.

"Maharashtrian," she continued emphatically. She straightened the pleats of her sari.

I stared at her. I was suddenly aware of feeling hurt. If she weren't so prejudiced by my short hair and western dress, and the quickly made assumption that I was unmarried and childless, she would surely have seen right away that I was Gujarati. I opened my book and began reading to signal that the conversation really was over.

"I know a girl from Goa who looks just like you."

I turned the page and crossed my legs, settling into my stance.

"But naturally you are Bengali." She turned to her children and nodded sagely.

Suddenly I tired of her game and decided to burst her bubble. I reached into my purse and pulled out a package of Gluco biscuits. I tore the wrapped slowly, to make sure that I had the attention of all three children. They looked at me hungrily.

"Biscuit aapu?" I asked in Gujarati and held out the pack to the older boy.

The woman gasped in horror and slapped down her son's outstretched hand.

"You're Gujarati!" she howled in rage. She was so offended by this realization that she instinctively reached back and covered her head with her sari for protection.

"Yes, auntie," I said in a wide-eyed sing-song. "I am a pukka Gujarati."

## You can't be one of us!

All three children were staring at me slack-jawed. Their mother slapped each on quickly across the mouth. She shouted at them. "How many times have I told you not to take things from strangers, huh? Have you no shame? Sit up straight and keep your hands to yourselves!"

I put down my book and looked at the woman fumbling for her handkerchief with shaking hands.

"Are you also Gujarati?" I asked with a smile.

She pursed her lips and looked out of the window. Her fingers twisted the handkerchief into a tense rope.

"We are the real Gujarati, from Gujarati!" she spat.

"My family is from Saurashtra," I said gently. We are Jains."

Her face turned pale and her brow knitted furiously.

"These days anybody can say they come from anywhere," she muttered in exasperation. "I'm not so stupid that I will believe everything!"

She pushed her children out of the way and stretched out on the seat. She crossed her arms tightly over her chest and pressed her lips shut. She stared pointedly at the miniature ceiling fan. The three youngsters re-seated themselves timidly by the window, looking at each other nervously. Their mother was now in a bad mood, and any disturbance was likely to result in a hard slap across the head. Even though I was Gujarati, I was obviously a troublemaker if I had caused their mother to reach this state.

The Gujarati woman remains unmoved by my secrets. She leans forward and slides shut the compartment door. Then she reaches behind her and quickly undoes the tightly coiled bun at the nape of her neck. She shakes free her long hair and runs her fingers slowly down the length of it, head bowed to one side.

*Excerpt continued, page 15*



FEMINIST  
TASK FORCE

## Women in Libraries

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~holman/FTF/>

*Women in Libraries*, the Newsletter of the American Library Association's Feminist Task Force, is published four times a year. To subscribe, inquire about your subscription, or to change your address, write to Diedre Conkling, Publisher, Women in Libraries, c/o ALA, SRRT, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Subscriptions are \$5 for individuals, \$8 for institutions (prepaid), or \$10 for invoiced subscriptions. Personnel: Madeleine Tainton, Editor, West Texas A&M University; Diedre Conkling, Publisher, Lincoln County, Oregon, Library District; Theresa Tobin, Listserv Administrator, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

To subscribe to the Feminist List, send this e-mail message to: [listserv@mitvma.mit.edu](mailto:listserv@mitvma.mit.edu):

**subscribe feminist firstname lastname**

Send articles, comments, or materials for review, but not subscription questions, to: Madeleine Tainton, Media Services Librarian, West Texas A&M University, WTAMU Box 736, Canyon, TX 79016-0736. Phone: 806-656-2407; Fax 806-656-2213; e-mail: [mtainton@wtamu.edu](mailto:mtainton@wtamu.edu).

Contributors: Pamela Crossland, West Texas A&M University; Laurel Duda, University of Rhode Island; Kristin H. Gerhard, Iowa State University; Laura L. Greene, Georgia Institute of Technology; Cathy Hartman, University of North Texas; Beth Jedlicka, University of Georgia; Cher Krause Knight, WTAMU; Rosemary McAndrew, New York University; Jacquelyn Marie, University of California, Santa Cruz; Pamela Matthews, University of Maryland; Necia Parker-Gibson, University of Arkansas; Bernice Redfern, San Jose State University; Madeleine Tainton, WTAMU; Wendy Thomas, Radcliffe College; Konny Thompson, Gonzaga University; Deborah Turner, UCSC; Nel Ward, Newport, Oregon; Priscilla White, Boston Public Library.

## Passion in a Palestinian landscape

Zahran, Yasmine. *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*. Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-942996-24-0, \$12.95.

"Love is a constantly changing landscape." This statement provides the focus for the narrator of this richly complex novel set in an ancient Palestinian village where a traveling archaeologist finds the threads of a narrative that will direct his life for the coming decade. A visitor to the bleak, almost deserted rocky plateau in January 1980, Foster discovers a collection of rotting notebooks that reveal, in both Arabic script and English, the tale of two unfortunate lovers, a displaced Palestinian woman and her English lover, who stayed in the same room three years before.

Leisurely, in a velvet tapestry of colorful language, the story unravels not only through these writings but also from the tales of those who saw the couple when they toured the area. A fascinating blend of both physical and emotional landscapes allows the reader to experience, through her journals, Rayya's zeal as a martyr and, in his writings, Alex's worship for the poet. Skillfully woven into their growing intimacy and the intensifying parallel views of their relationship from their meeting in 1969 are discussions of love, both individual and nationalistic. It is through Rayya, however, that we see a view of Arab culture—its politics, mysticism, and poetry.

This tale of treachery, duplicity, and passion leads to a startling climax in a dark view showing the pain of Palestine. For Rayya is the epitome of Palestine, never permitted peace until she—and her country—are free.

*Beggar* is Zaharan's third book, her first written in English, following *Echoes of History*, a history of ancient Palestine, and *The First Melody*, a novel, both written in Arabic. —N. Ward

## Escaping the Argentine whorehouse

Katz, Judith. *The Escape Artist*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-56341-084-2, \$12.95; cloth, ISBN 1-56341-0855-0, \$26.95.

Almost every one of us has been hooked, engaged in some incredible story in part because of its disturbing nature. That's how I experienced *The Escape Artist*, a lesbian adventure novel by Judith Katz. Set in a "kosher" whorehouse, we might have expected this love story from Dorothy Allison, had she been stolen from Eastern Europe and forced to live in early 19th-century Jewish Buenos Aires. Sofia Teitlebaum, a 16-year-old "bride" tricked into prostitution, falls in love with the charming, bona fide escape artist, Hankus (formerly Hannah) Lubarsky. As the unlikely romance tumbles forward, Katz weaves fiction, fantasy, and history to make this work a haunting delight. In one instance, she

cunningly conveys the impact a woman "misbehaving" might have had upon those around her:

Tante Sara lit a tiny brown cigar right there in the carriage and began to puff away. I had never seen a woman smoke before, never mind a Jewish woman. In spite of my terror I found this absolutely thrilling; I couldn't take my eyes off her. I felt a sudden desire for her to eat me alive.

Page after suspense-filled page reveals how religion, identity, and class entrap each desolate, underworld character—gangsters, prostitutes, and johns alike. At times, we wonder who needs magic the most. Perhaps, it's the zaftig Madam Perle Goldenberg, entrepreneur whose business deals conflict with her growing devotion to Judaism, or her violent, hoodlum brother Tutsik who's financially, and quite unwillingly, locked into the family business. Then again, magic might best benefit Tante (aunt) Sara. The tricks she plays make her slowly sink into a depression not unlike a disappearing act. Katz generously smatters a great deal of magic-act metaphor throughout the entire work. Sofia's father, for instance, "out of nowhere, with an empty pocket, ...[provides] for [his] family each Shabbos." Sofia's mother advises her daughter, "play your cards right and he'll make us all happy." At times, the descriptions and the adventures get too outrageous, too unbelievable. It's almost as if Katz balances the horrible reality on which *Artist* is based with ridiculous twists of humor, hope, and imagination. The result: we read curious, transfixed like deer in headlights, asking ourselves and our friends, do you know anything about Jews in Argentina? Those prone to queasiness may want to skip this sleight of hand. But you'd miss one admirable result of rigorous historical research and an intriguingly fun tale of love. *Artist* reminds us that truth is still stranger than fiction and to escape unscathed—whether from a closet or a dark past—is indeed an art. —D. Turner

## Colors of life

Wilson, Barbara. *If You Had a Family*. Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1996. Trade, ISBN 1-878067-83-4, \$23.95; paper, ISBN 1-878067-82-6, \$12.00.

Color came first, before things, before words, and more than any other color: yellow. Yellow was pale and bright, butter and fire.

So begins this novel of the colors of a woman's life. In this novel are interwoven the shades of family relationships, a family formed of an orphaned father, a mother whose family could not teach love, and of the daughter who must learn to form her own family and integrate herself within it. Cory is a little girl with a loving, happy family. Her mother loves life and exuberant flowers, her little brother adores her, and her father is the image of security. When her maternal grandmother comes to visit, the vibrant

# Book Review Section

shades begin to be sucked from Cory's existence. Devastating events gradually paint her life a dull brown, and shades of grey. As she grows older we find her rediscovering the shades of her life and coming to terms with the childhood she lost and the new palette she learns to use.

Wilson has dealt with a series of sensitive issues in this work, without becoming sentimental or strident. Loss, abuse, lesbianism, anger, and loneliness are all dealt with matter-of-factly, but with compassion. Family relationships, or their lack, intertwine with the way the main character represents her world in colors and paint and clay. The result is a tightly woven mat of words, with distinct, interlocking designs. The book often reads as if the chapters were written for separate publication, but that is not usually a distraction. It would be an excellent purchase for any public library collection, or for academic collections of contemporary women's writing or women's studies. —K. Thompson

## Witch hunt in Finland

Lander, Leena. *Cast a Long Shadow*. Toronto, Canada: Second Story Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-929005-66-X, \$15.95 Canadian, \$12.95 US.

Originally in Finnish, *Lankeaa pitkä varjo*, translated by Seija Paddon.

In 1666, Northern Europe, like America, was plagued by witches, or rather, by witch hunts. In the Åland Islands of Finland, Judge Nils Pilsander tries and condemns to death seven women accused of witchcraft. Lander's fictionalized account is a weaving together of the personal story of a modern woman, a writer and homemaker, who is haunted by the ghost of the judge.

The unnamed writer observes:

The man isn't sitting in the rain under a dripping porch light any longer; he is in my study. He wanted to tell a story and I needed one, but the collaboration isn't working the way I had imagined it would ...

Perhaps my theory about novels is too constricting; I don't accept in a work of fiction the kind of insanity which in the course of ordinary living I swallow every day. A limited amount of suffering, surprises, happy or unhappy events are appropriate in a novel; life, on the other hand, can waste them all at will.

She is looking for a novel to write; he needs someone to listen to his story. The judge and the novelist take turns, as she reports his words and gives us her viewpoint and a contrasting account of her twentieth-century life. Lander also presents the journal of one of the condemned women, a view of what it is like to wait to die, condemned for no reason. Lander's book, a delicately interwoven story within a story, is based on transcripts of the actual trials. It is also a story of passion and obsession, as the judge is obsessed with his victims, blaming

them, troubled by his feelings of entrapment in events, and rationalizing his role, while the writer describes him and her reactions as she is told the story.

Beautifully translated, the book is a moving and provocative look at human passion, and its tragic and troubling effects. —M. Tainton



## Love and murder on a Maine island

Saum, Karen. *I Never Read Thoreau*. Norwich, VT: New Victoria Publishers, 1996. Paperback, ISBN 0-934678-76-6, \$10.95.

The setting for Saum's novel is a rough island off the coast of Maine; she captures the beauty of the area in a matter of fact manner rather than the syrupy portrayal of tourist brochures. In addition, her sketches of native speaking and mannerisms are excellent. Rather than the typical Maine Yankee stereotype so often portrayed in the press, Saum uses colloquialisms lightly and effectively. The story's pace is slow and measured and reveals her great knowledge and love for the people of that area. Saum also uses an interesting device to attempt to draw the reader into a story told in retrospective; the narrator, Alex Adler is alone on the island with a storm raging outside and a dead body inside the cabin where she takes shelter. Having no writing material except artist crayons and paper, she writes each chapter in a different color. The device of color would be effective if it moved the story along; unfortunately it slows the deliberate pace even more.

The story of the women of the island and how their lives intermesh is a difficult web of past and present lovers, nuns in and outside of the church, and refugees hiding on their way to Canada. Most of all, this is the story of Alex's long relationship with Santa Clara, a former nun who manages to seduce in some form almost every woman who comes to the island. Saum attempts to make Santa Clara mysterious by keeping her silent; instead the character appears shallow, with nothing to say. She has so few redeeming characteristics it is difficult to understand why any of the women fall under her spell.

The story of the dead body is incidental, not central to the book, as is the struggle of the refugees making the difficult journey to Canada. While Saum's characterization of Maine life and its natives is excellent, the real mystery is why her story of misguided love, with all of its knots and twists, has to suffer being crowded by her attempt at a murder mystery. —P. Crossland

## Cross-country search for home

Hart, Kerry. *Not so much the fall*. Chicago: Third Side Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 1-879427-24-9, \$12.95.

"It's not so much the fall—it's the sudden stop." A phrase recalled by a troubled woman during her long journey home is the central theme of this complex, unsettling novel by Kerry Hart.

Casey, a 33-year-old lesbian who has been living in Portland, Oregon for 9 years, is driving back to her home town of Memphis where she will rejoin her estranged lover, Kris. Casey's "fall" actually begins many years earlier with her mother's death, a woman whose unconditional love set no proper limits as she continually picked up the pieces of Casey's misbehavior. Casey tended to her mother's many ailments and complied with the one unspoken rule—that she never stray far from home. When her mother dies of cancer shortly after her college graduation, Casey believes that her desire to "grow up" and attend graduate school out of state fatally broke her mother's heart. To flee from her guilt, Casey leaves Memphis and chooses Portland, Oregon as a suitably distant place to resettle.

Once in Portland, Casey spends nine years experiencing life through a haze of migraines and prescription drugs, working as a therapist and struggling through a series of difficult relationships with women—most notably with Kris, who unwittingly becomes Casey's surrogate mother during their dysfunctional, six-year relationship. Casey's betrayals test Kris's loyalty until they both yearn for a change of scenery. Kris leaves first with their beloved dogs and heads back to Memphis, while Casey packs up their house and numbly follows several weeks later. It is on this journey that we find her, heading toward Kris, Memphis, and her "sudden stop."

The author does not present these events chronologically, for Casey's tale unfolds via her random memories and reflections as her mind wanders during her drive back to Memphis. As we experience the people, places, and events that have been pivotal in Casey's life, we cannot help but wonder what kind of life she will build for herself when she reaches her destination. However, readers who prefer stories with clear solutions and happy endings may be disappointed, for, like life, this novel holds out no guarantees. What it does do is skillfully explore the moral ambiguity that can cloud our adult relationships when we replay our childhood dramas, creating new wounds even as we seek to heal old ones. And it does offer hope that one woman's soul searching can help her to bring greater honesty, accountability, and genuine feeling into her relationships.

—P. White

## Intrigue in Key West

Manthorne, Jackie. *Last Resort: A Harriet Hubble Mystery*. Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada: Gynergy Books, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-921881-34-7, \$10.95

A lesbian guest house in Key West, Florida is the setting for this Harriet (better known to close friends as Harry) Hubble story. The guest house is owned by Barb Fenton, Harry's former lover and still close friend and the novel takes off after an attack on Barb. The attack leaves her in a coma, and a controversial will puts Harry in a leadership position at the elegant guest house—the plot thickens! Suddenly Harry herself has motive. The subplots delve into the dynamics of relationships, with previous links between the characters unfolding, along with motives and opportunities for the attack. Attractions abound and contemporary definitions of fidelity are challenged. The multicultural atmosphere of Key West is a necessary backdrop for the novel: "...its untamed, rowdy nature. Southern good old boys and gals, straight tourists, expatriate Cubans, gay men in leather and lesbians in denim, or vice versa..." The island's compactness serves to enhance tolerance. Harriet Hubble enters this exhilarating mecca looking for a respite from the Canadian winter and a resolution to her twelve year relationship with Judy, who recently insisted that their relationship be open. An attempted murder and much more awaits her.

—R. McAndrew

## Dreamlike surprises

Guest, Barbara. *Quill, Solitary*. APPARTION. Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-942996-26-7, \$12.95.

Keep a dictionary close by—this beautiful book will have you thumbing for unfamiliar words. Barbara Guest, recognized as one of the distinguished New York School of poets, has produced a lovely volume of dreamlike, yet passionately real, surprises. Here is my tribute:

Like moving pictures of the silent era  
Or darkened glimpses underwater.  
Images uncertain, penned in evocative tones.  
Her words swoop and disturb, imprinting.  
Reminiscent; connotations unknown.

Seven free-form, sparsely spaced poems appear in this slender volume. I favor "Finally, To The Italian Girl," with its simple, delicate rendering of its subject in musical notation. "Cold and Its Demeanour" captures the essence of the chilling of a young woman's romantic desires.

Unusual punctuation is used to full effect. Barbara Guest's book does not yield up its treasures easily, yet the portrayals linger with the dedicated reader, and surface with their hidden suggestions over time.

—L. L. Greene

Review section continued, page 7

# Call for Award Nominations

ALA's Awards Program Committee is seeking nominees for the Elizabeth Futas Catalyst for Change Award.

The Futas Catalyst For Change Award recognizes and honors a librarian who invests time and talent to make positive changes in the profession of librarianship by taking risks to further the cause, helping new librarians grow and achieve, working for

change within ALA or other library organizations, inspiring colleagues to excel or make the impossible possible.

AWARD: Citation and \$1,000 from Elizabeth Futas Memorial Fund.

To nominate someone, complete the form below and send it, along with supporting documents, to Elizabeth Curry at the address below.

## Elizabeth Futas Catalyst For Change Award 1998 APPLICATION FORM ALA Awards Program

NAME (of person nominated): \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS (Institution): \_\_\_\_\_

STREET: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

ALA MEMBER #: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

NOMINATED BY:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Send SIX copies of the application form and six copies of supporting documentation to:

Elizabeth Curry  
SEFLIN  
100 South Andrews Ave.  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301  
Fax: 954-357-6998  
E-mail: [currye@pb.seflin.org](mailto:currye@pb.seflin.org)



Clip and send

## Artist and poet make elegant art

Hunt, Erica. *Woodcuts* by Alison Saar. *Arcade*. Berkeley: Kelsey St. Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 0-932716-39-3, \$15; special edition, signed, with original woodcut, ISBN 0-932716-40-7, \$125.

In their collaborative statement, Erica Hunt and Alison Saar note, "We have this in common: art and life, children..." All of this—and much more—is explored with unblinking candor and insight in *Arcade*, a collection of Hunt's poetry and Saar's woodcuts. The poems are finely tuned ruminations, addressing issues ranging from personal reverie to social satire. Their elegant cadence is counterbalanced by the graphic starkness of Saar's prints.

Saar, better known as a sculptor, contributes woodcuts so deliberately crude and essentialist, yet masterfully rendered, that one cannot help but be reminded of the early German Expressionists working at the beginning of this century. Harsh contrasts of black and white, or the saturated warmth of red against brown, as well as the emphasized wood grain, recall the work of Die Brücke (particularly Emil Nolde), and even the Symbolist Edvard Munch.

Hunt's words and Saar's images are well matched in their evocative potency. The prose, which tends towards empowered declarations as much as somber-tinged introspection, reveals the process of coming to terms with one's own womanhood. And Hunt is capable of great humor, as evidenced in "Magritte's Black Flag," a chronicle of mass transit's perils that is an apt metaphor for society; and "Madame Narcissist," which lampoons the self-absorption of her contemporaries and colleagues:

I believe my silence speaks volumes.

I have as many layers as any serial killer.

But whether she is confronting racism, gender, the public-at-large, or her own self-doubts, Hunt dispenses witty wisdom, as in "Biographical Suite: 3. City of Heaven": "In the long run, there is no such thing as balance. You are all the way in or you are out of bounds."

After reading this collection I have three hopes: that Saar will continue to make books (this is her first); that Hunt will continue to write her probing poetry; and that readers will be able to get their hands on a copy of *Arcade*, which has been published in a limited edition of two thousand.

—C. K. Knight

## Artist's prose poem

Adnan, Etel. *There : In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other*. Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1997. Paper, ISBN 0-942996-28-3, \$13.00.

There is a poem of questions, written by a fascinating artist. Adnan is well-known for her

paintings as well as her writing. As the subtitle suggests, there are many juxtapositions in the poem: love and hate, desire and war. Perhaps these seemingly opposed juxtapositions represent different points on the spectrum between two extremes. This poem is multi-dimensional. Adnan creates different levels of meaning and then weaves them together, or she layers them one on top of another, as one does with colors on a canvas.

Adnan questions some of the fundamentals of human nature: who we are as women and men, or as people of different backgrounds and nationalities. What is the nature of relationships between and among people? She asks these extremely difficult questions of herself on a personal level, and of humankind. She also brings up the question of war. The violence of war is a common theme in the work of Adnan, and it can be seen also in this poem. She says, "War is raw." Clearly so. It intensifies desire, the ultimate one, the one meant to annihilate what is and make happen what was not to be, turn the metaphysical enterprise of love into hate.

This is a complex poem. It is a beautiful and, at times, frightening reflection on the human spirit. At one point, Adnan asks, "Do questions ever cease?" Perhaps amidst these questions lie some answers.

—B. Jedlicka

## Humor: amateur sleuth Nancy Clue

Maney, Mabel. *Nancy Clue and the Hardy Boys in A Ghost in the Closet*. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1995. Trade, ISBN 1-57344-013-2, \$24.95; paper, ISBN 1-57344-012-4, \$10.95.

This is a hilarious spoof on the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys detective series that many of us read as children. Now we have Nancy Clue and the Hardy Boys solving mysteries together, and of course all three are gay. This is gay and lesbian life in the fifties when clothes were the thing and butch-femme roles were much in evidence. The most fun with this book, and the other Nancy Clue spoofs, *The Case of the Good-for-Nothing Girlfriend* and *The Case of the Not-so-Nice Nurse*, (both also from Cleis), is to read them aloud to your partner, lover, or friend. As Nancy says after she sees her girlfriend Cherry (the nurse) sitting practically in the lap of Jackie (the police officer), to her chum Frank, "I need your help. I've got trouble—girl trouble—of the most terrible kind!" There is also a wonderful local librarian, Miss Penelope Parsnips, whom everyone calls Miss Pansy. As she says, "While you could say books are my business, poodles are my passion!" Clothes are very important when you are out investigating so Nancy had her "crisp shirtwaist cinched with a slender belt in the prettiest blue," and her date, Cherry, had a "smart shirtwaist of the palest yellow and she was carrying a white patent-leather clutch purse." A great read, and we look forward to more in this ongoing serial.

—Jacquelyn Marie

# Book Review Section

## From apartheid to freedom

Ramphela, Mamphela. *Across Boundaries: the Journal of a South African Woman Leader*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 1-55861-165-7, \$19.95.

Have you longed to hear the voices of South African women reflect on the historical changes taking place there? Have you tried to imagine what has been left unsaid on the news and even on National Public Radio? If so, read *Across boundaries*. This timely, frank memoir chronicles the life journey Mamphela Ramphela, described on the book jacket as "a leading political activist, medical doctor, anthropologist, teacher, advisor to the Mandela government, university president, and mother." An undercurrent of racist and sexist oppression pulls readers under her wave-like depictions of the challenges and triumphs of her life. Ramphela's insights into these events act as a window on the radical unrest of her country.

The work begins with Ramphela's birth in the strenuous summer heat of Transvaal. Detailed descriptions focus on those in her family and extended family who welcome her into the world.

From there, she leads us to school in Transvaal, there earning a medical degree against numerous odds. The influential people she meets help initiate her relatively-easy segue into a life of activism.

"Natal Medical School . . . offered me an environment for the transformation of my life from an innocent rural girl to a person who became alive to the vast possibilities which life has to offer."

Her activist approach to work lasted for years after she became a physician. Such work included founding successful health care facilities under some decidedly grim circumstances. Because of the political climate, she reluctantly changes her leadership role. Ramphela carries readers through a very personal struggle during which

"I...noticed that the method of Anthropology—participant observation—was not very different from what I had used as an activist in community development work...But I was still not ready to become an anthropologist."

Besides sharing precious stories of her political involvement and career choices, Ramphela reveals deeply moving accounts of marriage, motherhood, and relationships. "...[L]ike so many women who are my contemporaries, I did not negotiate our respective roles as man and wife with my husband before our marriage."

She also discusses her relationship with the former South African leader Steven Biko in her usual open manner. It seems innocent at first, then unfolds into a tragic love affair—the stuff of a Shakespeare play. Yet, even in the midst of love lost comes a taste of Ramphela's consistently brilliant observations. Her passionate, probing commentary of the media-birthed title used repeatedly to describe her is typical of her incisiveness throughout this

courageous work:

"...the eagerness to label a woman who was linked to, but not married to, a deceased political personality signals society's anxiety to re-establish its own equilibrium by symbolically removing her from the liminal unknown to the liminal known where social tools exist to deal with her."

Although Ramphela has a remarkable ability to make practical use of feminist ideologies, *Across boundaries* gives us a sense of real contradictions she learns to reckon with. In one puzzling instance, she uses Biko, in his role as a famous leader of the people, to explain the paradoxes of being a famous leader. One might ask, but is not Ramphela a well-known leader in her own right? Her explanation of the paradoxes between public demands and private life has the same clever understanding found throughout the memoir. But, for a brief instance, it almost reads like a young woman making excuses for "her man." Through such contradictions, we see the depths and peaks of her life.

Ramphela reveals again and again how she maintains her faith that change would come and to speak her truths whether she is betrayed by the country she cherishes or by those she knows and loves. She imparts confidence, inspiration, and wisdom to all those around her. Perhaps this mentoring helps counter her belief that "the most devastating impact of apartheid on poor black South Africans has been the destruction of people's faith in themselves as agents of history."

A few aspects of the memoir are somewhat jarring. It's encouraging that the germanic descriptions of the naming process in chapter one are inconsistent with the remainder of the work. Next, there are a few surprising and unfortunate editorial errors. And finally, the discussion of her work at UCT has a somewhat moralistic tone. To these observations, one might find a response within *Across boundaries*: "Survival," she writes, "is a stronger force than the fear of offending others." To read this inspiring and powerful memoir in its entirety is to gain an understanding of that force as

Ramphela does indeed survive and flourish.

—D. Turner

## French resistance memoir

Aubrac, Lucie. *Outwitting the Gestapo*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.

Paper, ISBN 08-03259-23-9, \$12.00.

Lucie Aubrac's memoirs tell the story of nine intense months in her life. The nine months begin in May 1943, in Lyon, France, as Aubrac begins her second pregnancy. She and her husband, Raymond, activists in the French Resistance, face extreme danger daily, along with all members of the Resistance. In her memoir Aubrac gives us a clear picture of this danger as well as the essential role played by women.

# Book Review Section

During the German occupation, being captured by the German Gestapo meant torture and almost certain death. Raymond is arrested, and Aubrac spends months making contacts, gathering information, and planning his rescue. Daily, she lives with the fear that Raymond will be executed before she effects his rescue, or that her parents or Raymond's parents will be endangered by her activities. She protects her son by hiding him in a country school where he cannot be traced to her or her husband.

Working with other members of the Resistance, she plans and leads the raid to free her husband. After several weeks in hiding, Aubrac, her husband, and their son manage an escape to England in February 1944, just in time for the birth of her daughter.

Aubrac's attention to detail in her portrayal of the daily hardships and the terror of living in occupied France creates a moving story. Clearly written from a woman's point of view, the book presents to the reader a perspective seldom seen in mainstream history publications. —C. Hartman

## A history of sex education

Chen, Constance M. *The Sex Side of Life: Mary Ware Dennett's Pioneering Battle for Birth Control and Sex Education*. New York: The New Press, 1996. Cloth, ISBN 1-56584-132-8, \$25.00; paper, ISBN 1-56584-133-6, \$15.00.

Mary Ware Dennett: suffragist, leader of the American Arts and Crafts movement, peace activist, and crusader for the right to obtain and distribute birth control information. Chen presents this information in an interesting and well-researched biography. Though not as well known as fellow reformer Margaret Sanger, Dennett made a significant contribution to the crusade to legalize the distribution of sex education and family planning information. The title refers to a pamphlet Dennett initially wrote for her sons. Years after it was first written and distributed, Dennett was prosecuted for its distribution under the provisions of the Comstock Act, which banned any material deemed to be obscene. Ironically, in the years prior to her trial, Dennett actively lobbied Congress to repeal the very law under which she was later indicted.

*The Sex side* is a well-written book and makes for fascinating reading, though it could have benefited from closer editing. In two places the author incorrectly refers to the president of Bryn Mawr College as M. Thomas Carey instead of M. Carey Thomas. In discussing Dennett's early years, Chen clearly means to refer to the end of the nineteenth century, but "the last decades of the eighteenth century" appears in the text. Nonetheless, this is an important book which rescues a little-known woman from obscurity. Highly recommended for women's studies collections. —B. Redfern

## Remembering China

Howe, Florence, ed. *Women's Studies Quarterly: Beijing and Beyond: Toward the Twenty-First Century of Women*. Vol. 24, nos. 1 and 2. New York: Feminist Press, 1996. Paper, ISBN 1-55861-142-8, \$22.00.

This "extra large, double issue" of *Women's Studies Quarterly* comprises two parts: an extended report on the United Nations Fourth International Conference and a set of national reports on women's studies.

The U.N. Conference and its associated NGO Forum, ultimately held in Beijing and Huairou, were the largest United Nations-sponsored gatherings of women in history. This volume includes a chronology of the events leading up to the conferences, text of Global FaxNet Bulletins documenting actions and reactions as the Chinese government changed the site of the NGO Forum from Beijing to Huairou over international protest, photographs from the meetings, and excerpts from remarks made at the meetings. Worth the price of the issue alone is the complete text of the Platform for Action adopted by the conference. This should be basic required reading for all persons working for the equality of women. The topics it covers range from women's education, women and poverty, the girl child, and the environment to institutional and financial arrangements necessary to realize the actions outlined in the platform. Mariam K. Chamberlain's review of the resource volumes prepared as background for the conference provides additional context for the conference.

The second section of the volume looks to the future of the women's movement and women's studies in the next century. These reports document the national history and status of women's studies in twelve countries. There is a wide representation of cultures and geographic regions in these reports. They are arranged by the period when women's studies originated in each country and cover the range from well-established programs begun in the 1970's (e.g., Germany, Korea), those begun in the 1980's (e.g., China, Peru), and new voices (e.g., Hungary, Uganda). As Florence Howe notes, "if one follows the national histories and current status of women's studies in a variety of countries around the world, one will find the essential elements for knowledge about the contents of the Platform for Action and, just as important, strategies for moving it forward."

Alongside the Autumn 1996 issue of *Signs*, which includes five eyewitness responses to the conference, this is a primary sourcebook that should be in all women's studies collections that serve women, with added value from Chamberlain's review, personal accounts, and country reports.

—K. Gerhard

# Book Review Section

## Trailblazer in the air



Wagstaff, Patty, with Ann L. Cooper. *Fire and Air: a Life on the Edge*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 1-55652-310-6, \$24.95.

In 1991, Patty Wagstaff became the first woman to win the U.S. National Aerobatic Championship. *Fire and Air* is the story of her life.

Her story is told honestly and even-handedly, including both good and bad memories. She had many difficulties growing up, not the least of which were her parents' failing marriage and alcoholism. Yet she also tells of the beauty of the places they lived, and good times with her family. From an early age Patty possessed a fierce independence, which her parents spent much time and energy trying to quash; her free spirit survived and became stronger as she grew older.

As a young adult, Patty wandered quite a bit, making many friends. Eventually she ended up in Alaska. There she met Bob Wagstaff, who taught her to fly, and who became the other love of her life.

Flying becomes so important to Patty that the book is almost as much about flying as it is about her life. The reader accompanies Patty on many flights, vicariously feeling the elation and occasionally a quick bolt of fear brought on by a mishap. It is fascinating to learn about aerobatics and the rules of aerobatic competitions. Wagstaff does a good job of explaining what it feels like to compete. She talks about the highs and lows of competition, about what it's like to have an all-consuming love for a dangerous sport which has taken several close friends from her.

In reading this book, I couldn't help making the comparison to Beryl Markham's *West with the Night*. The two women are both trailblazers in the field of aviation. In terms of prose, this book cannot compare with Markham's, but it remains worth reading. Patty Wagstaff's story is one of courage and drive, told in a straightforward and honest manner. Truly she is an inspiration to anyone who has a dream.

—B. Jedlicka

## Canadian writer's journey

Blais, Marie-Claire. *The Angel of Solitude*. Translated by Laura Hodes. Victoria, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1994. Paper, ISBN 08-89223-37-8, \$11.95.

—. *American Notebooks: a Writer's Journey*. Victoria, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1996. Paper, ISBN 08-89223-58-0, \$13.95.

These two works, the latter autobiographical, invite the reader to draw some parallels between them. Marie-Claire Blais, in *Angel*, focuses on the tension between the needs of the individual and the community or society. The characters are revealed piecemeal, by vignettes and internal monologues;

they constantly test the limits of companionship and friendship within their relationships, by intemperate habits, by secrecy and sometimes by outright infidelity or abuse. One keeps a shopgirl as a mistress, underlining the fact that liberal ideals do not keep the motives of the individual pure, and that a rise to a bourgeois standard of living may also bring other bourgeois habits. The needs of the group, which have risen above the solely economic, and the affiliations of the friends/lovers who share the house allow examination of these and other emotional and social issues, including the tendency of the socially disenfranchised to self-destruction. It is not a cautionary tale so much as the acute observations of a caring internal witness.

*American notebooks* recounts the author's life in the U.S. beginning in the early 1960s. Like the novel, it is episodic and pivots on some of the same issues, examining the writer's relationships. Her central, most basic tension is between the solitude that she needs in order to write and the temptations of society, for whom drinking and talking in company often supplant real work. To paraphrase Elena, one of her friends, "one who is lonely enough may embrace a chair," and the artist or writer must balance discipline with the need for companionship in order to be productive.

She clearly profiles the result of seduction by excess, and the fact that even for the "best and brightest," ideals and behavior often don't coincide. Also, as is clear from the internal monologue, she eventually carries her own community in her head, like the old painter mentioned in the book, for whom the memory of her dead dogs, idealized and detached, replaces having live ones. The author shows her response to feminism in her internal conversation as she restrains herself from disputing a man's pontifications about Virginia Woolf.

Racism, which she witnesses while living in a poor, mostly black neighborhood, is compared to the factories of Quebec and the appalling living conditions of factory workers, and she waits for her neighbors to strike. Somewhat ironically, she escapes this grinding exposure to the effects of racism and poverty by visits to successful authors in Martha's Vineyard, where she is confronted by the issue again in the form of a black author who loves white women. Did his wife and biracial son die from racism or isolation? Was the isolation caused by racism, or by depression? Is the angel of solitude also an angel of death? Clearly for Blais, the life of the mind cannot replace life with others, especially for the young or the immature. The focus, regardless of genre, is the need for community in some form, and the need for gallantry, whether physical or psychological: the survival of art and the individual despite society, sorrow, illness and death. Readers will understand more about the author and her works after reading *American notebooks*, although it is less a personal autobiography than a political one.

—N. Parker-Gibson

*Women in Libraries*

## Spirituality and intimacy

Elker, Diane, and Sapphire, eds. *Keep Simple Ceremonies*. Portland, ME: Astarte Shell Press, 1995. Paper, ISBN 1-885349-02-5, \$14.95.

This book came out of the twelve-year history of the Feminist Spiritual Community of Portland, Maine. It is handwritten in the manner of ancient scribes and reveals rituals that celebrate this community and bind it together through various phases of its existence. The introduction emphasizes that the perspective of this group is primarily that of white European-American women; each ritual often has the dimension of the political as well as the personal.

The contents include "Life Cycle Rituals," such as menarche, baby blessings, and croning; "Seasons of the Earth," honoring Beltane, Lammas, Samhain as well as other ancient Celtic celebrations; "Personal Milestones," commemorating personal journeys of an individual as well as the group; and rituals strengthening the community of women as a whole.

The Feminist Spiritual Community believes that the journey through life is one of spirit experiencing a physical body rather than physical bodies seeking spiritual enlightenment. In the introduction to the croning ritual the community affirms: "We are here to celebrate the attainment of the age of wisdom in a woman's life. Our patriarchal society does not recognize crones as the wise, powerful older women that they are." Methods are guidelines, not rules, and the editors emphasize that each community or individual should customize ceremonies as needed.

Spiritual groups seeking a format from which to launch their journey will find much of interest in this volume. Therapists and survivors of the multitude of violence against women may find several rituals very helpful. Especially useful in this contest are the two unbinding rituals and the ceremony for letting go. Humor is celebrated in the April Foola ritual, nor are the joys of life overlooked; there are processes for baby blessing, home blessing, and honoring female friendship. —P. Crossland

## Primer for lesbian parents

Arnup, Katherine, ed. *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride and Prejudice*. Charlottetown, PEI, Canada: Gynergy Books, 1995. Paper, ISBN 0-921881-33-9, \$19.95 Canada, \$16.95 U. S.

In this book on lesbian parenting, Arnup has brought together an astonishing set of essays. As editor, she managed to bring together 39 disparate essays that showcase the breadth and depth of the lesbian parenting experience.

The essays are amazingly diverse; among the groups represented are lesbian birth parents, lesbian step-parents, lesbians who were artificially inseminated by known donors, lesbians who were artificially inseminated by anonymous donors, lesbians who adopted from their own country, lesbians who went abroad to adopt, lesbians who always dreamed of being mothers, and lesbians who never wanted to be—and still are not sure about being—mothers.

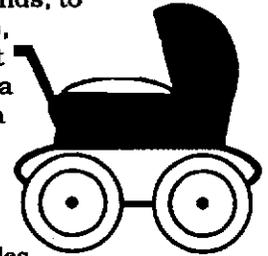
Thoughts, feelings, and dreams are unleashed in these pieces. The details of one couple's final decision to not have a child are outlined a few pages down from a dialogue between a woman who sees herself as mother first and lover second and her lover, who wishes that she would reverse the importance of these roles. A mother's embarrassment at discussing masturbation with her daughter is a chapter away from a mother's pride in her son's ability to see beyond traditional gender roles.

Themes do emerge, however. Several essays detail the trickiness of coming out, especially when the disclosure was not voluntary on part of the author. The writers explain how they came out to themselves, to their ex-lovers, to their ex-husbands, to their current lovers, to their parents, to their children, to their children's friends, to their children's friends' parents, to their children's teachers. Not surprisingly, facing homophobia as a person and as a family is a recurrent theme, as is the inability of government and business organizations to recognize and validate the relationships of same-sex couples and their families.

Arnup makes sure that the book does not consist solely of personal reminiscences, however. A few academic articles are also included. Suggestions for further research in the field are given, and there are analyses of the "family status" of gays and lesbians and of homophobia in the school system.

It's undoubtedly a testament to Arnup's editing that the book reads as easily as it does, given the differences in voices and in the purposes of the essays. She wisely grouped the essays into five main themes: "Choosing Parenthood," "Defining Family," "Raising Children," "Parents and Children," and "Lesbian Parenting and the Law." These groupings help the essays hang together better than they otherwise might.

This book is recommended for several reasons, mainly for its aforementioned depth. Besides including stories and research from diverse people, it also includes pieces from various countries including the United States, Canada, and South Africa. It is also recommended because it is timely, touching and truthful. —P. Matthews



# Book Review Section

## The high cost of being black

Armour, Jody David. *Negrophobia and Reasonable Racism: The Hidden Costs of Being Black in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 0-8147-0640-1, \$24.95.

Jody Armour's recent book is a cogent discussion of the irrational, so-called "reasonable" racism practiced by many in the United States, especially in the context of law. He gives examples of what he terms "Reasonable Racists" ("as racist as society in general"), "Intelligent Bayesians" (racist based on crime statistics and media exposure), and "Involuntary Negrophobes" (racist because of circumstances, such as previous crimes against them by African-Americans). In an article in the *Stanford Law Review* (1994), he explored the use of racial imagery in criminal defense cases, and how racial bias can affect judgment—the "reasonable racism" further explored in the book, which points out the use and misuse of statistics, over-simplified images of race, and other sources that lawyers and others, especially in the media, play on, using common fears and stereotypes to keep blacks and other people of color in the position of "one-down" rather than equal in court and in the rest of the world.

One example: a woman getting money from an automated teller machine in an enclosed booth shot a black man who, upon entering the booth, reached under his coat (for his wallet, as it turned out). Her lawyers tried to say that it was a reasonable action, given crime statistics and the expectations of society regarding black males. Armour demolishes that argument quickly and skillfully.

The book is well written, but the language is more clearly for legal studies than for the general population. Armour is an associate professor of law at the University of Pittsburgh, and it shows. I read the book in tandem with two books by Ellis Cose, *Color-Blind: Seeing Beyond Race in a Race-Obsessed World* (HarperCollins, 1997), and *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (1993). Cose explores the frustration, rage, and depression felt when people do "all the right things" and are still undervalued, ignored, persecuted and attacked (not unlike some other minorities, or in the case of women, majorities). Cose's books cover some of the same issues as Armour's, but from a perspective of personal experience and in more common language. Armour, however, makes unique points in relation to racial stereotypes and societal expectations.

—N. Parker-Gibson

Correction: The age group for *Aruna's Journey*, reviewed last issue, was misidentified. The book, by Jyotsna Sreenivasan and published by Smooth Stone, is intended for ages 8-12, grades 3-7.

## Creative new writers

Reaman, Micki, et al, eds. *Present Tense: Writing and Art by Young Women*. Corvallis, OR: Calyx Books, 1996. Cloth, ISBN 0-934971-54-4, \$26.95; paper, ISBN 0-934971-53-6, \$14.95.

The Calyx Young Women's Editorial Collective offers a remarkable volume of the work of young women often referred to in the media as "generation x." Their poetry, art work, and essays demonstrate that they are a force to be acknowledged and not discarded under a generic label.

These young women remember where they came from, whether they immigrated with their families or were born on American soil. Kahlil Suggang Apuzen learns her Phillipino history well, knowing as early as the first grade "*pinoys join the military to master the art of corruption. torture is cheaply done with a cigarette, a knife, a fist, a dick.*" Kristin Herber describes her own conception and birth, the details a legacy from her mother. "She's an emotion ocean, alone in Milwaukee, full of sardines and the bulging secret of me. She eats cheap, lays low, catches what rolls in: i.e. labor, the bus to the hospital, her ride back afterwards." Breaking their collective and individual isolation, these young women share views of old worlds and new, their ties to family and community.

Nor is the personal experience of their own sexuality overlooked. In "My Breasts: Two Views," Emily Lloyd recalls, "You got small, stubborn breasts, a man once told me...He was right: as far apart from each other as possible...my breasts are like the chins of sisters who aren't speaking, but are forced to sit together on the same couch." Later in her life another lover offers a totally different view of her body.

The art work is just as compelling. Priti Darooka expresses a nostalgia for India that does not omit the reality of what her life would be if she returned. Dorothy Eileen Goode and Cara Judea Alhadeff depict the pain of disease, with its impact on the artist and on the victim herself. These young women symbolize their lives and experience and sense of self through their work. As Stacey Dressen-McQueen puts it, "I paint small prayers to myself."

Ann E. Green dreams about life on the farm: not the wholesome, sentimental vision of children running freely through the fields, but the reality of her family's dairy farm, and all the work and pain inherent in living ethically off the land. She writes of the pressures that force her family to sell their farm, of the underlying sexism that, while possibly protecting her and her sisters in some ways, excludes them from the total range of experience necessary to the work.

The theme of the outcast, of being foreign whether it is by skin color, ideology, or sexual orientation, continues in the prose section of this book. It is very easy to forget the ages of the young

women and focus only on the experiences they relate, though there are occasional reminders of the contemporary nature of these experiences. Emily Regan Wills writes, "That picture is forever painted on the screen saver of my mind." Another adds, "Actually you and I had fought that night. Remember? I don't know about what. Maybe the chick with the shaved head you had flirted with at the party the weekend before."

The works of these young women are exciting to read, filled with their passion, awareness, and need to be visible in a society compelled to label peaches and people equally generic. —P. Crossland

## Mystery in a country theater

Dreher, Sarah. *Bad company*. Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 1995. Cloth, ISBN 0-934678-67-7, \$19.95; paper, ISBN 0-934678-66-9, \$10.95.

If you enjoy reading mysteries with colorful female characters, but would like a change from the standard who-dunnit murder plot, then try reading Sarah Dreher's latest novel, *Bad company*. In this sixth novel of her Stoner McTavish series, Dreher combines mystery, humor, lesbian romance, and psychological insight to create a highly satisfying reading experience.

Stoner McTavish, Dreher's unassuming and likable lesbian sleuth, is also co-owner of a travel agency with her longtime, straight friend, the lively Marylou Kesselbaum. Stoner, Marylou, and Stoner's romantic partner Gwen Owens (whom Stoner met in an earlier novel when she killed Gwen's husband in self-defense) are preparing to relocate from Cambridge to western Massachusetts when Stoner receives an interesting letter. Sherry Dodder, owner of the Cottage Inn in Maine, has been referred to Stoner and would like her to investigate a series of events that have been plaguing her collective women's theater company in residence there. Intrigued, Stoner somewhat guiltily leaves the packing of the travel agency to Marylou, and she and Gwen set off for an eventful stay at the stiffly formal Cottage. There they meet Sherry Dodder, expertly portrayed as an enigmatic, complex personality deeply disturbed by the incidents endangering her "sisters." As they pose as ordinary inn guests, Stoner and Gwen witness plenty of mischief: ladders that suddenly give way, altered scripts, tea inexplicably laced with marijuana, stage blocking marks moved to cause physical mishap, and threatening notes, one targeted to Stoner herself.

While the mystery plot is certainly intriguing, it is the author's fascinating characters that make this novel such a pleasure to read. Even the minor characters are vividly portrayed in the Agatha Christie tradition, and the author also takes frequent opportunity to poke affectionate fun at some common lesbian stereotypes. Along with Stoner,

Gwen, Marylou, and Sherry, the "wimmin" of the theater company, named Demeter Ascending, are equally unique and engaging. Stoner also befriends an older, lesbian couple staying at the Cottage, and they charm Stoner with their magnetism as they also share with Stoner their powers of observation and their own sleuthing skills. While the characters create much hilarity, the author also leads us deeply into their emotional lives, but most poignantly into the relationship between Stoner and Gwen. The love between these two women cannot fail to move us, even as they themselves fall victim to the mischievous forces afoot at the Cottage, and the bond between them is tested.

Ultimately, this novel makes the transition from being a "who-dunnit" and becomes a deeper study of "why do it," as Stoner attempts to fathom the psychological twists and turns of a disturbed woman's mind. The author gives Stoner, and the reader, a chilling insight: that evil can manifest itself for shockingly simple reasons. But pathology cannot thwart the forces of heroism, compassion, and true sisterhood that unify Sarah Dreher's strong and diverse group of women.

You need not have read the earlier Stoner McTavish books to appreciate *Bad company*, but after reading this novel you may be very eager to enjoy the rest of the series. —P. White

*Review section continued, next page*

## Books to empower girls

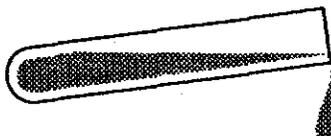
In order to make available a substantial collection of books containing positive role models for girls, one author has compiled a list of books from independent publishers. Jyotsna Sreenivasan, author of two such books, *Aruna's Journeys* and *The Moon Over Crete* (reviewed here in prior issues), evaluated a range of books and assembled an annotated recommended list. From picture books for toddlers to books for young adults, the books are available online at <http://members.aol.com/brvgirls>, or write to Brave Girls and Strong Women at P.O. Box 15481, Washington, DC 20003-0481.

# Book Review Section

## Women as scientists

Gates, Barbara T., and Ann B. Shteir. *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 0-299-15480-7, \$45.00; paper, ISBN 0-299-15484-X, \$17.95.

Some of my best memories include the glow of fascination in my children's eyes as they squeamishly dared to touch the soft shell of the eastern ring-necked snake egg cupped gently in the palm of my hand. Unearthed while digging in our mulch pile, finding the eggs was just one of the engaging home-spun science explorations we shared.



In *Natural eloquence* notable authors describe the lives of women who were captured by the fascination of science and chose to dedicate a significant part of their lives to exploring and writing about it. From Catherine Parr Traill's studies of the backwoods of Canada to Rachael Carson's enchantment with the sea, thirteen essays and one interview reveal the difficulties women from the 1800s to the present have had to overcome to pursue scientific investigation and be considered viable contributors to a male-dominated field. Although a limited number of women are represented, their stories demonstrate the hurdles jumped to claim their place in the world of explorative science.

They also give the reader a sense of the areas of science women were first drawn to, such as botany, biology, entomology and other natural sciences, as opposed to the physical sciences of mathematics, physics, chemistry and others. This raises the question of whether women chose natural sciences due to the influence of our patriarchal society's belief that females were capable of observing and collecting but not capable of cognitive research, or if women simply associated more closely with the areas of science that explored their place within the natural world. Whatever the answer, the essays capture their journeys from budding interest to recognition in their field. Furthermore, one undeniable contribution is women's translation of scientific theories into the vernacular, making the mysteries of science popular among the general public and the young. Gates and Shteir have compiled a significant contribution to the areas of women's studies and the history of scientific research. —L. E. Duda

## Fearless woman of Ethiopia

Olmstead, Judith. *Woman between Two Worlds: Portrait of an Ethiopian Rural Leader*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997. Cloth, ISBN 0-252-02283-1, \$39.95; paper, ISBN 0-252-06587-5, \$19.95.

Brave, bold, and clever, Chimate Chumbalo acted as a leader and mediator, or *balabat*, in her rural Ethiopian community. Rarely has a woman held this powerful political position. In *Worlds*, author and anthropologist Judith Olmstead beautifully chronicles Chumbalo's unique life. Olmstead uses each chapter to focus on specific events or time periods. We "hear" Chumbalo's proud, yet humorous, "take-charge" voice because Olmstead quotes extensively. Chumbalo ingeniously saves her household in her husband's absence as the Italian army invades the country:

I hid my husband's guns and ammunition by strapping them to my body. I did not want the soldiers to take them. Then I put on my finest cotton buluko and prepared a feast. Very politely I offered them food.

Such passages give us a means to escape inside *Worlds*. At times, I felt as if I had been transported to the fire-lit, split bamboo house where Chumbalo and Olmstead lived together during the early 1970s. Olmstead sets a well-dressed stage for Chumbalo's storytelling by framing it with descriptions of the local environment, Ethiopian history, political climate, and governmental relations (both local and regional). In the quote above, it's Olmstead who carefully explains how, even while feeding her enemy, Chumbalo adheres to local customs that call for women to rise above men's foolish engagement in wartime activities. Although her commentary is useful and informative, Olmstead occasionally interrupts well-paced, enthralling narratives with background, contextual information. In the midst of Chumbalo's captivating description of her husband's death, Olmstead reflects on her changing relationship with the leader:

I heard Chimate's death before, but never has she mentioned the Amhara women. She's changing the emphasis. She knows now that I have a special concern with women. She's bringing out details she knows will capture my attention and hopes will direct my sympathies toward [her husband].

It takes a moment to reconnect with the story after such awkward interruptions. Fortunately, these insights do help convey Chumbalo's complex persona as well as Olmstead's knowledge of and respect for her. Though a legitimate biography, *Worlds* also reads like an oral history: it explores scarce evidence of day-to-day life in Ethiopia's Gamo Highlands, from running a household to mediating disputes—an art form taught to all from very young ages. For the Gamo people, few of whom are literate, survival necessitates witnessing and remembering significant events—births, deaths, crimes, etc. Olmstead's written record of Chumbalo's life thoughtfully carries out that tradition for a wider audience. To read *Worlds* is to witness the dynamic life of this charismatic woman. —D. A. Turner

## Smorgasbord of stories

Johnstone, James C., and Karen X. Tulchinsky, eds. *Queer View Mirror 2: Lesbian and Gay Short Fiction*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997. Paper, ISBN 1-55152-039-7, \$17.95.

With 101 works of short fiction by lesbian and gay writers in eight countries, *Queer View Mirror 2* offers quite a smorgasbord of stories. The editors are to be commended for bringing the writings of gay men and lesbians together in one volume; by arranging the short stories alphabetically by author, they provide a nice, random approach for the reader and avoid pat categories like gender, geography, or topic. And more than a few of the authors have names that are gender-ambiguous, so it is possible to read some of these stories and wonder...

Although I read the book cover to cover, I remembered very little. T. J. Bryan's "Good Gyal Gets Hers" is a standout, as is Edward Power's bittersweet "Love, Frankie." But the rest of the works quickly blurred together. Perhaps the reason for this is the genre: "short shorts," that is, works of fiction that are one thousand words or less. I was left with the impression of "too much of too little": the format became numbing, after a while. A collection of longer short stories, interspersed with the short shorts, would have provided much needed variety.

—Wendy Thomas

## Ideas for a lesbian studies curriculum

Zimmerman, Bonnie, and Toni A. H. McNaron, eds. *The New Lesbian Studies: Into the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Feminist Press, 1996. Trade, ISBN 1-55861-135-5, \$35.00; paper, ISBN 1-55861-136-3, \$17.95.

*The new lesbian studies* is an immensely rich, thought-provoking collection of essays and articles. Although it stands on its own as a must-read volume for those interested in lesbian studies, *Studies* has a history. The original work, *Lesbian Studies: Present and Future* (Feminist Press, 1982), was edited by Margaret Cruikshank and published just a few years after the creation of the first Lesbian Caucus of the National Women's Studies Association. It featured almost thirty essays grouped into three categories: "Lesbians in the Academic World: The Personal/Political Experience;" "In the Classroom;" and "New Research/New Perspectives;" as well as sample syllabi and bibliographies of books and articles.

*Studies* reprints several of the original essays but features more than thirty new works. Some of the articles will be of particular interest to those in specific fields, for example, feminist lesbian disability studies and feminist psychology. Many, however,

will be of general interest to lesbians in academe, students as well as teachers.

Some of the highlights include Toni A. H. McNaron's "That was Then, This is Now," which describes her closeted experiences as a professor at the University of Minnesota in the early 1960s—and her participation on a campus diversity panel thirty years later. Also particularly useful are Carolyn Woodward's "Lesbianism in Introductory Women's Studies Textbooks" and Kathleen Hickok's "Lesbian Images in Selected Women's Literature Anthologies, 1980-1994" as well as informative essays on older lesbians, homophobia in women's college athletics, cyberdykes, and lesbian studies and postmodern queer theory.

The editors have gathered articles that provide a bit of geographic and ethnic diversity: lesbians in Chinese history, East Asian-American lesbians, Native lesbians, black lesbians in academia, and lesbian studies in Sweden, the UK, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Lastly, the introduction, by McNaron and Zimmerman, stands on its own as an excellent overview of what has happened to lesbian studies over the last decade, discussing the explosion of information, books, and courses on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual subjects; the backlash against women's and lesbian/gay studies; and the impact of queer theory.

—Wendy Thomas

## Jungle Girl excerpt, continued from page 2

I am shocked, as I always am to how sensuality abruptly descends on the sternest of Indian women when they loosen their thick dark hair. With her hair down, this smug judgmental mother of three is suddenly so breathtakingly beautiful that I want to cry. She looks at me slyly, conspiratorially, savoring the feel of her long tresses between her fingers.

"Why don't you grow your hair," she murmurs. "Long hair looks so good on us, don't you think?"

She pushes up her window as high as it will go. The wind lifts her hair around her like a long hawk suspended on a bank of air. Her hair spreads out, shading her, like the flat top of a solitary baobab tree. If only I could climb into those silken branches...

An old familiar longing rushes into my throat, hammering at my vocal chords, drying me out with desire. I know this woman. I know her well. She is part of my recurring dream of coming home to India to be greeted by thousands of women running down a hill with their long hair swooping behind them like black garlands of welcome, like black birds released from captivity to honor my return.

You will have to read the rest on your own. Kamani's book, *Jungle Girl*, is published in San Francisco by Aunt Lute Books, 1995. Trade, ISBN 1-87996-041-9, \$19.95; paper, ISBN 1-87996-040-0, \$11.95.

*Editor's Note:* In India, the term "jungle girl" describes "a wild and uncontrollable woman." I, for one, wish to be one.

Women in Libraries  
American Library Association  
Office for Literacy and Outreach Services  
50 East Huron Street  
Chicago, IL 60611

