



CANADIAN  
WOMAN STUDIES  
LES CAHIERS DE LA  
FEMME

FALL/WINTER 1988  
(VOLUME 9, NUMBERS  
3&4)

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**CANADIAN WOMAN STUDIES** is a feminist quarterly which was founded with the goal of making current writing and research on a wide variety of feminist topics accessible to the largest possible community of women. During our nine years of publication we have attempted to create a forum in which all of us - not only university women - can exchange our ideas, personal experiences, expertise and creativity.

By demystifying our communications with one another we are actively working towards serving as a middle ground between the scholarly and the popular, between theory and activism. We welcome experiential articles and essays; book, art and film reviews; and creative work. Our key criteria for accepting material for publication are clarity, interest to the lives of our diverse readership, and thematic relevance. While we do not restrict our always-expanding sense of what makes a contribution 'feminist' - we strive for a presentation of different perspectives - we will not publish writing that is sexist, racist, homophobic or in any other way discriminatory.

We particularly welcome Frenchlanguage contributions and manuscripts in both languages that deal with issues pertaining to the lives of women of colour, immigrant women, working class women, lesbians and other marginalized women

**LES CAHIERS DE LA FEMME** est une publication trimestrielle dont le but est de rendre les Etudes de la Femme et des mouvements féministes, tant sur le plan de la recherche que de l'écriture, accessibles au plus grand nombre possible de femmes. Au cours des huit années de notre existence, nous avons tenté de créer une tribune où nous pouvons toutes - non pas exclusivement les universitaires - échanger nos idées, nos expériences personnelles, notre compétence et notre créativité. En démystifiant les rapports entre nous, nous voulons servir de lien entre l'académique et le populaire, entre la théorie et le militantisme.

Nous encourageons la soumission d'articles et d'essais dans les domaines reliés aux arts, des critiques de livres, de cinéma ou d'exposition, ainsi que de courtes oeuvres de fiction et des poèmes. Les critères de publication portent principalement sur la clarté d'expression et l'intérêt que peut susciter le sujet choisi tout autant que la recherche et l'originalité des thèmes traités par l'auteure.

Bien que les cahiers de la femme n'oeuvrent pas sur un terrain limite en ce qui concerne une publication dite féministe, nous visons à élaborer dans des sphères qui respectent les différentes perspectives des études de la femme. Il est entendu que nous ne publierons pas des textes sexistes, racistes, anti-gais ou discriminatoires.

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**Fall/winter 1988 Volume 9, Numbers 3&4**



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**FRONT COVER:** Buseje Bailly, [untitled portrait of the artist's daughter Cherel], 1982 acrylic on canvas, 4'x4'. **BACK COVER:** Buseje Bailly, Third World Madonnas, 1985, acrylic and newspaper on canvas, 2'x3'. [See page 112](#) for a biographical note on Buseje Bailly.



Why is literacy a women's issue? (Isn't it an issue for "everybody"?) We think that the answers to these questions are complicated. In a literate society, literacy is necessary; those who are without it find their options limited, their way difficult, even their sense of self undermined. Yet, a theme in the material we received for this issue is the resilience, and capability of those who seek literacy. In reaching for what ought to have been theirs from childhood, they express the courage and strength that they already possess.

The clichés about literacy, particularly for women, are that acquiring it allows the silent to speak, and the inarticulate to find language. Often, however, those without literacy are silent only because they have been silenced. In a literate society, the written word is the source of authority and power. Those not in command of the written word, by definition then, are powerless. It is in this sense and context that literacy is "empowering."

And so it is. Women learning to read often say their first goal is to be able to read a story to their children. There is poignancy and paradox in this goal. In some historical periods, women were educated only so that they could teach their children, while their use of literacy in the public sphere was restricted or condemned. Regardless of women's access to literacy, in all periods women's use of it in the public sphere occasioned comment. Many of the women in the literacy programs described in this issue are single parents. They need literacy to function in the public sphere in order to provide for themselves and their children. Literacy as a women's issue draws attention again to women's double role (whether or not they have paid employment).

But literacy and literacy programs provide other things women need as well. Another recurring theme in the material we received is women's isolation and the way in which literacy programs give women a context for gathering on their own behalf. Particularly when the program nurtures the possibility inherent in the gathering, these gatherings provide support and community. So in her literacy group, Mary, brought to Canada as a domestic worker and fighting to remain, received support in her battles with abusive employers as well as with immigration officials. Her strength and tenacity in those struggles predated her arrival at the literacy program; the support helped her to continue, while her increasing literacy helped her deal with things in other ways.

There are more ways in which literacy is a women's issue. At least in Canada, most literacy workers, paid and volunteer are women. Volunteer work has been, by and large, the sphere of women, and so the high proportion of women who are tutors is not surprising. Women seem also to predominate in employment that requires education but pays poorly, so the high proportion of women who are employed running literacy programs also is not surprising. We speculate further that helping people acquire literacy in a culture that assumes its early acquisition is women's work because women's job is to

provide early language training - in speech and on paper. In this context, helping people to learn to read and write is very intimate; it requires tact, gentleness and a caring and nurturing attitude. And so women, expected from girlhood to develop these traits, more readily gravitate to tasks that use them.

Still it is only relatively recently that the literacy community has focused on the special needs of women acquiring basic literacy. The context created by the women's movement has made visible what was implicit, and so, for example, the CCLOW pamphlet "Women and Literacy" [\[see pp.26 and 28\]](#) delineates what earlier literacy workers knew but could not publicly articulate. Time and again, members of the guest editorial board, literacy workers themselves, as well as people we asked to submit articles for this issue, commented on the importance and pleasure in family concentrating on the intersection of women's issues and literacy issues, even as they struggled to find time to do so. Ironically, the women's movement has not addressed the issue of literacy well, and this too is a theme in our issue.

Ironically, of late literacy has become (yes, we will say it) something of a "motherhood issue" - and not in any of the ways this phrase might find meaning above! Politicians declare war on illiteracy and distribute money. In the academic world, the Modern Language Association has a big conference on Literacy.

Literacy is hot, Literacy is in.

We wonder, why now?

We have come up with no answer to that question, but we can speculate. True, helping someone learn to read is "a shortening of the road." As a national project, in Nicaragua, for example, literacy means engaging the people in modernization and is socially transforming.

However, as well, literacy programs, in industrialized countries especially, are a lot cheaper than changing the economic and social structures that keep people in poverty. In countries where literacy is the norm, the "illiterate" is an individual who has failed to keep up in the system - or been failed by it. Even when the latter is acknowledged, the individual is still perceived to be at fault, or defective in some way. Literacy provides a handy remedy but need pose no overwhelming challenge to the status quo. Countries with a long tradition of general literacy have learned to absorb its revolutionary impact.

In their article "Is it her voice if she speaks their words?", Elaine Gaber-Katz and Jenny Horsman illuminate another thread that weaves through this issue when they urge a critical pedagogy. This pedagogy encourages literacy learners to see patterns in their experience and to challenge the social arrangements that impinge on their freedom. When literacy programs employ this pedagogy, they can go beyond being the "motherhood" projects their benefactors may believe them to be. Literacy is an issue for "everybody" - certainly - but examining it at the nexus where it concerns women has made larger matters clear.



We want to thank the many people who contributed to this issue: especially our guest editorial board - particularly for their insistence that we stay with basic literacy and trust that the material would come: Betsy Alkenbrack, Betty Butterworth, Jenny Horsman and Gladys Watson; and Barbara Levine for all the photocopying that allowed us to make our collective decisions. This issue was a long time in the making, but by the time the guest editorial board had our last meeting, it too felt like one of those gatherings of women from which our power comes.

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## The Other City...

*Where No One Reads...*

As a child, she had always had a yearning to enter the other city, the unknown city beyond and within the suburbs, where nobody, middle-class folklore declared read books or washed or cooked proper meals. She had sometimes, even as a child, wondered if it could be as fearful as its reputation. She disliked being made to feel fear of her fellow men and women. Now she lived with these people, and was no longer afraid, for they were like herself... Then she taught one or two illiterates on an illiteracy scheme. Then she started to teach two classes a week at a College of Further Education: aspiring caterers on Day Release. Cambridge visitors, visitors from outer space, childless visitors, asked her how she could bear to teach such stupid, such dull, such unambitious, such ill-read folk. She did not answer that intelligence is relative, like poverty. She did not think her students stupid, just different...

--- Margaret Drabble, *The Radiant Way*

September, 1987 - headlines across the nation boldly acclaim: FIVE MILLION CANADIANS FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE - "The first real statistics about the state of literacy in our country," declares Peter Calamai of Southam Inc., sponsor of the nationwide Southam Literacy Survey.<sup>1</sup>

At last, *real facts*. A lever to use in the fight for funding, in the fight to regulate the poor, unemployment, homelessness, crime and low worker productivity, and to control immigration and education. Illiterates are our problem, 5 million of them. Not as many as the 23 million "illiterates" in the USA, but 24% of our population over 18 years of age. Think of it...staggering... 1 in 4 of *us*... No...THEM... It's they who can't read or write well enough to function... those illiterates... not us... we need to help them... And that's how it works, the separation of the illiterates from the literates, the "have nots" from the "haves," them from us... all with the "best" of intentions.

Unproblematically accepted as truth, the question is, what to do. National attention is focused on illiteracy as never before. Social task forces, grant priorities, hearings of a Select Committee on Education, special issues of journals, news series, stories and editorials, researchers, educators, business(men), politicians... all are suddenly concerned about the rampant state of illiteracy in Canada. That there are 5 million illiterates has, almost overnight, become a lasting truth. Note a few lines from the Toronto Star editorial of July 18, 1988:

*The numbers are staggering: Five million or more Canadians can't read, write or count well enough to be called literate. What's the cost? According to the Business Task Force on Literacy, it's more than \$10 billion a year through unemployment, industrial accidents, lost productivity and training costs.*

More federal and provincial support is called for to educate the increasing numbers of children of refugees and immigrants being admitted into the country. Take responsibility for your policies, the feds are told. Noteworthy is the implicit racism (unintended, of course) as "the problem" gets shifted from a vast general issue to the specifics of immigrant and refugee policies; further regulation and cutbacks to end this glut of "illiterates" from entering "our" country becomes the subtext.

BY KATHLEEN ROCKHILL

I am alarmed by this splurge of concern. Not because I'm against the provision of more educational programs - they are needed - but because of the way "marginal" people become scapegoats for big money interests. Business says the costs are \$10 billion; "illiterates" are posed as a threat to our national interests. So Peter Calamai quotes McGill University professor Jon Bradley who, speaking of illiteracy, explains:

*It's not as life-threatening as AIDS, nor as terrible as mass murder, nor as current as acid rain, but in the long run it could be a far more damaging threat to Canadian society.*

WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN MIDDLE-CLASS FOLKLORE IS  
NOW NATIONAL IDEOLOGY; THAT IDEOLOGY DEPENDS  
UPON EXPERTS PROVING THAT THE POOR ARE  
INCOMPETENT AND THAT IS WHY THEY ARE POOR...

*The dangers are stark: 10 per cent of Canadian adults can't understand the dosage directions on a medicine bottle; 20 per cent can't correctly select affect from a simple newspaper article; 40 per cent can't figure out the tip on a lunch bill; more than 50 per cent have serious troubles using bus schedules; and nearly 60 per cent misinterpret the key section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (p.8)*

We are in the process of creating an OTHER - the disadvantaged - the illiterate - of unprecedented proportion... "the other city, the unknown city beyond and within the suburbs, where nobody, middle-class folklore declared, read books or washed or cooked proper meals." What may have been middle-class folklore is now national ideology; that ideology depends upon experts probing that the poor are incompetent, and that is why they are poor. Without literacy, they are "stalled on a long road to oblivion" (p. 40). It's sad, tragic, but "true." Here are the opening lines of the Southam Report:

*Five million adult Canadians are marching against their will in an army of illiterates. But they are an army in numbers only. They have no leaders. no power, little support, few weapons and no idea where they are headed. Darkness and hopelessness are usually their banners. (p. 7)*

Worst of all, they won't admit they have a problem.  
According to Bill Shallow, an adult educator quoted in the Report:

*It's something like being an alcoholic. You have to get someone to admit to themselves that they can't read. that they need outside help and that outside help will make a difference. (p.12)*

I find these analogies horrendous, wiping out deeply structured personal realities. I find them particularly horrendous in the case of women, who are anything but addicted to being illiterate. Quite the contrary. Their longing for literacy, for education is strong, but squelched by the structure of their lives, a structure which leaves them highly dependent upon support from the men with whom they are in relationship. The national ideology of illiteracy currently being constructed obliterates their contradictory experiences of literacy and objectifies them as : "Other," lacking the competence to do even the simplest things. Furthermore, the judgment of "illiteracy" rests upon a very suspect process of testing.

In order to determine functional illiteracy, twenty-five "representative" Canadians were selected to act as a jury.<sup>2</sup> From among 38 items on the Southam test, they were asked to indicate the 10 items that "ordinary adults should be able to answer correctly just to get by in today's society." (p.13) Anyone tested who missed 3 or more items is counted as illiterate. While the test as a whole consists of more items (items were adapted from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a functional literacy measure used in the USA, replete with problems), in actuality, illiteracy is determined by performance on the 10 items selected by the jury. To be literate, one must answer 8 out of 10 correctly. The assumption underlying the survey is that someone has to be able to read an item in order to perform the task (i.e., if they can't read the cough syrup instruction, they don't know how much to take; if they read it, they take the correct amount). It's not experience, but reading that counts; one must be able to read in the dominant language without help; most significantly, reading means "proper" functioning. (I never read cough syrup directions; my mother taught me to take no more than 2 teaspoons every 4 hours; as an adult, I take what I feel I need). Literacy determines "competence." The meaning is in the words; it is not, as many theoreticians would argue, derived from context, subtext, the "spaces between the words," history or experiences. As Linda Brodkey notes:

*Because all definitions of literacy project both a literate self and an illiterate other, the tropics of literacy stipulate the political as well as cultural terms on which the "literate" wish to live with the "illiterate" by defining what is meant by reading and writing... Functional literacy may be less a matter of decoding and comprehending such documents (since to do so requires specialized knowledge of law and economics as well as written language) and more the fact that I have ready access to the resources I need to use the documents. This is what separates the literate "us" from the illiterate "them."*

I could go on and on about the Southam Survey, but I want to pause here, and note the way in which an OTHER is being constituted - not only the capriciousness of the process, but the inherent race, class and gender biases that organize its construction. Anyone who cannot respond to 8 out of 10 of those items, in English or French, is by definition, illiterate. One million, or 42% of the foreign-born (excluding those from the USA and British Isles) are, according to the Southam Survey, illiterate. The Survey "reveals" that multilingual people are highly "illiterate." The numbers of foreign-born currently being admitted into Canada with fewer years of schooling than in the past is cited as one of the reasons for the increase in illiteracy. By definition, these "foreigners" cannot function adequately - are illiterate - and are a threat to our nation.

**LITERACY AS EDUCATION FOR WOMEN POSES A THREAT  
TO MALE HEGEMONY IN THE FAMILY; A THREAT TO MALE  
DOMINANCE THAT FEW MALE EGOS CAN WITHSTAND.  
MEN DO NOT WANT THEIR WOMEN TO BE MORE  
EDUCATED...**

The gender bias works much more subtly. Women make up "only" 46.5% of the "illiterate" population, whereas men make up 53.5%. The difference in performance on items is highly indicative of the experience-dependent nature of the Survey. The items women tend to miss more than men are those that involve transportation (reading maps and traffic signs, deciphering bus and airline schedules) and employment (filling out income tax and job application forms). They do better on interpretive questions that involve more reading, including what I found to be an extremely confusing question on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (That nearly 60% of all surveyed missed this item is seen as cause for national alarm, not an indication of fault with the item!).

Working mothers performed correctly on more items than non-working mothers: of those who worked, only 16% were deemed to be illiterate as contrasted to a 27% rate for those at home while their children were in primary school. The concern expressed in the Report about what this means for the education of the young (i.e. youth spending time with illiterate mothers) points to the gendered and class-biased nature of the text.

While these statistics have to be looked at with a high degree of skepticism, they do echo what I've noted in my research among Latino immigrants in Los Angeles, as well as that of Jenny Horsman among women in rural Nova Scotia<sup>4</sup> - namely, that women's "work" includes doing most of the literacy-related tasks of the household, except for those directly related to transportation and employment, areas they are often not allowed to enter. As for the higher rate of literacy among women in the work force, my guess is that this reflects the highly literacy-dependent nature of the work available to women: they must be able to read - and read well - in order to enter the clerical, secretarial, sales and service sectors of the economy where women predominate. Most other work available to women - factories and fast foods - does not pay enough to cover the costs of child care.

Literacy is important to women; in their gendered construction of work in our society, literacy is more important for women than for men. But much more than literacy is required. Even using Southam's definition, reading a cough syrup label won't do anything to move you out of poverty - if that's the issue - and they say it is. Access to education that can make a difference is at stake, not literacy. For women, a decent job requires not only high school completion, but some form of further education as well.

Elsewhere, I've written that literacy is women's work, but not women's right.<sup>5</sup> Women can be invisibly literate, silently doing the literacy-related work of the household. But let them seek education and see the resistance and direct opposition they often meet from their male partners. To actually "capitalize" on their literacy - to turn it into "cultural capital" - can upset the asymmetrical power dynamics in the family. The need to protect the male ego at the cost of women's lives is seen as quite OK, even humorous, in our culture.

Calamai plays into this "humor" by framing the news about women's performance as follows:

*Male egos take another battering in the war of the sexes. The Southam Survey shows women are more skilled readers. [Italics in text].*

*From: Peter Calamai, Southam News. Ottawa*

*Re: Latest claims of female superiority*

*It looks bad this time fellows. They've come out ahead again. It sure doesn't appear to be a fluke. Women are more literate than men. (p.29)*

In thinking about women and literacy/education, we have to consider how heterosexism operates, as well as the gendered construction of work. Typically, women are "kept down" by the men in their lives. The "dumb broad" may well be smarter than him, but, if she's "smart," she daren't let him know it. The risk for women in going to classes can be considerable. Men say that they want their wives home to care for the children, but many men are also threatened by the fear that they will lose control over "their women"; ownership of their minds, as well as their bodies. The threat of education to men - and women's desire for it - is harrowingly portrayed in the true story of Francine Hughes for whom the desire to continue to go to school was so strong that, when her husband beat and humiliated her, repeatedly insisting that she stop going to school, she finally murdered him.

The threat of women's learning to the male ego is comically portrayed in the film, *Educating Rita*; it's a story I've heard over my years of interviewing women, and it's a story I've lived.

From my research in literacy over me years, I've come to think of "literacy as



threat/desire" for many women in heterosexual relationships, particularly where further education would mean that they had acquired more schooling than their husbands. The experience of literacy as threat/desire differs fundamentally from the experience for men, where literacy is not bound up in some dynamic of longing and repression that it is for women. This difference is born of male dominance, often in its crudest forms. While Francine Hughes' story is extreme, the dynamic it reflects is a common one: women longing to become educated, to transform their lives, and repressing that longing because of the opposition of the men they love, and the fear that taking an independent step could mean the breakup of their family. Sometimes the opposition they experience is subtle; often it takes the form of a fist. Literacy as education for women, poses a threat to male hegemony in the family; a threat to male dominance that few male egos can withstand. Men do not want their women to be more educated; they do not want their authority in the household challenged.

When I've talked about "literacy as threat/desire" (that is, the desire of women for literacy and the threat of violence, subtle or overt, posed to them by the men their lives if they actually act on it by attending programs), I've been met by women at a range of educational levels who've told me that the story reflects their own experience. While I don't want to deny that women seeking to improve their literacy are in a different situation from women seeking higher education, the divide of class does not erase - or account for - the control men demand over our bodies and minds. As long as men are threatened by the prospect of our independence whether it be an independence of mind, body, spirit or the material independence of having our own source of income, education, as the potential conveyor of these resources (whether real or imagined), poses a threat to established patterns of male dominance. There are women in my graduate classes for whom their education is a threat to their relationships. Divorces are not uncommon, as many of us know, when the woman chooses to pursue her education; sometimes that pursuit follows a divorce when the woman decides, at last, to do something for herself.

I still hear Maria's words of longing echo - "I want to be somebody, you know" - a refrain I've heard repeatedly in various forms over the years. For women, the desire for education comes with a longing to be SOME/BODY. Why, I wonder. Are our bodies so stomped upon that we feel we are NO ONE without education? And then...? How does heterosexism play into all of this? Men so desperately needing to be "right", to "know", yes, to appear, at all cost, to be "competent" - to what extent is it at the cost of the lives of the women in his life?

**TO SUGGEST THAT NEARLY ONE OUT OF FOUR WOMEN IN CANADA IS ILLITERATE IS TO ENSHRINE THE DIVISIONS OF EDUCATION BY CLASS WITH A MORALITY THAT BLAMES WOMEN FOR THEIR OWN SITUATIONS.**

To return to the original theme of this essay, the establishing of one quarter of our

commonalities and differences in our situations as women is crucial. I think, too, that we have to shift our focus from literacy to education; and from functional to critical practices. Yes, reading and writing are important, especially for women who desire to "be educated" more than men do. (Il)literacy has become so overworked a concept that it's not meaningless - quite the opposite - it's laden with the ideology of non-personhood, of threat, of cost, of danger to "our" well-being. Its reference to the specific skills of reading and writing has been lost; to label 1/4 of women in Canada as illiterate is to drive a great class divide among women. While we must not lose sight of class differences, we must guard against naming material differences as differences in competence in everyday knowledge and functioning, in ability. It is also to create a city of the "other," a social, cultural and educational ghetto. The middle classes are offered college courses in English; the poor, literacy classes - if they're lucky.

To suggest that nearly one out of four women in Canada is illiterate is to enshrine the divisions of education by class with a morality that blames women for their own situations. To be labeled "illiterate" smells of irresponsibility, immorality - "they" choose to be that way - what is that? poor? to drop out of school at 16 because of pregnancy? to move from one's country of birth? to spend every hour of the day in the isolation of one's home with kids?

Choice? How much choice when we look at the material and social relations in which women are enmeshed? How does the wall established by "illiteracy" further divide us as women, creating a barrier across which it is impossible to speak or to hear one another?

In the opening passage of this essay, Alix reflects upon how, when her husband drowned and she was plunged into poverty, she came to see the women with whom she now had to live as more like herself than not; in time, she lost her fear of the "other city". How to hold the tension of sameness and difference; how to listen as well as speak? To label women as illiterate is to create an "other"; it is a form that defines difference in the terms of reference of the dominant language and practices; as such, it is to perpetuate domination, separation and fear. We have enough of that To talk of reading, writing and education - and how to think critically, that is, through the ideological "truths" with which we are confronted day after day - is perhaps a way out of the ideological trap of (il)literacy, and the institutionalization of difference through dominance.

## **HOW DOES THE WALL ESTABLISHED BY "ILLITERACY" FURTHER DIVIDE US AS WOMEN, CREATING A BARRIER ACROSS WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SPEAK OR TO HEAR ONE ANOTHER?**

<sup>1</sup> All references to the Southam Survey are taken from "Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians are Illiterate," the Southam Literacy Report. It is available for \$2.00 by writing to Literacy, Southam Newspaper Group, Suite 900, 150 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Y8.

<sup>2</sup> This jury of peers, or "representative Canadians" as the Southam refers to them, consisted of executives in business and industry, 2 rights advocates, executive officers of various organizations, 2 nationally-acclaimed authors, other professionals, 3 literacy workers, and 3 who were listed as various forms of "workers". Literacy students were also included, but they did not count as one vote per person, as in the case of other jurors, but passed "collective" judgment which counted as one vote. Note, the jurors were not, apparently, told to assess illiteracy, but desirable functioning.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Brodkey, "Tropics of Literacy", *Journal of Education*, Vol. 168, No.2, 1986, pp. 47-54.

<sup>4</sup> Jenny Horsman, "Something in My Mind Besides the Everyday." Ed. D. dissertation, OISE, June 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Rockhill, "Literacy as Threat/Desire: Longing to be SOME- BODY," in J.S. Gaskill and A.T. McLaren (eds.), *Women and Education: A Canadian Perspective* (Calgary: Detselig, 1987).

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# Can't You Read?

A Song by Tiki Mercury-Clarke

**Tiki Mercury-Clarke is a Thornhill (Ontario) music composer, lyricist, singer, pianist, dancer, actress and journalist. She composed the words and music to this song, which is from the show "The Reading Train."**



1. Where's the bargain, what's on sale  
A notice at the door  
Some medicine, a can of soup  
Everything in a no frills store
2. Restaurant menus or the latest board-  
game  
How to put together a toy  
Escalator up or shoe department down  
And the washroom's for a girl or a boy?
3. Is this plain or is it herbal tea?  
Just where do I find this sauce?  
I hope I brought enough money with me  
'cause I just can't figure out the cost
4. Is this shampoo for oily hair?  
Do I add water to this milk?  
How often must I take this pill?  
I didn't know that it was made of silk

## CHORUS:

What's the matter can't you read?  
What's the matter can't you read?

I didn't know that the cloth would bleed  
What's the matter can't you read?

How many people will this box feed?  
What's the matter can't you read?

It's taken for granted everywhere you turn  
That everyone can read  
That all grown-ups have learned

What's the matter can't you read?  
What's the matter can't you read?  
What's the matter can't you read?

FROM THE SHOW "THE READING TUNES"  
BY TONY MERQUIRY-CLAUDE

WORDS & MUSIC BY TONY MERQUIRY-CLAUDE

CAN'T YOU READ?

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THE READING TUNES: THE READING TUNES

## Educating Priscilla



My earliest memory is of sitting in the backseat of a car. It is nighttime and we are following another car ahead of us. My cat, Butchie, is in the back window of the first car and I can see his eyes glowing in the glare of our headlights. We are on our way to the Reserve. My grandparents, my uncle, my mom, my four brothers, my younger sister and I have decided to leave the City of Sarnia because we hope that life will be better on the

reserve. My dad has died and we are having trouble making it without him. We're happy and we do our best. As had always been our way, our extended family shares what little we've got. But money is short and there are many mouths to feed, so the entire family unit uproots itself and away we go to what we hope are greener pastures. The feeling is happiness because we are pulling together.

But happiness is short-lived and my next major memory is of residential school. We are sent to the Brantford Mohawk Institute. It seems that the house allotted to us on the reserve is too small, so the Indian Agent, in his wisdom, decides to send those in our family who are of school age to residential school. I am only five years old. That doesn't matter. The Indian Agent represents Indian Affairs and they make our decisions for us. Life is different at the Mush Hole, as we call it. We don't sit around the kitchen table anymore watching Grandma make meals (I'm too young to help, but I watch because later on, I'll know what to do.) Instead, we line up whenever the bell goes and we file into a big room with tables and chairs and eat what is given to us. It's porridge most mornings, thus, the name Mush Hole. I don't hear my family laughing and joking in Ojibway all the time.

Now the only time I see my family is when I spot my brothers in the large dining room at meal-time. My mom wants to visit us, but the Mush Hole is a long way from the Reserve and she has no way to get back and forth. We all have to speak English here because it would interfere with our education if we spoke Ojibway. Sure is tough trying to learn a new language without anyone really teaching us how. Now we don't sit around the woodstove in the evenings listening to Grandpa tell tales of long ago. Instead, we line up at a certain time to use the washroom, then we have to go to bed. An older woman teacher we refer to as Cow Legs stands at the end of the hall to make sure we do this as quickly and quietly as possible. After lights out, we have to go to sleep, because if there's any noise, Cow Legs opens the door, turns on the lights and if we're caught out of bed, we get the strap. My friend, Barbara, cries herself to sleep almost every night. I want to comfort her, but I don't want to get caught out of bed. The feeling is fear because there are so many rules.

**BY PRISCILLA HEWITT**

The next phase of my education finds me back on the reserve. We go to a two-room school. Grades 1-4 are downstairs and Grades 5-8 are upstairs. Our teachers are a married couple who live with their son and daughter in the nicest house on the reserve, the teacherage. Each grade sits in a different row. Before we go out to recess, we have to have a tablespoon of cod liver oil. Sure tastes awful! School is serious business. We must not talk because the School Inspector might stop by and we will be in trouble if we're caught misbehaving. We write a lot in scribbles and it has to be neat, again because the School Inspector expects that. We have to memorize verses and recite them to the class. Roy has trouble remembering his lines - he speaks Ojibway at home and has trouble with English at school. The teacher makes him stand at the front of the class until he can remember his lines. I wonder why the teacher doesn't let us help Roy. Strange, but I don't remember Roy coming back after that I read about how we (Indians) lost so many wars and took part

in so many massacres. I wonder why I was born an Indian. The feeling is shame because my people are savages.

Several years later I make it to high school. It's in a little town seven miles away from the reserve, so we have to go by bus. I'm happy at first because I'm with a lot of my friends. Eventually they leave. Someone laughs at Brenda because she gives the wrong answer in class. She's too embarrassed to come back. My brother is big for his age and he knows how to track a deer for miles, set snares for rabbits and catch a lot of trout. My family is proud of him because he provides food for most of our meals. But, he can't understand algebra or science and, consequently, has the lowest average in the class. When the first term reports come out with everyone's marks in descending order on them his name is at the bottom. He decides to quit. Someone calls my other brother "a pesky redskin" constantly. He, too, leaves. Sharon's mom dies and Sharon takes on responsibility for her younger sister. Another one goes.



Eventually, I'm the only Indian in a school of 400 students. I try to make friends with the white students, but they live in homes like the ones I only see on T.V. --- hydro, indoor plumbing, central heating. They all have nicer clothes than I do. Most of my wardrobe comes from a rummage sale and I am afraid that somebody will recognize their cast-offs. I spend my summers working in the tobacco fields to pay my way. They take vacations that I can only take in my head. My mom tells me to quit, too, because I'm a girl and I don't really need an education. The feeling is confusion because I want what they have. Eventually I move to Toronto. I'm told life might be better in the big city because there are no jobs on the Reserve. I am determined to make something of myself.

I see other Indians, but they walk with their heads down and that makes me angry. I decide I'm not going to be like that I'm going to prove that I can live just like white folk. I turn my back on my people. I marry a white man. My mom is happy because she says that no, she will not have to worry about me. We have, first a girl, then a boy. But happiness eludes me. The kids and I are alone a lot. I start to drink out of loneliness and frustration. Down and down I go. I don't fit into the white man's world and I can't go back home. Too much pride. I have to quit drinking, but it's so hard. I go in and out of the hospital - taken there by an ambulance eight times one summer. Children's Aid commits me to the psychiatric ward for a "cure" or I will lose my kids. They do go to a foster home for a while. I make up my mind that I want them back, so, I start the longest uphill climb of my lie. I do it alone because my white husband just doesn't understand. We go our separate ways, but I take the kids. I have no self-confidence. I have to support myself and these kids, but I can only get a job pounding a typewriter. I decide to go back to night school so I can get a better job. The feeling is desperation because I have so much responsibility and I don't know if I can make it alone.

**WHY WASN'T SOMEBODY TELLING US ABOUT CULTURAL DIFFERENCE? ... THOSE PEOPLE MAKING OUR DECISIONS FOR US DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS WOULD BE ON HOW WE FELT ABOUT OURSELVES.**

One day, I come to the realization that I have to start talking to people. It's scary at first and I listen to others so I will know how to interact. Heart in my throat, I do start to talk and people not only listen, but they encourage me. They tell me to hang in there. One day, a wonderful woman, Paula (one of my bosses), suggests to me that I should consider working with my own people. She says I should be proud of who I am, where I came from and what I did. That's easy for you to say, I think. She befriends me and treats me special. I like this. She has many tales of how wonderful Native culture is and how I should find out more about it. One summer day, I phone a Native organization and ask if they are looking for more staff. They are. They ask me for my résumé. I've never made one in my life! Paula gives me an outline and shows me hers.

After two days of putting it off because I feel I can't do it, I sit down and manage to come up with one. Next step is the interview. I almost chicken out. I actually leave the place, then, trembling, I go back. Two people ask me some questions, then, say they'll let me know in a couple of days. I'm on tenderhooks! They ask me to come back and right there they offer me the job. I'm at once exhilarated, and petrified! I accept and it turns out to be the best decision of my life. I meet so many others who have gone through the same thing I have. I tell them how it was for me, how I had to start talking to others, how I turned my fear into determination. I feel great because I finally fit in. Together my newfound friends and I learn about our culture. It starts to click in why we did things a certain way at home. Why wasn't somebody telling us about cultural difference? Instead, we felt like square pegs that somebody was trying to fit into a round hole. When it didn't work, we somehow thought we were in the wrong. The feeling is consternation, because it seems that those people making our decisions for us didn't really know what the long-term effects would be on how we felt about ourselves.

One day I get phone call. Would I like to coordinate a literacy program for Native Women? I say that I will give it a try. I find out as much as I can about it. I learn phrases like "community-based" and "learner-centered." Apparently, there is no pre-set curriculum. It is geared to the learners' needs and interests. Not only that, there are specific Native programs. I meet other Native coordinators and we all want culturally-relevant curriculum. We are going to build learning partnerships where mutual respect is the foundation. In a learning partnership, both learner and tutor come with their respective strengths that they will share with each other. The learners that I see coming into the program wear the same "scared rabbit" look that I had when I decided to go back to night-school. I spend a lot of time talking to them. I ask them, "what kinds of things do you like to do?" and, "what would you like to learn?" I assure them, "You just didn't have a proper chance.



Now is the time for you. You can do it. I felt like that, too, and this is how I handled it." Over and over again. I see that fear slowly dissipate. The tutors, learners and I all work closely together. We talk about things like the causes of illiteracy (it's not our fault), cultural awareness (we're not inferior, just different) and how we can help each other (one of my learners has invited me to Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, Healing Circles and a has given me a traditional cure for my backaches. In return, I have shared the basics of sentences and paragraphs). The feeling is hope because we decide how we want our programs to be. It isn't someone else making decisions about our lives for us.

Now I work for the Ministry of Skills Development. My job is to offer consultative support to twenty-seven Native literacy programs. It's energizing because all the Native coordinators and I share our concerns and aspirations with each other. Over half of Native families are headed by single parents, usually the mother. We want to reach those parents and help them break the cycle of dependency often associated with illiteracy and social assistance. Some programs are attempting to work with both the parent and the children. After all, illiterate adults start out as illiterate children, and parent are often the role models for their off spring. I understand that programs evolving families are referred to as intergenerational or family literacy. Several programs operate on reserves. In these cases, the coordinator is almost always required to be bilingual. Bilingual in Native community refers to being fluent in the mother tongue (usually Ojibway Cree in Ontario) and English as well. The reserve programs involve Elders. In Native Society, Elders are revered for their wisdom and experience. It is their role to pass on teachings to others. These women and men encourage us to incorporate wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honestly humility and truth into whatever we do. Often they speak at a community getting to share these teachings and/or less from the past. Lately, I've heard this type of thing called Oral History. Oral history written down becomes culturally relevant reading material.

Many urban programs also ask Elders to be a part of their literacy advisory committees. We feel this is so important as we want to reinforce our culture, our tutor training sessions cover cross-cultural communication because it will only teach those Natives who weren't told the differences and bought into the idea of feeling like misfits, but it will also sensitize the non-Natives who are involved in our programs. We get a lot of support from the Native and the non-Native community. So many have will shared their time and expertise. The feeling is happiness because we are all pulling together.

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Dear Readers:

We've just published the first issue of *Voices: New Writers/or New Readers*. The goals of this magazine are to provide reading material for new adult readers and to provide assistance for tutors involved with reading and writing instruction. *Voices* would be especially useful in the literacy classroom, in teacher education programs and for researchers who are concerned with the reading and writing processes.

The magazine, produced in Surrey, British Columbia (Canada), contains stories and poems by literacy students at the Invergarry Learning Centre, commentary by students concerning how they perceive their development as writers, as well as articles written by instructors about the teaching methods used in the school. The material within these pages reflects our belief that curriculum and instructional approach should be learner-centred.

*Voices* will be published quarterly. Discount rates are available for subscription purchases exceeding 10 copies. Please use the Subscription Request Form printed below to place orders.

We would be happy to receive any of your comments or suggestions. In addition, we will consider submissions for the magazine from literacy teachers and from students enrolled in literacy programs. (For magazine submissions, please enclose a self-addressed envelope with Canadian postage or an International Reply Coupon.) Since **Voices** is aimed at new readers, we request that the submitted material be written in a style that is appropriate for this audience.

Your sincerely,



Lee Weinstein, Editor

## **Voices**

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# Female Education in 16th & 17th Century England

## Influences, Attitudes, and Trends



**F**or about a thousand years in England, from the start of Christianity there in the late 6th century through the 15th century, at least some members of all classes of society were taught to read. While in those years literacy was the prime tool for religious and learned scholarship, literacy was also a very pragmatic instrument for personal communication and for the other written necessities of economic and social functioning, including household and estate record-keeping (Clanchy, p. 198). In the many years that women were empowered with household and ecclesiastical responsibilities - which included much of the Middle Ages - reading and writing, on some level, was needed by them as well as by men.

In fact, it appears that in England, prior to the 16th century, the family and community structures of the localized preindustrial society of those many years allowed for a wide range of activities in which women could quite easily participate, though to a lesser extent than men. For poorer women, that participation included both learning and teaching to read at the early levels when males of similar station did. For high-born and for convent-situated women, a certain amount of advanced religious and advanced secular learning was also available.

The picture was changed by events of the 16th century, a century that, in England, started with the era of humanism - roughly, the forty years between 1500 and 1540 - was followed in mid-century by the twenty years of the Protestant Revolt or Reformation, and ended with forty years of the reign of Elizabeth I. All three periods affected the subsequent course of female education.

By MIRIAM BALMUTH

## Sixteenth Century Humanism in England

In contrast to the purely religious scholasticism that preceded them, the humanists advocated a liberalizing of thought and attitude, as well as an emphasis on classical Greek and Latin scholarship. Most pertinent for our discussion was the humanists' urging that the Scriptures be read in the vernacular rather than solely in Latin, and their strong recommendation that women be given advanced education. Such humanists as Leonardo Bruni of Italy (c. 1370-1444) and Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) of Spain were especially clear in their advocacy of women's learning.

In England, among the most prominent proponents of humanism in the early 16th century was Sir Thomas More, the man for all seasons (1478-1535), closely allied with Desiderius Erasmus of Holland (1467-1536), and Sir Thomas Elyot (1490-1546). More is held responsible for a decided advance in the 16th century in the education of upper-class English women - in such subjects as classical literature, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, physics, logic, and rhetoric. More himself educated a number of young women, including his three daughters, in his own home, and their classical education was a model for other noble families of the time.

Adding to the effects of More's leadership was the fact that Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536), daughter of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain and first wife of Henry VIII of England, was very much in favour of humanism and had close contact with outstanding humanists. She inspired Erasmus to write his *On Christian Matrimony*, one of the works strongly supportive of education for women, and brought Vives to the English court to be in charge of her daughter Mary Tudor's education. Vives' treatise, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), dedicated to Catherine, was perhaps the foremost work on women's education in 16th century Europe, with great influence in England (Stock, p. 51). Another eminent humanist, Roger Ascham (1515-1568) was tutor to Princess Elizabeth and then Latin secretary to her cousin, Mary of Scotland.

Thus, by the year 1540, the idea of a broad classical education, moving beyond the religious focus of the past, had become accepted for the upperclass women, and through most of the century many such women did indeed become learned. By 1540, however, a new major force entered the picture - the Protestant Reformation - and set the stage for subsequent changes in the education of women.

## The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation may be traced to the year 1517, when Martin Luther cast off the authority of Rome and inspired the establishment of a host of Protestant denominations and sects. The new Protestant groups had doctrines that differed from each other in many respects, but all shared the ideals of using the everyday vernacular language instead of Latin in the religious services and of calling upon all members to study the Scriptures in that vernacular. This meant that direct contact with the Scriptures was not to be limited to the clergy and to upper-class scholars who could read and understand Latin, but was to be available to anyone who mastered the rudiments of reading.

The Protestant groups and their leaders varied, however, on the question of women's education. John Knox (?1505- 1572), for example, the founder of Scottish Presbyterianism, took a vehemently anti-female stance in his treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (?1558). Yet, Luther himself was very supportive of women's education, insisting on compulsory schooling for all boys and all girls on primary and secondary levels, and advanced education for qualified girls as well as boys. Luther also noted the need for female teachers (Green, p. 97). Those ideals regarding women's education took hold in the Germanic regions of continental Europe to an extraordinary degree with the establishment of many schools that girls attended and a solid acceptance of female education.

In England, Protestantism started in 1534, when Henry VIII established the Church of England after Pope Clement VII excommunicated him for marrying Anne Boleyn without receiving a papal divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Henry declared himself the head of the new church, and dissolved the convents and monasteries, and confiscated for the king and state all of the former church's properties. As a result, the convent and other church and monastic schools were closed and most of them never reopened.

To take their place, a great number of privately endowed schools arose throughout England, well-subsidized by the members of newly-rich mercantile classes. The new schools were staffed by a class of scholarly schoolmasters, generally male, many of whom replaced less well-educated local clergy and other teachers left over from the generation before.



## The Elizabethan Influence

Henry VIII was succeeded by his daughter, Elizabeth I (1533-1603), whose learning both reflected and fostered the scholarly values of the humanists as well as of the early Protestant re-formers. By the latter part of the 16th century, the impacts of humanism, Protestantism, and Elizabeth's reign had coalesced. The view of the time on women's education includes those expressed by Richard Mulcaster.

Mulcaster (c. 1532-1611) was perhaps the most influential of a group of school-masters/spelling reformers of the Elizabethan era, and he had an immeasurable effect on reading and spelling in England and America (Balmuth, p. 126). On the question of female education, Mulcaster's position was consonant with the climate of the late 16th century, although he went somewhat further than his contemporaries in advocating formal education for more than just upper-class women.



In a chapter entitled "Education of Girls" in his book *Positions* (1581), Mulcaster makes this case for educating girls: "Our country doth allow it; our duty doth enforce it; their aptness calls for it; their Excellency commands it" (DeMolen, pp. 125-126). Yet, though he obviously felt that women were capable of acquiring learning, Mulcaster also cautioned that a woman's being learned could not override the practical effects of her being of a low social status; for example, there was little chance of her marrying upward (DeMolen, [pp. 140-141](#)).

The fact that Mulcaster's monarch, Elizabeth was a learned woman, assuredly helped the cause of advanced education for women, as reflected in this statement by Mulcaster:

*That young maidens can learn. nature doth give them, and that they have learned our experience doth teach us;...what foreign example can more assure the world than our diamond at home;... if no example did confirm it that young maidens deserve the training. this is our own mirror, the majesty of her sex, doth prove it in her own person, and commends it to our reason. We have besides her highness, as under shining stars, many singular ladies and gentlewomen* ([DeMolen, p. 133](#)).



## The Influence of Puritanism

The newer teachers and members of the new education-supporting classes mentioned above often were Puritans, opposed to the Church of England. Many of them, too, were followers of John Knox, whose antagonism to women's education has been noted earlier. One effect of having so much of the grass roots schooling of the latter half of the 16th century in Puritan hands was the dissemination of Puritan values which, ultimately led to a new family structure. In the new structure, the wife was a help mate to her husband, with circumscribed duties. This prescriptive family, headed by an authoritarian husband/father, served a religious need: the Catholic practice of group worship centered in the church was replaced by the ideal of each family household becoming a center for worship, with daily services, Scripture reading, and other practices that depended upon a clearly defined family model with responsibility for education as well as religion. In the realization of the model, the aspirations of the initial humanists and Protestant reformers regarding women's education were changed and in the changing, became intellectually lower with the effects felt in the 17th century. In contrast not only to the stated liberalism of the previous century but to the practices of many of the years prior to the 17th century, more and more limitations were placed on all women. The Elizabethan ideal of a rich classical education for upperclass women was supplanted by one that addressed a broader population of women, but called for much less erudition. That is, a new ideal arose of women of all classes becoming literate enough to read the Bible for themselves and perhaps to teach it to the children and servants of the household - but not much more. For high-born women, the prevailing ideal was more secular, and included the graces required of a socially accomplished wife - the Cavalier values of the 17th century left their mark in this respect.

In practice, the formal schooling actually available to females barely reflected even those limited ideals. For women who were too poor to hope to preside over a domestic domain, there was practically no provision. For the middle classes, though there is little data on the precise extent of primary school education for girls, the picture that emerges is one of very limited resources. On the secondary level, girls were rarely permitted into the grammar schools, nor were they sent as often as boys even when they might have been welcome. Thus, even the Quakers, who believed in female education, only provided two female and two coeducational boarding schools out of a total of fifteen that they had established by 1671 (Stock, p. 70). There were some female boarding schools for a limited number of the well-to-do, but their curricula, with rare exceptions, were aimed at developing socially acceptable rather than learned women. For women's higher education, the possibilities were even more closed off. Dissolving the convents had eliminated those institutions as sites for any kind of women's scholarly advancement; nor were women permitted into the secular centers of higher learning - the universities.

How women reacted to such limitation of opportunity is a natural question. The answer for the 17th century is equivocal: on the one hand, women in general believed that a woman's social life, as well as her morality, could be endangered by too much learning. Yet, there are indications that such caution did not mean that women considered themselves innately inferior. In Elizabeth Jocelyn's treatise, *The Mothers Legacie*, to her

*unborn Childe* (1624), she hints at an inner pride covered over with self-protective diffidence:

*I desire (if the child be a daughter) her bringing up may be learning the Bible, as my sisters do, good housewifery, writing and good works: other learning a woman needs not: though I admire it in those whom God hath blest with discretion...But where learning and wisdom meet in a virtuous disposed woman, she is the fittest closet for all goodness. She is like a well-balanced ship that may bear all her sail. She is – indeed, I should but shame myself, if I should go about to praise her more. (Watson, 1906 p. 118).*

The picture, men, that emerges of female education in 17th century England is, on the whole, rather dismal. Nevertheless, that century also helped set the stage for the education of succeeding years. Although it is beyond the province of this paper to detail the ways that the 17th century had impact on later years, it may be said that, from the very start of the 18th century, certain aspects of the educational picture began to brighten for women, helping to set into motion a series of processes that resulted ultimately, though laboriously, in the much more cheerful image presented by the English female education of today.

**SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**  
**WOMEN IN GENERAL BELIEVED THAT**  
**A WOMAN'S SOCIAL LIFE, AS WELL AS**  
**HER MORALITY, COULD BE ENDANGERED**  
**BY TOO MUCH LEARNING.**

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The logo for 'The Womanist' is written in a stylized, cursive script. The word 'The' is smaller and positioned above 'Womanist', which is the main focus of the logo.

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# The Women of Frontier College

The history of women in Frontier College mirrors the history of women in the field of education in Canada. In itself, this is not surprising. What is surprising is that women played as innovative and exciting a leadership role in the early days of Frontier College as they do today.

A unique Canadian institution, Frontier College is often known more to the "outside" education community than to Canadians. The College is not a college in the traditional sense. It awards no degrees and has no campus other than a head office in Toronto. Its "classrooms" are wherever people meet from coast to coast in Canada. There are no fees or qualifying examinations required to become a student of Frontier College. The only prerequisites are a desire to learn and have contact with a college program or staff member.

The College's mandate is to work with people generally passed over by the education system. The central curriculum is literacy, which we interpret broadly to mean full participation in the day to day life of the country; that is, full citizenship. The central learning tool is called SCIL student centered individualized learning. Based on sound research and practice, our experience with SCIL shows that all people can learn. Indeed, given the proper environments and learning conditions, those once labelled as unable, are capable of great things. In operation since 1899, Frontier College changed over the years, but it has always stayed within the philosophy outlined by the founder, Alfred Fitzpatrick. He believed fervently that we should take education to the people and never force people to accommodate themselves to formal institutional education structures. Today "taking education to the people" means working on the streets, in prisons, in hospitals and other institutions as well as in the factories and homes that provided the College's early classrooms.

"Go North, young woman," Alfred Fitzpatrick urged in his book *The University in Overalls*. He believed, even then, that women should also work in the settlements and camps of the Canadian frontier.

As early as 1902, women went into the reading rooms as instructors. By 1903, ten camp schools and fourteen Reading Camps were in existence; some used portable canvas tents, others, permanent log structures. Reading Camp instructors taught the workers in the evening. The concept of the labourer teacher was born in the winter of 1902-03 when a bored instructor near Nairn Center, Ontario decided that rather than wait for the labourers to finish their work and come to the camp in the evening, he would work alongside the workers as a labourer during the day and a teacher at night. The Reading Camp Association thus established a basic tenet of adult education - the Labourer Teacher was to be an active participant in the camp and be a part of the life of the student. In 1920, women worked in fish plants and mills as labourer teachers.

In 1929, the courageous Dr. Margaret Strang worked as a teacher, visitor and social influence among families in the Cochrane district of Ontario. An itinerant doctor, she visited settlements on horseback any hour of the day or night .

Some of the other women Frontier workers of the 1920s included Miriam Chisholme, a mill worker in Bear River, Nova Scotia; Isabel MacKey Kelly [[see interview on p. 24](#)], an education worker from Toronto who went to Stalwart, Saskatchewan; and Marjorie Wickwire, another mill worker, who made clothes pins and taught in Bear River with Miriam Chisholme. Jessie Lucas retired from Frontier College in 1963 after over four decades of dedication and hard work as the registrar and as the secretary/treasurer.

**BY MARSHA FOREST & JAMES MORRISON**



**“GO NORTH, YOUNG WOMAN,” FRONTIER COLLEGE FOUNDER ALFRED FITZPATRICK URGED. HE BELIEVED, EVEN THEN, THAT WOMEN SHOULD ALSO WORK IN THE SETTLEMENTS AND CAMPS OF THE CANADIAN FRONTIER.**

After Edmund Bradwin assumed the Principal ship of Frontier College in 1932, few women went to work on the frontier, a policy which he and his successor, Eric Robinson, maintained into the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the policy has been reversed. In fact, Fitzpatrick was years ahead of his time with regards to hiring women and his zeal and zest for social change included everyone. In 1899, with few staff, and hardly any money, he initiated in the wooded wilds of Ontario what has now become Frontier

College, Then, the frontier was the isolated camp of the illiterate worker. The underlying core of Frontier College was best summarized by Bradwin in his book *The Bunkhouse Man*, in which he wrote in 1922: "It is a national necessity, that no body of illiterate adults whether on the frontier or crowded in the city, be left without reasonable means to improve themselves," The underlying credo of Frontier College has not changed much from the passionate and almost messianic fervor of Fitzpatrick and Bradwin. Jack Pearpoint, the College President since 1975, defined the city as the new frontier and committed the College to making "illiteracy" an issue in Canada. Our Programs are wellknown; HELP, BEAT THE STREET, INDEPENDENT STUDIES, LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE and READ CANADA.

In 1981, a woman with two crutches, walked into Frontier College and in a small, breathy but mighty voice announced that many of her friends who still lived in back wards of institutions for people with physical handicaps could not read and write. Marilyn Collins, 4' 11" tall, was born with cerebral palsy and an extra dose of guts. She herself had made it through university but still had trouble getting jobs. Her friends, many of whom could not speak for themselves and who used symbol boards or sign language, were still alive but barely making it at all.

Marilyn convinced Jack Pearpoint to invest a little money and a lot of time and together they pieced together a small summer project to see what could be done, Marilyn's dream is today the Frontier College Independent Studies Program which does one-to-one and small group tutoring for over 100 students located allover Toronto. It is run and organized by Joy Evans, Anna Pratt and Ed Wadley, One of the students wrote:

## I AM A PERSON

by Carol Parsons

*All we are saying is give us a chance. To read and write to us, it's fulfilling our dreams. As we walk through the darkness of our life to survive we see, we hear, we talk. I can write now and tell you the real story of what we go through. We all have dreams and goals, but most of the time people never believed me or they'd laugh because they don't know what its really like out there on the street.*

*We are human beings too. Our kids are the future. If you want to beat illiteracy and you want our world to be better then help us to help ourselves cause illiteracy can be beaten.*

*I learned the hard way. I don't want that same way for my kids. I feel like I'm starting over. People helped me and stuck by me when I wanted to give up and made me realize I'm not what all those others said I was. I'm a woman, a wife, a mother, a worker. I'm not a jar so don't label me what I'm not. I can do it. I will do it and as you see I did do it. I wrote this. By helping each other you can do it too.*

(Published in INSIGHTS, a collection of writings, from the Independent Studies Program.

Frontier College Press, 1988.)

Carol Parsons is now on the streets helping kids to read and write so they can finish high school, kick a drug habit or feed their children. That's what the Frontier College of this decade is all about.

About BEAT THE STREETS, much has been written. Now located in three Canadian cities (Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina), BTS was founded by two former students of Frontier programs, Rick Parsons and Tracy LeQuere. The offices are now directed by three energetic women: Roxanne Cook (Toronto); Donna Beadle (Regina); and Ruby Braff (Winnipeg). The Winnipeg and Regina offices, led by Native women, focus on reaching Native people and especially single women with young children, so that their children will not inherit their mothers' difficulties.

The women at BTS want skills, not social workers. They want dignity and respect for who they are, not lectures about what they should be. Most of all they want to get off the street and, quite literally, to have a room of their own for themselves and for their children. They want their sons and daughters to get a decent education. They want to read to their children and help them with their homework. They want to finish high school and get a job that pays a fair and decent wage. At BTS they get what they want - respect, skills, and the support they need, when they need it.

Learning in the Workplace is another model of what is possible in any factory to improve the education of the worker. It is run by Miria Ioannou, herself a woman who came to Canada with her parents from Cyprus at the age of ten.

In the workplaces chosen so far, women are eager members of the literacy and learning programs. They cite as their goals wanting to learn to help their own children "get ahead" or "stay out of trouble." As well, many have no control over their lives and want to learn their rights and to be able to read contracts, etc. Many of the women cannot even write out a cheque. Some are abused at home and the tutor becomes a friend and advocate.

At Frontier College, we work with women many people consider challenging: women on the Street, in prisons, and in the workplace, women with labels of mental handicap, mental illness. They are into struggling for child care, fair wages, adequate education, peace for their children, food for their families. Their anger is raw, their hurt is real, their needs are acute and intense. Our programs are striving to meet their needs in a way that will give them the dignity and self-respect they so rightly deserve. This is in essence what Alfred Fitzpatrick was trying to achieve among the marginalized workers in isolated camps almost ninety years ago dignity, self-respect and a measure of control over their own lives.

*Marsha Forest is the Director of Education at Frontier College.*

*James Morrison, Dean of Arts at St. Mary's University in Halifax, has done historical research on Frontier College.*

# Isabel Kelly

## Pioneer Literacy Worker

The following is an excerpt from an interview by Marjorie Zavits [whose questions appear in italics] with Mrs. Isabel Kelly, formerly Miss Isabel Mackey, who worked for Frontier College during the summer of 1920 and 1921.

Originally from a farming background, at the time Isabel Mackey was a graduate student in Physics at the University of Toronto. Upon the completion of her Master's degree in 1922, Miss Mackey was offered a position at Yale. However, the offer was subsequently withdrawn, when her acceptance letter revealed her sex, so she pursued a Ph.D. in Education instead, and taught mathematics at Port Arthur Collegiate Institute until her retirement in 1963.

*Somehow or other you heard about Frontier College and felt you would like to work for them?*

I think it must have been an ad in the paper or something, I can't remember, but I remember I contacted Mr. Fitzpatrick and he was most anxious that I go out to the prairies...Mr. Fitzpatrick met me in Regina and we went up to his brother's, John, who lived five or six miles out of Stalwart on a farm.

*And what was your assignment?*

I think it was to work up more or less of a community spirit because... [people in the community came from many different cultures and] to encourage them in meeting together and probably in good reading as much as anything else but I didn't succeed too well.

*Well, you also mentioned that it was important to talk to the women?*

The women seemed to enjoy talking to me and we were happy together. I picked berries and anything I could do to help around... Then, one of the women... had a new baby the same time as they were thrashing the grain and [I filled in for her]. I managed to cook most anything but pies... They were completely beyond me.

*Did you set up any educational programs? Did you go around and try to teach English?*

No, there wasn't very much I could do in that line. It was in the summer holidays and the children in the neighbourhood went to school on horseback and I didn't know much about their school.

AN INTERVIEW BY MARJORIE ZAVITZ



*It sounds like you were sort of a cross between a social worker and a community developer, you were trying to get spirit into the community.*

Yes, I would say now looking back... that Mr. Fitzpatrick's ideas were far advanced for that day... He was trying to bring the pleasant things in life to the people, to the community, because they had their long winters and radios at that time were few and far between...

*Frontier College didn't send men into that type of job at the time.*

Oh no, most of the men were working in the camps and things and were paid and they did their teaching at night. Which, of course, was a little different I do think I wrote a few letters for people and things like that.

*Would that mean that some of the women couldn't write?*

Well the English would be a little difficult.

*[Note: The next summer Isabel Mackey worked in Nova Scotia] .*

I boarded at a house with a man and his wife... I worked in the canning factory whenever the fish were available. I worked with the women.

*Would any of the women in the factory have been supporting themselves?*

Well, there might have been some because if there husbands were gone, the welfare wasn't the same as it is today. People had to look after themselves pretty much.

*Were you also supposed to teach in this community?*

I think nowadays it would come under social welfare. No, I didn't do any teaching. There was attempts at games and things like that and Mr. MacLean [another Frontier College worker] did more than I did. I let him take the initiative in it and I did what I could to help out with the games and things of that nature, but no, I don't think there was anyone there that couldn't read and write.

*Did you get close to any of the ladies and did the ladies have any problems with the company or personal problems?*

*We talked about cooking and home conditions and that sort of thing. Just general conversation, what they were interested in and their homes and everything.*

*Was there a difference between these women and the women in Saskatchewan who were isolated more?*

Oh yes... The women of the West - they felt isolated. They didn't have anyone to talk to like these women in the villages.

*What about Mr. Fitzpatrick's attitude to women?*

They were more or less on a pedestal. I think he had a great deal of respect for them.

*He thought that they would be a very good influence on the men of the community in the outlying communities, didn't he? Yes, he said if they went out to work he would think of their influence... they would have a gentling effect on where he sent them, on the canneries and places of that sort.*





## Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women

Throughout the world there are many more illiterate women than men. However, in Canada, if we use completion of grade 9 as a benchmark (as suggested by UNESCO) to define functional illiteracy the numbers are about the same for both men and women: one in five people, or about five million Canadians are considered functionally illiterate. Despite the similarity in numbers, there are important differences in how women are affected by illiteracy.

In this pamphlet the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women discusses some of these differences, and what literacy programs are doing and can do for women. It's our hope that this pamphlet encourages literacy workers to share experiences, new ideas and good learning materials they have found. CCLOW is working on a catalogue of literacy materials for women which will be available in the Spring of 1989, and we would like to hear about other projects in this area. Our address is:

**CCLOW**  
**47 Main Street**  
**Toronto, Ontario M4E 2V6**  
**(416) 699 1909**

### Why do women want to learn?

Often women hope literacy will be a step to a better job, or to further training:

**"It's more or less to help me find a job, like a better paying job than \$4 an hour."** Betsy.

\*

Sometimes women want to be able to be more involved in their children's education: "It would help me with her a lot because if I could read stuff to her she'd understand it... We could go to the park, we could get books and sit outside and read." Susan.

\*

\*

Many women see reading as something meaningful which they are missing out on:

**“Reading I think has a lot to do with life. If you can read and understand what you're reading I think you can do a lot with it.” Susan.**

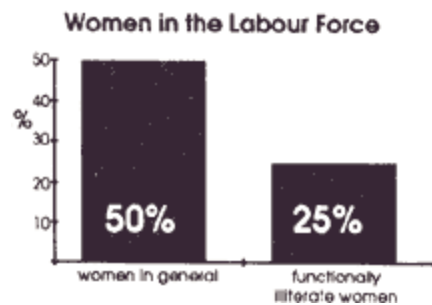
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## Making Connections: Women, Poverty and Literacy

The relationship between literacy and poverty is complex but important in the way it affects women's lives.

- Only 25% of functionally illiterate women are in the paid labour force compared with 50% of women as a whole.<sup>1</sup>



- Half of all female-headed families live below the poverty line. The rate of illiteracy in this group is much higher than the national average.
- Jobs available to women with poor reading and writing skills are traditionally the lowest paid jobs - such as domestic work, sewing machine operation.

- The average woman of any educational status who works full time makes only 68% of what the average man makes. Women with less than grade 8 make on average only 59% of what men earn.<sup>2</sup>



## What are the Barriers to Women Learning?

Women enter literacy programs for lots of different reasons. Often a woman hopes it will be a step towards a better job or further training. Sometimes mothers want to be able to be more involved in their children's education. And, most women hope that literacy will enrich and improve the quality of their lives. However, a woman's desire to learn is often mediated by other circumstances in her life. Literacy workers must look at the pattern of a woman's life, and at the role a woman's responsibilities and relationships play in her decision making. Understanding and valuing a woman's situation will help educators provide ways for her to continue learning.

The following may be important factors:

### Children at Home

Responsibility for childcare may hinder a woman's ability to participate in literacy programs. It may be difficult for her to get baby-sitters or childcare at the times when classes are available. Once in a program, a woman might be kept from attending classes by her children's illnesses. At home, children often distract their mothers from completing or concentrating on homework.

### Demands of Husbands and Boyfriends

Men in a learner's life may feel threatened by her attempt to do something on her own and especially by an attempt to become better educated. While many men are supportive, others are not: their negative reaction may range from just not helping her (for example,

no baby-sitting while she goes to class) to verbal, emotional or physical abuse.

## Isolation in the Home

Women become isolated in the home for many reasons. For women already isolated by their lack of reading ability, this may be a formidable barrier to even finding out about a literacy program. Isolation often comes from traditional expectations that a woman should stay at home. Mothers - especially sole-support parents - are often isolated in the home. One-tenth of all families in Canada are headed by single parents and 80% of these are women. The rate of functional illiteracy among these single parents is 36%, much higher than the rate for the population as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

## Options: Making Literacy More Accessible to Women

To be successful, literacy programs try to reach those who need them most. Often this involves extra work, such as publicizing programs in different communities, communicating in different languages, making participation possible to disabled learners. Some literacy programs have come up with ways to make it easier and more beneficial for women to participate.

**Making childcare available to students** is one way to help women benefit from literacy programs. Sometimes childcare at the literacy centre is not possible and alternatives, such as providing in-home baby sitting or a childcare allowance, may be more beneficial.

**Scheduling classes that are convenient for women** is also important. Some women with children may find day time classes the most convenient, especially if time is left for the women to get their children to and from daycare or school. But many mothers also work outside of the home, so the more flexible a program is, the better. It may be necessary to offer the same class in different time slots so that women will be able to attend.

**JILL SOLNICKI**

**BIII**

Bill, I banish you  
to the back burner,  
the trash can.

Banish you to  
the lexicon of  
short, dumb names.

And if, at the traffic light,  
your green eyes blink,  
I'll wait for red;

and if, bill-in-the-box,  
you pop from every  
doorway - your

square shoulders,  
shapely legs  
and narrow waist -

I will lid you,  
key the latch.  
And if, while I am

reading by the fire,  
the words from your

Women may benefit from **women-only groups**. Women are often more able to talk freely with one another, and share experience of learning without men present. Women-only literacy groups become an important space in which women can discuss common problems in their educational experience and their lives. Out of these groups, women sometimes gain new motivation for writing and communicating.

For many women learners, classes become an important social experience providing a break from their home or work life. The supportive atmosphere a woman learner experiences is likely to help her learning and encourage her attendance, as well as improve her life beyond the classroom.

To reach isolated women, many literacy workers are using **existing networks in their area**, for example: schools, daycares, social service agencies, women's church groups, farm women's networks, and public service announcements.

## What DO Women Want to Learn About?

Once women are in a program it's important that the material used holds their interest. By listening to what women want to learn about literacy, practitioners can design programs relevant to women's lives. For example, women may want information on **health care, birth control, childcare, or sexuality**, so materials on these subjects may make good learning material. However, it is important not to assume that all women are interested in the same things, and to offer a range of possible learning materials.

Women who are working or planning to work need **information about what jobs are available**, and how to prepare for them. It's also important that they are able to learn what different jobs will mean for their future, and that they understand the options for change and growth.

Material must **relate to women's lives, but not portray women stereotypically**. It should be grounded in reality

grey letters, bound and  
gagged

at the back of the drawer,  
dare to steal across the  
page,  
stain the paper,

I will close the book,  
douse the fire,  
go upstairs to bed.

But Bill, Bill,  
when I lie  
on my defenseless  
sheets,

please don't come  
breathing  
on my warm sleep.

but allow for the possibility of change. How are women portrayed in material - as passive, weak, always doing "women's work"? How often are they the central character in a story? In illustrations, are they in the background? Is inclusive language used? For example, it's better to use "firefighter" than "fireman." Language used in literacy material should not be sexist, racist or otherwise discriminatory.

<sup>1&2</sup> CCLOW, *Decade of Promise*, 1986. Quotations are from women in Maritime upgrading and literacy programs, interviewed by Jennifer Horsman. See also Horsman's 'From the Learners' Voice: Women's Experience of illiteracy.' to be published in *Adult Basic Education: A Field of Practice* (edited by James Draper and Maurice Taylor).

<sup>3</sup> Audrey Thomas, *Adult Illiteracy in Canada-A Challenge*. UNESCO, 1983.

## One Room School Houses

*This really happened. I was asked to speak about literacy to a women's church group in a neighboring town last fall, and the events that took place that night left such an impression on me that I decided to write about them.*



**I** never liked driving at night to a place I'd never been before, so I left with lots of time to spare. It was a beautiful night - September, harvest time, combines in full swing, and a big moon coming up.



I arrived a little early, found my way to the basement of the eighty-year-old church, and sat quietly while the women fished the "new business" on their agenda. I watched and listened, trying to get a feel for the group, as they talked about the recent tornado in Edmonton and how they might be of help to those in need.

There were twelve women, the youngest perhaps forty-five, the oldest in her eighties. I noticed they were all wearing dresses and was grateful I had had the sense to wear one as well! The ladies seemed to lack a little humour, but they were involved and dedicated and I liked them immediately.

The business meeting was over. I was introduced and welcomed; the women were sitting in a semicircle with quiet expectancy.

I cheerfully started into my usual run-down of how the Camrose Adult Read and Write Program operates, talking about statistics and the problems of illiteracy in our society. They were listening, but I wasn't sure they were taking in what I was saying. Then one woman asked, "What exactly does illiterate mean?" It was a good question. I talked about "functional illiteracy," those with less than a grade nine education who are unable to function to their full potential in our print-oriented society, and so on. I looked to the woman who had asked the question. She was staring at me with a cold look that I wasn't sure how to interpret. She asked where and how I had come up with that definition.

I thought quickly to myself that she was probably a retired school teacher and I was being challenged because of my youth and lack of experience. I was mentally mounting a defense, when she turned to the other women and asked how far they had gone in school. The answers came... grade nine, grade six, grade eight, grade nine, one after another. Only the youngest women had gone to grade eleven (with some grade twelve credits). The oldest of the group said that she had gone to a one room country school in that very town seventy-five years ago, and never for a second thought of herself as illiterate. The others echoed their agreement. Not one of them felt they couldn't "function" in society. I was at a loss for words. They then went on to assure me that illiteracy may be a problem in Camrose, but certainly not in their community! Everyone was talking at once and I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach.

**BY DEBORAH MARTIN**

There was, however, one woman sitting to my left, who had been very quiet throughout all the discussion. Whenever I looked at her, she looked away. At one point I thought I saw her eyes well up with tears and then I looked away. I was desperately wondering how I was going to survive the mess I was in, when the tears got the better of her, and she openly started to cry. Her name was Shirley.



After an uncomfortable silence, Shirley began to tell the story of her husband of thirty-eight years who had always depended on her because he couldn't read the newspaper or fill out a deposit slip. The women in the group were dumbfounded. They had known this man for years and never imagined or guessed that he wasn't able to read or write. Shirley continued to cry and her friends crowded around her, offering her their concern and their support, openly, freely, as I imagined they had done for each other many times before.

I had a sudden urge to slip out the side door; I was an outsider. I took a deep breath and decided that no, this situation was too incredible to walk away from.

I asked everyone to sit down again. As the ladies gathered themselves together, I noticed an odd noise and realized that the water was dripping from the ceiling into old pots strategically placed at the corners of the basement where the ceiling leaked. It had started to rain. I wondered (especially being in a church) if it was God's way of providing some much needed comic relief!

We started to talk of illiteracy and how and why it happens. Shirley spoke of her husband's dismal few years at school: living far from the school, having to help on the farm, and never being able to catch up. Many of the ladies remembered now, that indeed, he hadn't gone much past grade five. I described some of the students in my program and how unique, special, capable, and creative they each are. When discussion opened up again, the women decided together, that if a person feels handicapped or limited because their education (be it grade five or grade twelve) isn't serving them adequately, then perhaps they could be considered "functionally illiterate." My previous definition, they decided, was too general and unfair, I sat back, exhausted, and agreed.

It was 10:00 p.m. The rain had stopped and as I drove home, I watched the harvest moon slink through the clouds, and the grain elevators loom up in front of me one and two at a time, and I cried. I cried most of the way home. I realized I had learned more in one night than I had learned in a whole year as a Program Coordinator.

I thought about how universal the problem of illiteracy is, but also how personal it is. I thought how next time I'm asked to speak, I'll be a lot more careful with me definitions, prepared speeches and pat answers. I started to feel better as I neared home, safer and again secure. Just as I turned into my driveway and felt the warmth of the porch light greet me, remembered the eighty-year-old woman saying, "I was born here, I went to school here, and raised my family here. I've lived a good life." It seemed so simple am uncomplicated and I really believed that she was happy.

Before I went inside, I leaned again! the porch door, and wondered out loud "Yes, but if you'd had the opportunity to further your education, would you have done things differently? Would you have traveled? Would your life have been the same? Could it have been happier? I felt a sadness at knowing I'd never know that answers to those questions, and neither would she.

I pushed open the door, took a last look at the moon, and quietly turned off the light.

*Deborah Martin has been the coordinator of the Camrose Adult Read and Write Program since its inception two years ago. Camrose is a community of about 13,000 people 100 km south-east of Edmonton. There are 48 students in the program and as many volunteer tutors. Martin is also Chairperson of the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta (LCA), an organization that provides support, networking and professional development 50 literacy coordinators throughout the province, all but 3 of whom are women.*

## Literacy Service

### at Regina Public Library

Saskatchewan has a fine history of women's contributions to libraries and learning. Our pioneer women laid the foundations of an organization dedicated to fulfillment of the adult education needs of prairie women. Early settlement patterns found women on isolated farms instead of villages, longing for companionship and cooperative effort. Early this century, Saskatchewan women formed a network of Homemaker's Clubs, which were designed to meet the adult education needs of Saskatchewan women.

An early activity of the Clubs was the establishment of permanent and traveling libraries. The average rural prairie woman needed to develop skills for self-sufficiency, given the economic hardship and geographic isolation she faced. The information dissemination and mental stimulation provided by Club activities and libraries met a fundamental need.

As the Clubs matured and Saskatchewan grew, their women recognized the need for improved library service. As early as the late '30s, Clubs' conventions passed resolutions calling for province-wide library service much as we enjoy today. In the '40s, Homemakers lobbied their ratepayer meetings to support regional and provincial library development. As these library organizations grew, Homemakers' women participated freely as Board members and library volunteers.

Regina women today continue this tradition with their active participation in our public library literacy program. Half of our learners are women, and many more than half of our tutors are women.

The Regina Public Library's literacy program was started in 1973, with the opening of the Learning Center, at the initiation of Ronald Yeo, Chief Librarian. The program began with staff working with adults in small group settings. Staff and learners eventually articulated a need for attention to individualized learning needs and styles. The recognition of this need and a steady rise in demand prompted the Library to investigate options for revising the program.

In 1977, the Library joined the literacy volunteers movement. Since then, the Library has regularly recruited and trained volunteer tutors, recruited learners and matched them with tutors, and provided ongoing follow-up. For those learners who choose to get their high school equivalency, the Learning Center offers programs to assist in preparation for high school equivalency examinations.

The Library's literacy program presently includes three essential characteristics: it is volunteer-based, learner-centered, and offers one-to-one tutoring. Group sessions are offered for those who wish to attend.

The Library asks for a few basic qualifications from its volunteer tutors. We expect them to have literacy competence, and the willingness and commitment to help someone else learn to read. The vast majority of our volunteers are women, which is consistent with the commitment to helping others that women are known to exemplify. The profile of our women tutors is an eclectic one, representing a variety of economic and occupational backgrounds.

The Library provides all prospective tutors with a one to one-and-a-half hour orientation in which the literacy issue, the tutoring process, and library support are presented. The tutor-training workshop lasts fourteen hours and is usually offered in seven two-hour sessions. A two-hour follow-up session is offered after tutors have had six to eight weeks of tutoring experience. Monthly tutor meetings are held to share information on successful tutoring strategies and to provide continuing education.

The training workshops also explain the nature of the tutoring relationship and represent a number of tutoring techniques. It is repeatedly stressed that the tutorial relationship is a partnership. The tutor is not asked to control or direct the learner, but is expected to coach and guide in order to help the learner achieve her goals. We emphasize that it is essential that a tutor treat the learner in a way that is positive, encouraging and patient.

The cornerstone of our tutoring technique is the "experience story." Simply described, the learner tells a story from her own experience, which the tutor records. This story then becomes a text for a tutoring session. This method encourages self-expression in women whose low level of literacy has often relegated them to silence or passivity. It affirms the validity of their life experience and provides a familiar context for learning.

**BY JEAN DIRKSEN**

The training also explains how to plan tutoring sessions, and how to help the learner set achievable goals. It is quite common for our learners to have limited goals, given the low self-esteem with which many arrive in our literacy program. Tutors are advised to encourage learners to recognize their potential and advance beyond their initial goals once they have been achieved. On the other hand, if a learner's goals are so ambitious as to be unrealizable within the time frame, tutors are advised to help organize the goals into achievable components. I think the goal-setting skills are especially important for the women in our program, since they often have not been exposed to the developmental potential of these skills. They are accustomed to filling their time with the needs of others, rather than organizing it for their own objectives.

Successful literacy tutoring is learner-centered. The tutoring process works with learners' own stories, or with their choice of material, and works toward their goals.

We discourage our program participants from expressing the negative descriptive labels used in statistical literacy measures. Statistical measures do not describe individuals, and our learners are individuals with their own histories and aspirations. We emphasize that our learners need improvements in their literacy skills largely because they have lacked the opportunity to learn, not because they lack intelligence.

The form for our learner-centered tutoring is a one-to-one process. One of the reasons for our choice of one-to-one is to concentrate on the individuals' needs in the learning process. Some of our learners also come to us from adult upgrading classes because they do not get sufficient attention to their needs in the classroom.

Another significant reason for one-to-one is that the large majority of our learners want us to honour their confidentiality. Some don't want to acknowledge to others that they need help; others are in employment situations which might be jeopardized if their literacy needs were known.

The one-to-one process allows for flexibility and as much adaptability as suits the pair. The pair can meet in any location the participants choose. Many of our teams meet in library locations, but many also can choose a more private place.

We also offer several weekly group learning sessions. These are attended by learners in addition to regular tutoring sessions, and by learners who are waiting for a tutor.

June Waffle, who supervised our literacy program for nine years, confirms that most of the women learners preferred one-to-one tutoring when starting in the program. Herself a graduate of an adult learning process, June feels that the initial desire to protect confidentiality relates to the low esteem many women literacy students have. Before she became an active and assertive adult learner, June remembers feeling that she would have liked to be invisible. Many women literacy learners need to overcome silence and self-effacement as one of their learning barriers. Those women who overcome their need for confidentiality find support among the other learners in group sessions.

Finding tutors and learners for a literacy program involves the same strategies used in any successful library outreach program. We take advantage of mass market media for city-wide public awareness of our program, and we use targeting strategies to reach neighbourhoods and special groups.

In targeting, we rely heavily on personal contact. For example, we have attended many meetings of service agencies and community organizations to explain our program, and to ask for help in finding tutors and learners.

Most of our tutors come to see us because of our newspaper ads and the many recent articles and media features highlighting the literacy issue. Many are drawn by personal appeals from staff or friends.

Learners usually come to us by referral and word-of-mouth. The media exposure gives them a necessary awareness of us, but the personal encouragement of friends and trusted people provides them with the courage to come forward.

Regina's Bridging Program for women was initiated by the local network of the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women and is currently administered by the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology. This program attempts to meet the needs of women who require transitional support to identify and attain jobs and educational goals. The Library has tried to assist some of Bridging's learners as needed. We have also received the benefit of Bridging's job placement program, as several of their clients have worked in our literacy program.

In the last year, the Library has re-allocated resources to dramatically expand its literacy service. In the process, learners and tutors have responded to our appeals for additional help. Women have been especially active in forming committees to begin to participate more fully in the program's direction. Our committees have an exciting and unpredictable challenge ahead of them because literacy needs are growing and developing in a time of economic restraint. The women who have responded to the challenge to join our literacy drive, whether as learners or tutors, are continuing in the fine cooperative tradition of our prairie pioneer women.

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*Jean Dirksen is Head of Adult Services et Regina Public Library. She is an active member*

*in the Action for Literacy interest Group of the Canadian Library Association. Jean has been active in the literacy movement since 1980, and is responsible for the Regina Library system's extension of the Literacy Program.*

## Who Do We Think We Are Talking To?

**H**ow many times do we see something that we want to read? Maybe it is a note from our children's school. The nurse may give us a paper about some tests we need. We see a poster at our job about new safety rules or working hours. We get a letter in the mail about our pension, our citizenship or our family allowance checks.

A lot of this kind of information is hard to understand. Even when we understand what the words say, we may not understand what they mean. We may be able to read the words, but still not know what we are supposed to do.

If we read well, we can most likely work it out in the end. If we can not read well, then we may be in trouble. After a while, we may decide to stop trying to understand the words and to figure out what is happening some other way.

When we cannot read well enough to make sense out of the information that we are given every day we may be called "functionally illiterate." People in the government, in business and the schools then talk about "the literacy problem." And it is true that many women want to read and write better. We know that we can not have the kind of life we want unless we improve our skills.

Many other women work in literacy programs, in community services, in unions and as teachers to help learners with reading and writing. I am one of these women. I work as a tutor, as a writer and I do research for a literacy council.

So - I am one of those people who work with "the literacy problem."

I also work with another problem - "the readability problem." Here, I look at how people write the information that we want or need to read. I look at how they do not seem to pay attention to the real lives of their readers.

When the school teachers write notes for children to take home, when hospitals write instructions for medical tests, when work managers write safety notices or the government people send out letters - they do not seem to think about who they are talking to.

They write as if everyone has a lot of education and understands how things like schools and governments work. They write as if everyone is white, speaks English, has money, a job, a safe house to live in and an easy way to get to their offices.

So when I try to work with other women on this problem, I am trying to help people learn how to use clear language - language that most people can understand. I try to make people who write see what happens when they write in a way that many people cannot understand.

They do not get their message across. They make other people feel angry and stupid. They keep all their information for themselves and for other people just like them. They do not share what they know. They stop other people from learning what everyone needs to know.

It is one thing to write to a special friend, or a person who does the same kind of work that we do, or to our teacher. Then we can write any way that this other person understands. Even if no one else understands what we say, we will still get our message across to the person we want to talk to.

**BY BETTY-ANN LLOYD**

But if we want a lot of different kinds of people to understand what we are saying, then we need to think about how we are saying it .

I care about clear language for all information that "the general public" is supposed to read. I especially care about clear language for all information that "women" need to read. This includes information about childcare, our health, our rights as workers, or our right to a safe place to live. It includes information about meetings, about parties, about community services and art and music.

What does it mean that so much of this information is difficult to find in the first place and difficult to understand once we find it? What does this difficulty say about the rights of all women to have the same kinds of information?

**MOST OF US CAN TALK TO OTHER WOMEN , FACE-TO-FACE.  
WE CAN PAY ATTENTION TO WHO THE OTHER WOMEN ARE IF  
WE SIT ACROSS A TABLE AND CHAT. SO WHY CAN'T WE WRITE  
THE WAY WE SPEAK?**

Some women say they write the way they do because that is what they learned in school or that is how they have to write at their jobs. When they leave school or their jobs and do work with women, they can not stop writing that way. They do not know any other way to write.



But most of us can talk to other women, face-to-face. We can pay attention to who the other women are if we sit across a table and chat. So why can't we write the way we speak? When we are putting out women's booklets or papers or posters, why don't we just sit down and write the way we talk?

What have we got to lose? Many of us have learned that if we do not write in a certain way we will not sound important. So - if we keep writing in "important-sounding" ways, does this mean we need other women to think we are important? Do we need to think we are more important than the women we want to talk to?

I think that most women do want to write in ways that other women can understand. We do want to talk with one another as much as we can. But, this means many of us have to learn new ways of writing. Sometimes this also means we have to learn new ways of thinking about who we are in the world.

I have worked out some questions writers can ask when they begin to write something for oilier women to read. I do not think that these are the best questions or the only questions. I am still learning a lot about new ways of writing myself. But, I do think we need to start somewhere.

These are also questions that other women might ask when they find something they can not understand. If we could start to ask these questions of each other, just think what might happen! Posters, booklets, papers, notices that are clear and easy to read! Information we can actually understand!

I use the word "we" when I am talking about both the writer and the reader. I do not think there is one group of women who write and one group of women who read. I think most of us have trouble finding writing that makes sense in our lives. So we are all readers who have trouble. Many of us reading this article are also writers. We try to use words and writing to talk about what is important in our lives. We also have the power that comes with being able to write. Each one of us needs to understand who we are in these questions. The more we can see ourselves and others, the easier it will be to talk.

**Step 1:** Here is a simple question to ask-

**What happens when women write something that many other women do not understand?**

There are three main reasons that women do not understand information. We may not know how to read the words. We may not think the words have anything to do with our lives, so we ignore them. We may be able to read the words and we may want to read the words, but we still can not understand what they mean.

If we want the information and we do not get it for any of these reasons, we may feel left out. We may feel like no one cares whether we understand or not. We can get angry and

important-or we may feel angry and sad and alone because not enough women are reading our words. Whose problem is it that some women do not read and understand what other women write? We can say that women who can not read or understand our writing have a problem. They can be labelled "functionally illiterate." They can go to programs that teach reading.

But we can also look at the problem in a different way. We can say that those of us who write have a problem. We can be labeled "functionally unreadable" because other women can not understand what we write. We are using words and sentences and talking about ideas in a way that does not make sense to many other women.

In the end, all women who want to talk with each other by using words and writing have a problem when the writing gets in the way. But the writers are the women who can change most easily. It is more often the women who write who have the kind of power that allows us to change what we are doing.

So, the first step is to think about what actually happens when some women can not read what other women write.

## **Step 2: If we are women who write- who do we want to read our writing?**

I think a lot of us who write start to put down words before we really think about why we are writing and who we are writing *for*. Instead of starting right away, I think we need to ask some questions about who we want to read our writing. We need to wonder about who the women are.



FRAMES OF REFERENCE 1987

Janice Andreae  
*Frames of Reference, 1987*  
Ink on paper [actual size]

Editor Note: Janice Andreae is a Guest Editor for our forthcoming *Canadian Women Artists* issue (vol. 10, no.3). For a brief biographical note, see p. 76 of this issue.

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Are they young or old? Are they white women? Are they Women of Colour? Native women? Black women? How do we know what race these women are?

Are these women working in paid jobs? What kind of jobs? How well do they read? Do they like to read? Do they live in families? What kind of families do they have? Are they lesbian? Do they have children? Are these women physically disabled? Do they pay for our writing or do they pick it up somewhere? Where do they live? Why do they live there?

What kind of music do these women like? Do they dance? Do they laugh a lot? Do they like to eat good food? What kind of food? Are they fat women?

### **What do we need to know about women that will help us write well for them?**

Many women say that we can not write for all the women, everywhere. If we try to include everyone, we get too many details and we are sure to leave out somebody. But if we are too general, nobody feels included and the writing seems boring and useless.

I agree that it is hard to write for every woman in everything we do. On the other hand, I also think it is too easy to write as if there is just one group of women the women who are like the writer.

It is true. We know what we look like. We know if we go to school, if we work, if we have very much money. We know what kinds of families we have, what kinds of things we like to eat, where we go shopping and who washes our clothes.

We know about ourselves. But what do we know about anyone who is different from ourselves? And if we know some things about other women, how did we find out? Did we talk to women who are different from ourselves and ask them about their lives? Did we ask them what they want to read about? Did we ask them if they can understand what we say when we talk? Did we show them some of our writing and ask them what they think about it?

If we do not know the women we are writing for, how are we going to know how to talk with them? Why are we writing for them, anyway? Why do we think we know enough about anyone else's lives to write things that are important for them?

These are very hard questions. And we can decide not to answer them. We can decide that we can not write for anyone who is different from ourselves and just carry on writing like we always did.

Or we can start writing with women who are different from ourselves. They will tell us, as we write together, that we are not writing about the lives of women like them.

Or we can start to say... "This is what I know. This is the information I have. Do you want it or need it? What else do you want or need? Maybe we have that information too. Or maybe we know how to get it."

In any case, I think we can not stop asking the questions or finding new questions to ask. Step number two is to keep asking, even if it is hard!

**Step 3:** Here is another question -

**What happens when women write as if we are *talking* with other women?**

When we sit down to talk with someone, we do not talk as if we are alone. We may try to think about what our friend already knows about what we are saying. We try to think about what she wants to know. Maybe we think about what she needs to know.

And if we do not know what she wants or needs, we can ask her! May be we should ask her even if we think we do know. We may be wrong!

So, step number three is to sit down and write as if we are talking to someone. If we do not know much about our readers, we can ask them what they want to know.

**Step 4:** What do we do when we discover women can not read what we write?

**How much time are we willing to spend learning how to write in a way that more women can understand?**

If we want to be sure we are doing the best job that we can, we need to spend some time learning how to write clearly. We can learn about writing stories instead of ideas. We can learn about active verbs and concrete nouns and sentences that have subjects. We can learn about colons and commas and contractions and hyphens.

We can learn about white space and type sizes and how much space to leave between the lines. We can count how many syllables there are in each word we use.

We can count how many words there are in each sentence. We can count how many sentences are in each paragraph.

We can learn how to look for words and ideas that women may not understand because their lives are different from the lives of the women who are writing.

So, step number four is to take the time to learn how to write so that more women can understand what we are saying. We also need to ask - what does it mean if we are not

willing to take this time.

**Step 5:** How will we know if we are writing more clearly? How will we decide if more women can read what we write?

**Will we test our writing with different women before we make a lot or copies of it?**

Women who write are learning to ask who they want to read what they write. If we think about this clearly, we will know where to find some of these readers. We can go to see them and ask them to tell us what they think of what we have done.

This can be a very hard thing to do. It is hard to write things as clearly as we can. When we finally get something on paper, we do not always want to change it.

On the other hand, we do want other women to understand what we are saying. And the only way we are going to find out if someone understands is to ask them.

I think this is the most important step of all. We can always learn a lot by taking what we write to different women and asking for their advice. If we hear what they say, we will get better and better at writing clearly.

So, step number five is test our writing with the women that we want to read it.

**Step 6:** If we test our writing with other women, we are going to hear that there are some problems with it.

**Are we going to change our writing after we test it?**

Many women who write say we do want to write in a way that other women will understand. But, when we find out that many of the women we want to read our writing are having problems, we find it hard to change.

Sometimes, we say our ideas are hard to understand because they are so important and complicated. We say there is no clear way to write these ideas. Sometimes, we say we do not want to insult our readers by being too easy to understand.

Sometimes we say women need to learn how to read important and complicated words and ideas. It will be good for us to teach others the kinds of words that we know. Or, we say we do not have time to change the writing. We just have to get the information out

I think we need to look at all these reasons and find out which ones are true and which ones are excuses. I think we also need to look at this question---

**What happens if we do not change our writing after we find out other women can not or will not read it?**

One thing that is going to happen is that many women are not going to read what we write. Are we saying, then, that we will not change? Are we deciding that how we write and how we feel about our writing are more important than sharing our information?

I think we need to make sure we understand what we are doing if we make this decision. We do not have any right to pretend that we are trying to write for many different women if we decide to write only for those who are just like us we can not say one thing and do another thing.

So, step number six is to be honest about who we want to write for and how we want to change our writing. If we do not change when women tell us they have problems, we need to look at what that means.

I think it is very hard to change how we write. How we use words is part of who we are in this world. How we use words is part of our power and part of our powerlessness. Some of us have the powerful words and it is very hard to let that go!

Maybe we can not let go. In that case I believe we need to admit that out loud and look at what happens. Who will be standing on the side of those people who have the power? Who will be standing on the side of those people who do not have the power?

*Betty-Ann Lloyd is a Halifax writer/ editor who is currently doing some research on literacy and the community college system in Nova Scotia.*

## It's Time We Learned

*Why Should A Disabled Woman Who Has To Worry  
About Getting Attendant Care, Housing,  
Accessible Transportation, Family Support, A Job  
And A Vacation Learn To Read And Write?*

**W**omen with disabilities face a unique struggle in acquiring literacy skills. Not only do they need to improve their education level to manage competently in a highly technical society, but they struggle with the double burden of being disabled and female in a society which for so long has been dominated by men in an able-bodied culture. All three areas of vulnerability need to be presented here to clearly illustrate the additional difficulties encountered by disabled women who do not have the literacy skills to function fully in Canadian society.

Women in Canada lobbied to acquire the vote, to become pilots of their own fates and owners of their own property (including their very persons). Conversely, women who were disabled have been segregated, often institutionalized and rejected by society as a

whole. Only radicals believed that disabled women could contribute to society for, if one was disabled, she ought not to jeopardize the gene pool by producing "defective" offspring, or if producing classically healthy children, she could not raise them herself, and so she had no role in society. While the women's liberation movement and equal rights efforts should have emancipated all women, those with disabilities were still safe targets for old-fashioned views and lowered expectations.

The champions of the Civil Rights movement did not advocate an "integration" that permitted black-only schools, or black-only classes within neighborhood schools. Integration meant that students of both races were interspersed, integrated within the fabric of the school. To do otherwise would have served to perpetuate the sub-standard education offered to the black minority group. Arguments ensued that white students would reject peers of the visible minority, that white families would protest and haul their children out of schools where they feared the standards would be reduced. But these assumptions ultimately were proved false, and in the interim, were not accepted as reasonable arguments against integration. Indeed, integration within the schools set the tone and example for civil and social integration at that time.

How ironic that for people with disabilities, these assumptions remain as valid arguments for segregation outside of the mainstream whether in school, housing, or social spheres.

Rosa Parks caused an uproar when she refused to relinquish her seat to a white man on the bus. Disabled women are not even allowed *on* the bus! Instead, if any transportation is available in their communities at all, they ride in separate vehicles, segregated from the mainstream of society.

The issue of integration is central to an examination of the problems disabled women face when their handicaps are compounded by weak literacy skills. The fact that women had not been expected to integrate in any socially relevant way has been one of the underlying assumptions in developing educational and service policies for children and adults with disabilities. Along with the assumption that disabled people could not contribute to society came service structures and mechanisms which underlined this deficit, and, eventually, contributed to the perpetuation of its own false assumption.

**BY TRACY ODELL**

Following are two concrete examples illustrating the profound implications of these structures on the lives of people with disabilities:

Sarah, age two, is too uncoordinated to perform the typical tasks that two-year-old can perform, and so her parents seek medical help. The doctor refers Sarah to the local medical center for an assessment, where it is discovered that Sarah has cerebral palsy, which is disrupting her motor development.

The staff at the center have assessed many children like Sarah before, and using the best

of their training and experience, recommend to Sarah's family that she should be institutionalized.

"It is too difficult for you to do this alone," they explain. "You really should put her away and have another." Her parents have already started to feel the impact of looking after Sarah. After all, by now she should be getting more independent, but what they foresee is the additional time and effort required to assist Sarah to master basic tasks. Won't all this extra attention to Sarah undermine their relationship with their other children?

"She'll be better cared for in an institution," the staff add, consolingly. "They are better trained than you are to care for these children."

Even with the rationalizations, the decision to place Sarah in an institution doesn't *feel* right to her parents, so they ask for time to think it over. A few days later, against the better judgment of the medical professionals, they decline to send their child away.

By deciding to keep Sarah at home rather than have her institutionalized, her parents have opted for a new life of research, planning and advocacy. They will have to fight hard for the services Sarah is presumably entitled, if not in court then in libraries, social service offices and school rooms. Wherever there are gaps in service, they will write proposals, analyze services and assess Sarah's needs themselves in order to articulate her needs clearly within the arena of services. If they are successful, they will gain a reputation for being demanding, for thwarting the system and for rejecting assistance when it was offered during Sarah's initial assessment

So Sarah lives at home, but she is relegated to a segregated class in her neighbourhood school, because her parents lost the fight to have her integrated with an aide in a typical class. Her teachers have special training and experience. At eight years of age, Sarah's teachers determine that her inability to speak will inhibit academic pursuits and it will seriously restrict the contribution she can make to society. Sarah's curriculum, therefore, is designed around "life skills" and recreational activities.

Sarah grows up, and her family celebrates the welcome changes together. However, these changes mean that her service needs changes, and these changes must be documented and justified in every new service request. They win many battles, but with each passing year, the gap between Sarah's scholastic achievements and those of her peers widens.

At twenty-four, Sarah has graduated from high school as part of an "exceptional student" program. Her school work was primarily non-academic and she was upgraded. As an adult, she understands that her lack of academic skills will render her unemployable, so she approaches her local literacy program. Sarah is ready to fight her own battles: she wants to read and write.

What is it about our educational and social systems that allow early verdicts to young children about their adult potential? Why should a handicapping condition be used as a rationale for slanting the curriculum away from academic subjects? Why do we spend less



time teaching those who need the most time to learn?

Literacy programs, whether community-based or classroom style, need to serve members of their community who have handicapping conditions. The immediate fear literacy practitioners express is inadequate "specialized" training. And yet, the competencies they have already acquired will be useful with students who have disabilities. Teachers during the Civil Rights movement had to teach all their students --- black or white --- and were no longer permitted to discriminate. Why should teaching people with disabilities be any different?

Educators must understand that the burden learners with disabilities face is not their disability per se; more it is the attitude of others who have continued to slough them off to experts faithful that they know better.

Human needs are universal: we all need food, shelter, and people in our lives who matter to us; we all need mobility, transportation, dignity and a sense that we are safe from threats. These needs do not change because a person has a disability.

Typically, a woman in this society will meet her needs for food and shelter by earning money to purchase food and shelter. Typically, she has transportation to work and shop, and she has the personal mobility required to get herself up in the morning and look after her personal needs throughout the day. With these basic needs met, she can nurture new friendships and maintain old ones. The difficult pieces are finding the right job at reasonable pay, and finding the right accommodation at reasonable rent.

Now, comes the twist: imagine this same "typical" woman - call her Vivian who now has a disability which severely limits her personal mobility. How does she get her needs met? How are her difficulties compounded beyond that of the woman described above?

First of all, she uses a wheelchair for mobility - a power wheelchair because she lacks the strength to push a manual chair. These cost \$6,000 and she is not yet working, so she must investigate the financial assistance programs available for such purchases. Until very recently, reliance on the benevolence of service clubs was her only possibility. To them, she would describe her plight in graphic detail, trading off dignity for practicality. Now, in Ontario, Vivian also has the option of applying for government funding through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program or through the Ministry of Health's Assistive Devices Program.

Since Vivian can read and write very well, she can read the program titles, document her need and complete the appropriate forms. The service providers will evaluate her request to determine whether she requires this device, and is therefore eligible. This is the process which is necessary for her to meet her mobility needs.

Because of Vivian's mobility limitations, she requires assistance in activities of daily living, such as taking a shower, preparing meals and using the washroom. She realizes she can not depend upon her parents for this assistance much longer and investigates her

housing/attendant care choices. She completes a 20-page application for attendant care in a wheel-chair-accessible apartment in the community. Until recently, she would have had to fill in a different version of this lengthy form for each housing project to which she applied, but now there is a centralized system, so she just has to do it once. Since she can read and write very well, Vivian completes the form with no difficulty. It takes her four hours.

She reads newspapers and has memberships at a number of consumer-based organizations which deal with disability issues, and so she is painfully aware that very few projects exist which offer housing and attendant care. She knows she is not eligible for Outreach, because she needs help more than three times per day.

Because the turnover and subsequent vacancy rates for attendant care are slow, Vivian will have to seriously think about organizing a new project were she would have a better chance of getting in. It only takes three or four years to develop a project, because many of the documents each group has to create can now be built upon those of existing groups. Personnel policies, bylaws, job descriptions, flow charts, program plans, hiring plans, land allocations, contracts with housing companies, rental subsidies, selection of staff and tenants all take time. Vivian is optimistic that she could accomplish this before her parents retire.

In terms of looking for a job, she will require alternate transportation until the Wheel-Trans service has an available place. Wheel-Trans has become computerized, resulting in a more efficient system, so she might wait only two weeks. The odds against Vivian getting Wheel-Trans decrease if the job site is far from home, and if it falls outside the travel path of existing runs. She has no way of finding out the Wheel-Trans runs before job hunting, but she is an adventurous spirit and goes ahead anyway, letting the dice fall where they may. This is, after all, an improvement from ten years ago, before there was even such a thing as Wheel-Trans. She is thankful for all the hours she invested to lobby for at least a demonstration project. Before Wheel-Trans, Vivian could not have gone out anywhere on her own, and now that the hours have been extended to week-ends and 11:00 p.m., she has the possibility of a job where she might be required to work evenings or weekends.

The fact that sometimes the vans have been known to catch on fire, or, more often, a passenger falls when a hydraulic lift cracks at the seams, is not really on her mind as she books her rides. Because Vivian can read and write, she was able to do the lobbying, address questionnaire envelopes, send letters to her MPs and MPPs, write the newspapers and finally, fill in the form to register for the service, which her doctor and one other health professional co-signed, as required, to assure Wheel-Trans that she was not pretending to be disabled.

With her basic mobility needs met, Vivian can continue to look for a job. With her good education and communication skills, she will find appropriate employment with reasonable pay. Without her education, she would not be able to work at all. Jobs which rely upon physical strength are out of reach: she can not work with a construction crew,

arrange goods in a shop, work a cash register or paint houses. Even for a non-disabled person, these options are fading if one lacks the basic literacy skills essential for learning computerized cash machines, reading paint labels or operating manuals and completing invoices.

It was crucial for Vivian to receive a good education. It pays off now as she scans the want ads, looking for employers who announce the job is an "equal opportunity" position, so she can have at least minimal assurance that they won't be daunted by the fact that she brings her own chair to the interview.

Vivian is extraverted, so she has always made friends easily and has the social skills to make her friendships blossom. She looks forward to being married someday, and perhaps even raising children, but she'll wait until she has the energy. Oh, the energy isn't for raising the kids, it's for doing the advocacy necessary to develop housing where she can receive attendant care services in a family situation, for encouraging and shaping governmental policies to permit additional assistance to her raising her children, and for educating her doctor, maternity nurses and attendants of her right to have her child if she wishes, despite her disability. Her writing skills will serve her well as she writes letters, proposals, conducts research and develops surveys to document the need.

And now we're full circle: let's look at how these problems are compounded if the disabled woman who has been the focus of this discussion could not read and write.

Like Sarah, Vivian would have been educated in a segregated system, where the expectations were lowered and her handicapping condition was considered insurmountable. The professional advising on her curriculum would have assumed Vivian was not educable or, if she was, teaching her would take skills beyond the expertise of her teachers.

Vivian hasn't had to devote the time or energy to developing services, where none previously existed, but she has helped to discover what services might assist her, with the advice of someone who understands the systems well. This person must present Vivian's case wisely to ensure Vivian receives transportation and attendant care services.

Vivian has to rely on the meager income provided through the disability pension, because she does not have any skills to bring to the market place. Depending upon the philosophy of her social worker, she might be "encouraged" to spend all her days in a sheltered workshop. Her social worker shares the view of many social service professionals who believe it is better to have clients relegated to workshops to "earn" their benefits, although this means exclusive association with other people who share the same label, and the workshops tend to reinforce isolation from the mainstream of society. To refuse might jeopardize her benefits.

Without an income, Vivian can not be accepted into an attendant care project. Once her parents could no longer care for her at home, Vivian could only live in a chronic care

institution, a fate her parents initially wished to avoid.

Vivian's experiences would primarily be within a segregated context: she would have had disabled classmates, disabled workmates, and eventually, disabled roommates. Her social circle would be very narrow and she would be quite lucky indeed if, over the years, relationships were sustained where she mattered to anyone. Most of the people with whom she would be in contact would be paid to spend time with her. A relationship, marriage and children would be out of the question. Her chances of being sterilized socially, if not physically, would be rather high if she lived in an institution. On top of all this, to learn to exist within these limitations, she would have to learn how to be a "happy disabled woman:" passive, submissive and accepting, not daring to show how unhappy she was for fear of making things worse.

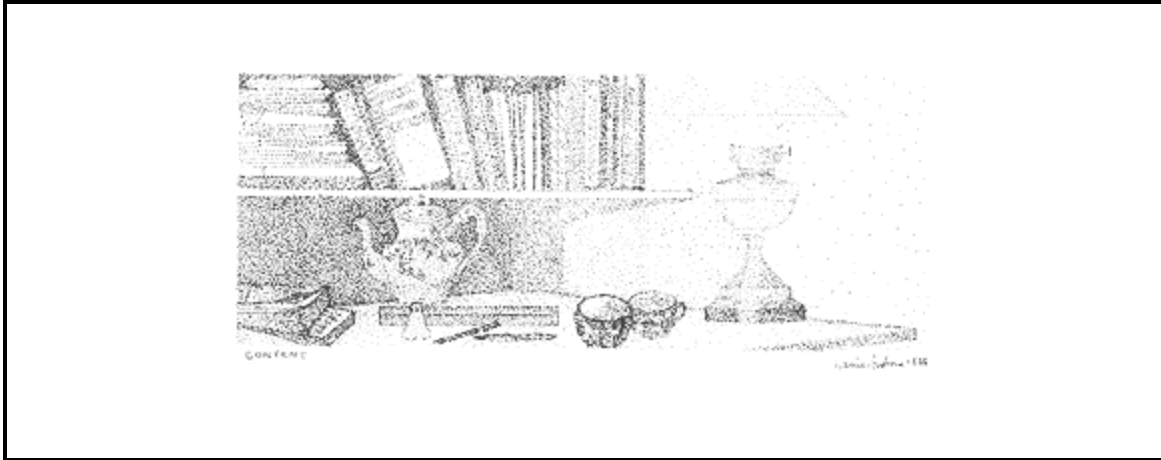
Vivian's inability to read and write would have sentenced her to a homogeneous life, a life without challenges, with lowered expectations. Vivian would end up being the victim of those who would control her life, rather than being empowered to make changes for its improvement

Literacy is vital for survival in an industrialized society like Canada, even for the general population. For a disabled woman, literacy creates the opportunity for a life approaching normal rather than one condemned to exile. The only thing worse than having to do all the form filling, lobbying and advocacy for very basic services is not having the skills or the assistance to perform these essential tasks at all.

If educators understood the kind of impact that literacy instruction could have for a disabled person, they would not I ask, "Why should I include this person in my program?" Instead they would work out how.

And just as women needed to be educated about the possibilities which would : become open to them after liberation, so too, do disabled women need to be educated about their possibilities - possibilities created and increased through literacy.

*Tracy Odell is the Access Coordinating with the Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Skills Development. Odell, who is physically disabled, is a long-time advocate for disabled issues. After living in an institution for twelve years, she lobbied for accessible transportation, and continues to do so for universal access. She has helped to develop two attendant care projects, and she consults with teachers: and literacy practitioners on curriculum and improving access to learners with disabilities. She currently lives in Toronto with her husband David and her daughter, Kathleen.*



**Janice Andreae**  
**Content, 1987**  
**ink on paper**  
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## Breaking Chains

### Immigrant Women Workers and Literacy

**L**iteracy in its most encompassing definition is the right to PARTICIPATE, the ability and confidence to articulate concerns, to pose questions, and above all, to get involved in one's own workplace, union and community. Being literate is knowing that you have a choice. In this great land of opportunities, many immigrant women are walking in chains. These are chains of dependency, chains of being treated as hands rather than as a person with a brain, and chains of having doors closed right in your face in the name of Canadian experience. It is a sense of vulnerability and helplessness, of being stripped of one's own historical, cultural and linguistic roots once you set foot on Canadian soil. It is also a sense of humiliation for having to rely upon a relative, a friend, a child or at times even a stranger to "speak" and "think" for you. Being illiterate for a non-English speaking immigrant woman is like "doing time" in a prison without walls.

The marginalization of immigrant women is more apparent when we walk into any garment, textile, food processing or electronics manufacturing factory in Metro Toronto to set up the English at the Workplace Program (EWP). What do you say to an immigrant woman worker, who has been working on the line for the last twenty-five years, and who told us we came twenty years too late because she had lost her hearing! What do you say to a Punjabi-speaking woman assembler who speaks flawless English and whose Master's

degree in Education in Punjab was given a mere Ontario Grade 13 equivalent? What do you say to a Chinese sewing machine operator who keeps saying that she can't learn because she does not even read Chinese!

The Metro Labour Education & Skills Training Center, a project of the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto, has been trying to break some of these chains. Since its inception six years ago, the English at the Workplace Program has attempted to address the functional ESL literacy needs of immigrant women workers. Inspired by educational campaigns like the Nicaraguan literacy crusade and the work of Paulo Freire, the philosophy of the Program emphasizes the need to develop worker/participants' critical consciousness of their work situation, their society and position in it, and ways of effecting changes through action, hopefully through participation in their union.

The content of our Programs is very much learner-centered. Workplace functions, such as how to report a machine breakdown, what to do in an emergency situation, how to read the health and safety labels, etc., are integrated into the training program. The learner's own life experiences as an immigrant, a worker and woman are very much acknowledged. We strongly oppose teaching approaches that patronize, and materials that infantilize the learners. The following, from one of our EWP participants, further illustrates this shared sentiment:

*I came to Canada from Monteleone, Italy in 1957. The boat arrived in Montreal. I took a train to Toronto, After 3 weeks, I looked for a job. After a couple of months I went to school to learn English. The teacher said the same thing every night. 'This is my pencil. This is my apple. I give it to you. You give it to her.' She made me sick when she said the same thing every night. I stopped after two months. I didn't want to hear her say the same thing every night, Now I am learning English again. I like this class because I learn different things every week.*

**BY WINNIE NG, IN COLLABORATION WITH PRAMILA AGARWAL & BRENDA WALL**

Workers come forward for many different reasons. For many immigrant women, EWP classes provide a welcome break, a chance to relax and do something for themselves alone. Confidence-building is probably the most important achievement of EWP programs. It has enabled hundreds of immigrant women workers to speak out and stand up for their own rights:

- A Polish woman, who had been forced to do her bosses' personal laundry for many years, filled out a grievance form and regained her dignity in the workplace.
- A Greek woman, a custodial worker, received thousands of dollars in back wages because her employer continually passed her over in the promotion process. After she raised the issue in the EWP classes, the union fought a successful case on her behalf.
- Two immigrant women, members of the CUPE local at a health care institution in Toronto, have recently become stewards in their local- a major step forward.
- A Chinese sewing machine operator who had endured backache for the last ten months, finally gathered up enough confidence and English to ask the mechanic to adjust her seat. She came back to the class with a renewed sense of pride.

Our EWP program is now taking on a new direction to recruit and train other workers to become potential EWP instructors. Hopefully through this process, we will be able to open up new possibilities for the immigrant women who have been silenced and whose previous training and credentials from their home countries have been totally discarded. These women workers can very well be ideal EWP instructors, as they will have a good knowledge of the workplace and empathy for the participants in the program.

The Center is also exploring new training programs that will address the mother-tongue literacy needs of our EWP participants. These immigrant women are in a double jeopardy position in the broader political, economic and social context. It is a basic human right and an access to learning that they have been TWICE denied. We strongly see the need for a bridging program in which bilingual instructors will be able to provide the additional support and pre-basic functional ESL training for these learners with social needs.

We see our English at the workplace Programs as a stepping-stone for immigrant women to have more options and to be able to move on. It is an empowering process which, at times, can be frustrating because training alone is not the only solution. Training does not create jobs. Nor does it resolve the systematic inequalities that immigrant women face on a daily basis. However, an acknowledgment of all these limitations does not immobilize us. Instead it has given us a much clearer focus to provide the support and tools for immigrant women to SAW their chains of isolation and 'illiteracy.' It is this collective

strength of our sister that will empower us all.

*Winnie Ng, Pramila Agarwal and Brenda Wall have worked for many years in immigrant women's programs. They are now involved in Metro [Toronto] Labour Education & Skills Training Center.*



## **"I Think I Got the Right"**

### ***A Look at the Issues of Literacy with Three Parenting Teens***

Since 1987, Action for Boston Community Development Learning Centre, an adult learning centre in downtown Boston, has been running a program especially aimed at pregnant and parenting teens. Its goal is to educate, to counsel, and ultimately to bring teenage parents into the workforce. Operating under the mandate of a grant provided by the Department of Public Welfare, the program also acts as a liaison between the teens and such governmental agencies as Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General Relief (GR), a family daycare centre, the Boston City Hospital, and Saludi's Banking Training Program.

But a year old, the program has already undergone modification. Originally planned for 25 students, it now serves a maximum of 15; originally of six months duration, its exit is now open-ended. Students must be between 16 and 21, and have at least grade 3 reading and math skills. They spend half a day at ABCD Learning Centre working toward a G.E.D. and half a day in health and parenting workshops conducted by a child development specialist. Later they enter an employment or vocational training program. According to the terms of the grant, the counselling aspect of the program is intended to develop "self-worth, physical and mental health and social competence." The education provided "must be accessible, relevant and related to the participant's life experiences, positively oriented, based in recognizing students' skills and competencies, flexible and demanding." The workshops are provided to develop parenting skills.



All this looks great on paper: one year, maybe two, and the students can attain a G.E.D., a certificate of training and practical knowledge of health and childcare. But from the outside looking in, the place of education in the priorities of pregnant and parenting teens is hard to discern. It struggles for attention among such other pressing concerns as the housing search (with Boston apartments starting at \$700-\$800 a month), work, daycare, courts, welfare, boyfriends, counselors, parents, families, friends, violence, hope, determination and constant change. Regular attendance at school seems impossible.

I sat down one day and spoke with three women from this program. All three desperately desire education, knowing it is their ticket out of dependency and into a good job; all three also admit that their immediate needs, of necessity, take precedence. When I asked them about their school experience, they responded with stories of hanging out, doing nothing, going nowhere except home at the end of the day for something to eat. However, all say that they see the adult learning centre as something "different".

All three women have grown up very quickly, forced to become women when barely out of the 8th, 9th, or 10th grade. Each has a unique story, but none is atypical. Surviving violence and even attempted suicide, they are, if nothing else, extremely clear and articulate about the massive confusion which they entered, very much of their own free will. None regret their situation, nor do they blame others. They all like mothering, are glad to have their children while young, believe they are caring for them well.

Lucia is 19 years old. When she got pregnant at 15, in the summer after 8th grade, her parents threw her out of the house. Even now, almost 5 years later, her mother will meet her occasionally, but only outside the house. After a few attempts to live with friends and sisters, she went to stay at her boyfriend's parents' house, but the arrangement soon fell apart. Jealous of her, her boyfriend's brother turned the family against her. If she was watching TV, they would shut it off, as if she was invisible. Her mother-in-law would not permit her to use the washing machines because she contributed to rent but not to electricity. When she smiled, she was accused of lying to herself. When she didn't, she was called rude.

**BY MARTHA KINGSBURY**

So, at the age of 16, with her 3-month old baby in the next room she took pills, lots of pills, enough to make her blind and deaf to the situation. Discovered, she was taken to the hospital and pumped out.

*When I took it I couldn't hear anything, I couldn't see anything. They took me to this hospital, pump me out. My brother came in and I didn't know who I were talking to. He said "I came to see if you're not going home with us, are you going home to your boyfriend's? And the counselor said, "We'll get you a nice place and you can stay, you and*

*your daughter, and you can go back to school." But I love my boyfriend! And if I go back home, my father doesn't talk to me, my brother doesn't talk to me. I won't be able to go nowhere. It's going to be worse. And I said, I'll go back to my boyfriend's." And when I went back my mother-in-law is yelling at him saying I'm no good and I end up lying in bed for one week. And my mother-in-law's sending me up something to eat, she's asking "how're you doing?" and she's looking at the baby.*

*We ended up finding rat poison and the City of Boston was coming in and checking with me and talking with me and taking the case to court. I ended up being thrown out of there and all my stuff's in the basement. So I got no place to go. I went down to Housing to see if they'd help me out down there. I went to my sister's, but she's over-crowded. So I went down to Welfare, see if they could help me, but they said they could do nothing. And I'm trying to go to school, get an education, go to training. I got two kids to take care of and trying to get an apartment!*

One child is 3 years old, the other, 9 months. She has been with her boyfriend for 5 years. During her second pregnancy, she considered an abortion. Lying about her age, she managed to get the money, tests, counselling and to arrive at the appointment But at the last minute, she changed her mind and walked out. She freely admits the love she has for both her children; the elder has severe problems. A confused child at 15, three years later Lucia has struggled into adulthood.

Lourdes, also 19, with a 20-month old son, is looking for permanent housing. Currently she lives in a shelter. She loves being a mother, and though she assumed she would finish high school and get a job, she knew, when she fell in love, it was time to "wake up and smell the coffee." The boy's father is long gone, and she does not miss him. Since her son was 3 1/2 months old, she been involved with another man, one who is "there when I need diapers in the middle of the night, when I have to run to the hospital, when I have a headache. He's the one who helps me to provide for my son."

Born to a wealthy family on the tiny island of Cape Verde, Lourdes came to the United States when she was 10. Now she is the child of two cultures, one inherited from the tightly-knit Cape Verdean community in Boston, the other from the larger Black American community of which she is also a member. She went to a post-bussing Black American school; she believes that America is a free country where the government leaves people alone and where you can get what you want And she is outspoken:

*The lady that works [in the shelter] where I'm staying at, she's always complaining how us Cape Verdeans should stick with Cape Verdeans and I cuss her out 'cause she says to me that I'm beginning to have black people's attitudes. I think I have the right to cuss her out so I cussed her out and she gave me a written warning. And told her "I'm going to sign this warning because you's supposed to be a counselor, and if you want to be a counselor your have to know how to communicate, know how to deal with people, know how to talk. You got to work here with a bunch of us, and if we wasn't homeless you wouldn't be sitting at this desk trying to run our life. And she's always complaining how we should take better care of our kids and we should watch our kids and I told her, I said, "Look, I'm tired of*

*you talking to me like this, because I'm doing it. If you want to talk to me you're going to sit down like a lady and talk to me. I might be young but I'm not stupid. Talk to me like I'm human and I'll talk to you like you're human." And then she got mad because I turned around and said. "Look, you're so much worrying about how we take care of our kids. You leave your son with someone all day from 7 to 2 and then you work from 3 to 11, Do you ever see your kids? How do you ever give your kids love? You might be out there trying to make a dollar but you're not worrying about your kids."*

*I told her "You can talk about me all you want but don't get off the line with me telling me how to run my kids. Don't tell me who to hang around with cause you're just as black as anybody I know."*

Lourdes' mother brought all her 11 children here from Cape Verde: first one half, while the others stayed back with the maid, and then the rest. In Boston, she set up shop. The children all got schooling and jobs. Lourdes was an A and B student : at school; her reading and class level are both 9th grade. Now Lourdes puts her child first; she makes sure that he is settled before all else. By joining the program, she is trying to do two things at once, but she puts housing first, and education second. She has a daily agenda as long as her arm, and she uses the structure the P.P.T. provides in order to get done what needs doing. She rarely manages the full 12 hours attendance required a week, but she does use the childcare, transportation, health and counseling services, education and training the program provides.

Pam is 20 and her daughter is 18 months. Recently she has found an apartment and is beginning to catch up with her bills, but before there were months and - months of moving from shelter to shelter, hostel to hostel. She has been through a lot. When she was two, her 17 year-old-brother was killed by the police in a case of mistaken identity. When she was 13, her mother died of cancer.

Pam was 18 and her baby's father was 38 when they became involved. Until then she had known him in passing as a father figure to her friends at school. They became friends, then lovers and had 10 months together before she became pregnant. When her baby was 2 weeks old, he was stabbed to death trying to get some junkies out of a hallway. It was two days before Christmas.

Pam has always been mature for her age, taking her grief, taking her time, moving on. But now when she recalls her lover, one sees she has begun to open up a bit, to take more risks, to be more playful. For example, she recollects the night when she and her friend Alee went over to his house, where he was still living with his other girlfriend. Pam wanted a ride home:

*It was a night to remember. I was 3 months pregnant. She let me in the house but she said, "He's asleep." But I know he wasn't asleep 'cause I seen him drive up. He would not wake up for beans. I said, "I know you're not asleep and I'm not playing." So he got up.*

But as they were parading downstairs, the mother of the woman he was living with was

coming up the stairs. A scene ensues:

*"It's either you or the truck," I said, and I went downstairs to bust his car. I went around the building and I found this log. I went back to the car and started to bust in his windshield. And I was laughing while I was doing it.*

*He looked out the window and he was pissed. I just did it to let him know that I wasn't playing. Don't really mean anything, just something I'd always wanted to do. Let them know I did it.*

*He came downstairs and my friend Alee said, "You'd better run."*

*"I ain't going to run from him." I started running, backing up, then I'd talk to him, then I'd run some more. Last time I turned around he was running behind so I yelled, "Go Alee, go!" I never knew in all my days I could run so fast. I couldn't do it now if had to. When I turned around, he ain't behind me no more. I know he's there, in the bushes, to grab me. I walked out on the street and I saw him and my friend fighting. He's trying to hit her. I don't know why. By the time I got there it had stopped.*

*"Why you jump on Alee?"*

*"She needs to mind her business.*

*You're going to need to pay for this windshield."*

*"I ain't paying for nothing."*

*And we left it at that. Took him a long time to pay it, too.*

*Wasn't even his truck.*

And all the while Pam is laughing and there is light in her eyes. It was only a truck, a piece of property, replaceable, and nothing compared to the spunk and freedom that was growing in her. Pam loves being the mother of his child, feels that she has a part of him, even if she does not have him. She thinks about him every day, thinks of their time together, sees him in her daughter, in her fighting spirit and her old soul.

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HOW WILL THE  
DENOMINATORS OF  
FRACTIONS HELP  
THEM KICK WELFARE  
IN THE BACK, OR PAY  
FOR THE CLOTHES  
THAT VOCATIONAL  
TRAINING REQUIRES?

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When we filter the requirements stated in the Pregnant and Parenting proposal through our participants, the requirements of relevant education" and "social competence" assume new meaning. Do we bump the women from the support services if their attendance is sporadic? Do we respond to their needs when their needs are not to be in class, but to be out looking for work or for an apartment? When the morning comes, and the grief hangs heavy on the heart, do we say, "Skip class and come over. Let's talk." Do we become less demanding in the classroom when they are distracted because of complications in their own lives? Finally, when is competency achieved? By whose standards?

It has been three weeks since the interviews took place, and three weeks remain till the end of the vocational training program. Lucia is the only one currently attending classes. "I'm getting a job soon," she says, as she moves away from the life patterns of her friends and into her own. She shows that perfect attendance is possible, whether or not she understands the teacher, falls asleep in class, or hates the material. She comes, she tries to find something she can understand, use, take with her, even if it is only how to shake hands, use the proper pronoun, or ask questions in an interview.

As a teacher, it is not always easy to make physics or metaphors relevant when a student is concerned with housing, or chicken pox. How will the denominators of fractions help them kick welfare in the back, or pay for the clothes that vocational training requires? They won't do the laundry, or feed the baby, not yet, anyway, not this week. And if the teacher moves too far to relevancy, does she presume to rob students of the pleasure derived from thinking about matters totally outside their immediate concerns? Physics can help make thunderstorms and electricity less frightening; metaphors can provide a way to express what is difficult to say; math can help to put the concepts of money and numbers into our hands. Every test they pass means they will never have to go back to the same place in the same way again. Education does help people to negotiate the world gracefully, forcefully, and confidently.

<sup>1</sup>"Pregnancy and Parenting Teens," Proposal to the Department of Public Welfare of Massachusetts. Written by John Jay Grymes and Neela P. Joshey, MD, MPHDC, Boston Mass., 1986, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> In transcribing the material from the interview 6/9/88, I edited slightly for coherence and punctuated where necessary. Otherwise I have retained the women's own words.

## Women, Literacy & Construction

### *Banana Kelly Housing Related Enhanced Work Experience Program*



**F**or the average young woman in the South Bronx, life is difficult and often overwhelming. Good education is scarce, drug use and crime are rampant, housing inadequate and job opportunities few. The obstacles to a productive and satisfying personal and work life are great for many, such a life is almost impossible.

Banana Kelly's Housing Related Enhanced Work Experience Program, a City works funded project, provides an alternative. It offers young women and men, ages 18 to 24 years old, an opportunity to get the education and training they want and need to advance academically, to defeat the odds of living in a chaotic environment, and to gain productive employment in the construction industry. In this intensive classroom and on-the-job training program, these young people are involved in renovating a five-story abandoned building (to provide housing for low income and homeless people) while they learn - about reading, writing and math skills, about developing positive work habits, about working cooperatively with others, about their communities, about themselves.

The thirty participants in Banana Kelly's HREWE program have much in common. They are all high school dropouts, they are all deeply familiar with the problems and

temptations of urban life. They are all highly motivated to learn, to grow, to challenge themselves. The young women in the program represent a special set of circumstances, however: in addition to fighting against the temptation to fail, they must also fight against society's belief that women are not fit to do construction work. They must be tough enough to take on the challenge daily, defying the taunts of bosses and co-workers, who continually claim that they cannot work "as well as a man" (and who are continually surprised). The following is an interview with Norma Samuel one of Banana Kelly's women participants, who discusses her feelings about being a woman in the construction field. [My questions are italicized].

BY ANNE MEISENZAHN

*Can you start by talking personally and just tell why you chose to go into a construction training program and eventually do construction work? Why construction?*

Why construction? Well, I have a younger brother, Nelson, who was in the program and he knows the kind of work I like to do. He knows I'm hard working, and all the work I used to do in the past. like welding. He dared me to go into construction and so at first I went into it like a dare but then I ended up liking it. I didn't think it was going to be like this. I thought it was going to be hard. It was hard in the beginning and all, but then I got into it and I loved it.

*What was hard about it?*

Well, at first, it was hard being a female. Being a female, because, the guys used to tell me, why don't you go home and take care of your babies. They said it's not a woman's job. The more they used to tell me the harder I would try and try. It was hard for me being a female because I was : afraid of it being just men and another female, it was just me and Samona, with all guys. It was hard, and it was scary, very scary..

*What was scary about it?*

Well, climbing on the beams, for one thing. There were no floors or anything, just beams, and you had to climb out on the fire escape. And then for someone like me who used to be scared of heights it was hard to look out. I used to call on the guys to help me out a little. They didn't want to at times, but they did help me out. They did. It was very scary.

*What do you think gave you the confidence to stay with it?*

Well, mostly it was because the guys kept telling me to get out, get out, so I HAD to stay

with it. Then I couldn't leave. And I have a son. I like for him to look up to me, and when he gets older to read about me, and about women in construction. He's a very smart kid, so I know I have to be good for him. He's two years old now.

*What was easy about the construction training program?*

The classes were easy for me, but in the building I didn't find anything easy at first. Like learning how to use the saw and the hammer, and all kinds of measuring was kind of hard. But even they ended up being easy once I made up my mind to put my head to it. And then I succeeded at that, too.

*But the classes were easy for you?*

Regular classes, writing and reading books that was nothing for me. I'm a person that in the past didn't read anything, but now I read book after book. I finish a book in two days.

*What was high school like for you?*

I was a very shy person, and for me, when I was in high school it was hard. I used to get embarrassed about any little thing, and I was afraid to talk to people. I was afraid. I was scared people would talk about me. I don't know why, but, you of know, when you're shy, you're just to scared, you keep to yourself. And then I just stopped trying to get along with people and I started hanging out and cutting out of school and everything. It was . hard. It was fun when I was outside, at the time, but when I look back, it hurt a lot. And that's why I came here.

*So why did you come here?*

I came here to get my diploma, to get my GED. It was hard for me because I had my baby, he was three or four months. And I had problems, family problems. And when I had the baby, that's when I did a lot of thinking. And I realized everybody's not going to be there to help me. I know like, if they weren't there before, what's going to make them be there now? So I said I've just got to do it on my own, for myself and my son.

*Do you think it's harder for women to go back to school after they drop out if they have kids?*

It depends on the woman and how she is if she really wants to do her thing. For me, it wasn't hard for me. And I was thinking a lot so I decided I'm going back to school. Partly because for me, I had my mother there to help take care of the kids. She's the one who used to tell me: Norma, I want you to go out there and DO it; you listen to your mother and you feel if you don't do it you'll be breaking your mom's heart. You can't just say: Nah, mommy, I just want to do this and that while you take care of my son. Never. No, it was great because she was always there to take care of my son. And to this day she still



takes care of my son. And with my job now, she's real proud of me, of course.

*What kind of advice would you give other women who wanted to go into construction?*

Go for it. Just go for it. Don't be afraid or anything. Just go through the doors you have to go through, hold your heart if you have to, but just go, ask questions, and you'll get around. Don't always think it's just a man's job, because it's not. We can do the same work. At first I didn't think I could handle the hand saw, or some of the heavy tools, but I ended up doing good. At first you have to make a couple of mistakes but you have to just go after it to get it.

*Anne Meisenzahl has been the Education Director for the Banana Kelly Housing Related Enhanced Work Experience Program for the past 3 1/2 years. The program is situated in the South Bronx of New York.*



Women learners in English as a Second Language and literacy classes need their lives outside the classroom to be acknowledged and discussed. The material in this kit describes many everyday issues in women's lives and provides relevant and stimulating material so that women can improve their English skills while considering their real problems.

The Women's Kit is a series of eight booklets plus an introduction. Each booklet is made up of excerpts from materials written by women about their lives in Latin America, Africa and England.

The kit is intended to be the basis for discussion about women's experiences - as homemakers, paid workers, and mothers. Our aim is to encourage women to engage in discussion and critical thinking about their lives.

The kit is published jointly by the Participatory Research Group (PRG) and the International Council for Adult Education, Women's Program. Call or write PRG to order your kit. The price is \$25 per kit; \$40 for institutions. Individual booklets may be purchased for \$2.50 each. Please add 15% for postage and handling. **Participatory Research Group, 229 College Street, Suite 309, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R4.**

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## “I'm very glad the program is here”

*Rabbittown Community Association  
Adult Literacy Program*

**By Shirley Hickey**

**T**he Rabbittown Community Association established in 1984 by a group of tenants of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation in Central St. John's. There are approximately 294 LHC housing units in the Rabbittown area with 74% of tenants receiving social assistance, 23% unemployment benefits and the remaining 3% "other" income. Many of the tenants (105) are single parents.

The Association's major objectives are to provide social and economic opportunities to neighbourhood residents through a variety of programs and activities. The Association operates community center as a meeting place and recreational service to the more than 700 young people in the neighbourhood. It has been operating a single-mother's support group for almost two years, as well as offering other programs that respond to the needs of local women.

After a community survey and visits to community based programs in Ontario, it was recommended that the Association establish a community based adult literacy program at the Rabbittown Community Center. Start up funds were received from the Department of Secretary of State and the program opened on May 2, 1988.

Unique to the program being developed Rabbittown is its combining of methodologies and approaches. Its eclectic strategy is a response to community dislike of the traditional classroom, and also the tradition of community development in Newfoundland, which is "characterized by mutual self-help, collective improvement through joint voluntary action and a respect for the uncertified accomplishments of individuals."<sup>1</sup> The program combines group process, Adult Basic Literacy (using Ministry materials), and a Client Centered

Needs focus through one-on-one tutoring. The group process concentrates on community issues, documenting them as part of a process of creating learning materials that focus on the community's expressed concerns. The program's long-term goal is to train their own learners to become tutors themselves. Prior to the opening of their community center in 1986, a survey was carried out in the area to find out what program were needed. Some people said at adult literacy should be offered at the center. Three women write about their experiences:

*My name is Ann and I was born in Ferryland on the Southern Shore. At an early age I was put in a foster home and at the age of eight I was sent back to my mother and stepfather. I didn't get much learning because there was a lot of problems at home. There were nine of us in the family. I had to take care of them because my mother and stepfather were always drunk and they didn't care whether I went to school or not. At the age of ten I went to court for not going to school.*

*I came to this program to upgrade my skills in writing and reading and spelling so I wouldn't have to depend on other people to do things for me and to help my children with their homework.*

*I feel good about coming here because I feel comfortable with what I am doing. I am learning what I want to at my own speed. I am happy that the program is here for me. This is the best thing I could do for myself.*

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*My name is Rebecca. I am a single Mom with three children. I came here to the literacy program to upgrade my skills in reading and writing so I could learn to spell words I didn't know and to help my children.*

*In the literacy program I am learning things that make me feel important. I can't express the feelings I have for being in the program. I feel excited. good and like I'm a great person. In this program I learned a great deal about myself, that I am a person and that I am important to myself and my children. When I first came here I felt like a dummy but I've been here for only three weeks and I know words that I never dreamt of learning when I was in school.*

*In the program they don't push you. They understand what you are going through. They know when you push a person they are not going to learn. I'm glad the program is here.*

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*My name is Bella . I was born in Goulds. I dropped out of school when I was 15 with only a Grade 8 education. The only work I was capable of doing was waitress work or housework.*

*When I reached the age of 21 I was married. As time went on I had four children which made it impossible for me to go back to school. It wasn't until I was faced with a situation where my husband became ill and couldn't work that I knew I needed a better education to find a job. In 1986 I did a 20 week work program at the Rabbittown Center and became involved with the Tenants Association. While sitting at the meetings there were times when I didn't know what was going on because I couldn't understand some of the words that people used. When the Literacy Program started I was very happy to be able to participate. Since that time I feel that I have learned a great deal. I feel very confident that I will be coming out of this program with enough skills to obtain my high school diploma.*

<sup>1</sup> *Rabbittown Community Association: Adult Literacy Proposal, Phase 2. April 1988, p.2.*

## East Elgin Literacy Assessment Project

Adult literacy programs in East Elgin County do not specifically exclude women. Nor, however, are they structured to facilitate their participation. Therefore, although local women recognize the urgency of their need to become literate, they encounter many barriers that actively discourage them from pursuing their desire to upgrade.

During the last decade, Elgin County, located in southwest Ontario, has experienced a tremendous influx of German-speaking Mennonites, who have migrated from segregated, closely knit colonies in Mexico. Recent economic upheavals, spiraling inflation and pressures to join the Military contributed to the immigration of these groups to Canada.

In Canada, winter causes them the most hardship because cultural, language and educational barriers limit their job opportunities during this season. During the summer, mothers and children pick cucumbers from dawn to dusk in preparation for the long, tough winter ahead.

Mennonite society is largely patriarchal. Women specifically are socially isolated and confined to caring for large families. It is not rare for families to have ten, twelve, or more children. Mothers are full-time caregivers and occupied with household duties, and as a result rarely participate in the life of their new communities.

The Adult Education Concerns Committee, consisting of representatives from the Board of Education, Fanshawe College, Mennonite Central Committee, the YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin, the Public Health Unit and concerned public citizens, through volunteer

efforts with this community, recognized the need to provide culturally sensitive, accessible literacy programs for Mennonite women. The ability to read, write, and communicate to effectively would bridge the gap of social isolation, low-self esteem and confinement to the home.

The AECC asked the YWCA to conduct a needs assessment which respondents would have an opportunity to voice their - needs for an appropriately accessible literacy program. As an organization working towards social change and improving the status of women, the YWCA responded to this community need. A grant for a Community Literacy Project was obtained from Ministry of Skills Development A Project Coordinator of Mennonite background was hired to do a survey of seven rural East Elgin communities.

The survey sampling procedure was random, yet it was the signed and conducted with sensitivity to the cultural barriers the Mennonite population, who make up about 16% of the district. The Project Coordinator conducted all the interviews, in English for the most part, and in German for the Mennonite respondents.

At the outset of the study, there were some uncertainties regarding how the respondents would react to a literacy assessment. These fears, however, soon dissipated. The objective was to provide people with an opportunity to express their needs, so that the ensuing program would meet them. The receptiveness was overwhelming. Women, in particular, took advantage of this, rare opportunity to voice their concerns and desires. On several occasions, women heartily expressed their desperation and their hopes that the program would come to pass.

**BY ANNE DYCK & LYDA FULLER**

The survey results clearly substantiated the urgent need for basic upgrading courses in all seven rural locations. Of the total sample surveyed, 20.3% admitted a personal need to upgrade their English reading, writing and communication skills. Of the total percentage who felt this need, 60.5% were female.

Particularly distressing was that 78.9% of the participants who wanted upgrading had completed grade eight schooling or less. Two-thirds of that group were Mennonites and over half of the Mennonite group had completed their education in Mexico. Mennonite schooling standards in Mexico are not at all comparable to Canadian standards. Survey respondents and members of the Mennonite Central Committee verified that unqualified instructors, minimal teaching supplies and short interrupted periods of schooling resulted in very inadequate levels of schooling. Families, farms, and households were of higher priority than school. Instruction occurred for about six months during the winter when the farm chores were less demanding. The average child graduated at age 12 or 13 after six winters of schooling, or 3.6 school years by Canadian standards.

There was a genuine sense of trust between the interviews and the interviewer. Respondents commonly felt free to give accounts of what their daily lives without literacy entailed for them.

In one vivid account, a young Mennonite mother expressed her desperately felt need to upgrade and her doubts whether it would ever be possible to do so. She said, "If at least I could read labels and recipes I could try new things for supper, but I can't so I make the same old thing over and over." She disclosed to me that she had not been out of the house since December, and when we spoke it was March. If a program was available, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and very low self-esteem were barriers to her coming that she herself acknowledged. This particular woman felt that, at least initially, she would need in-home one-to-one instruction, until she felt more confident with her abilities. She repeated several times that she was a slow learner and didn't think it was possible for her to learn ; any more. Many other Mennonite women said the same about themselves.

On another occasion, a teary-eyed mother expressed her embarrassment at not being able to read a story to her child when the child approached. Her greatest fear was that soon her children would begin school and learn to read. Then they would discover her handicap and would be embarrassed to have an illiterate mother.

One Mennonite woman was eager to participate in the survey but asked that I call on her again when she would be home alone - she did not want her husband to know about the visit. Another date was scheduled, at which time she told me her story. Having moved from Mexico to Canada 17 years ago, she decided it was now time for her to learn to drive. Her children were grown and out of the house, and her husband, a trucker, was not around much either. She felt that this was a necessary endeavour.

Her daughter read the entire Drivers' Manual on to a tape so that her mother could memorize what she had to know, and after several attempts, she succeeded first in obtaining her learner's licence, and eventually, her driver's license. She felt good about this, but then went on to explain her predicament. She could drive only in those areas familiar to her as she could not read any street or highway signs and warnings. Her dream was to be able to go into grocery store and know what all the delicious looking foods were and what they were used for. Also, as she had a lot of spare time, she wanted just to be able to read for pleasure and as a result, to learn about the many wonderful things around and perhaps to get a part-time job.

Even if a program were available, a frequent problem for many women was lack of transportation. Of all the respondents needing transportation, 94% were female. One lady in a rural area who was very eager and concerned about the possibility of learning to read and write said, "Unless it's in walking distance I would never be able to come; my husband isn't interested in things like that and would not take me." Yet when asked what the most convenient location would be, ill women frequently expressed their need to "get out of the house." The majority felt it would be more helpful to receive instruction away

from the noise of children lit and in a group situation with other women with similar circumstances.

Survey results indicated a gradual transition in the beliefs of Mennonites. As mentioned earlier, education was not seen as a fundamental component of life. Yet 93% of the total number of Mennonites in the overall acknowledged their desire to upgrade their educational levels. This discovery accentuates the importance of responding to this community's needs by developing and implementing culturally sensitive, individually suitable upgrading programs. Only if motivation and eagerness to learn are fostered and accommodated will the programs succeed.

The YWCA currently is developing programs in several of the rural areas surveyed. These programs will build upon Mennonite cultural traditions by using the women's present skills and incorporating literacy/numeracy instruction. One area of cultural expertise of the women is quilting. They also are fabulous bakers and are known for their delicious home-made bread. These skills can be used to teach new ones.

Childcare and transportation will be provided to enhance accessibility. Our overall goal is to provide client-centered instruction in an informal, non-threatening environment for residents of East Elgin County.

Illiteracy at a community, national and international level is an urgent, and growing problem that must continue to be aggressively addressed. Becoming literate will empower women and will open doors, allowing them to take advantage of many resources. Being able to read and write will equip women to better direct their own lives and to become more active in their communities. This benefits us all.

*Lyda Fuller received her B.A. from the University of Midland and her Master's of Liberal Arts from John Hopkins University. She has been the Program Director at the St. Thomas-Elgin YWCA for the past three years.*

*Anne Dyck received her diploma of Social Work from Sheridan College. Her involvement in Literacy began when she worked as a counselor for handicapped adults in a group home in Brampton. She was then hired by the YWCA to do a literacy needs assessment for East Elgin County. Anne is currently the Literacy Program Coordinator at the YWCA.*

## **East End Literacy**

### ***A Women's Discussion Group***

**E**ast End Literacy is a community-based reading centre for adults who live in down town east Toronto. In 1987, we began a women's discussion group. We didn't have much of a plan. We were developing a series of basic readers at the time, written with adult learners

east Toronto. In 1987, we began a women's discussion group. We didn't have much of a plan. We were developing a series of basic readers at the time, written with adult learners about their own lives. We thought that there was a shortage of women, and women's concerns, in what we had done so far. A women's discussion group, we thought, would generate manuscripts to "correct the imbalance." But of course the group did much more than that. It changed the way we looked at literacy. This article is about what happened to three of the women in the group: Rose, Debbie and Dorothy: what they learned and what we learned from them.

To get the group started, we called all the women in our program and asked them if, and when, they could come to a group. There are about 40 women learners in our program. Most work with volunteer tutors for about two hours a week, whether here at the reading centre or in their own homes. No one seemed to mind that we didn't have a plan, other than to talk. "I have some things to say that nobody wants to hear," said Eleanor darkly. "You mean no men? Great!" said Rose. But some women felt too shy. They valued their personal, private relationships with their tutors and they did not feel ready for a group. A lot of women wanted to come, but they were too busy. They worked days or nights or weekends or all of these; they had small children and other family members to take care of and it was just too hard to get out. even with baby-sitting money provided. Thai was the first thing we learned. The rate of illiteracy in our society may be slightly lower for women than for men, but the barriers to taking advantage of literacy programs are much higher.

Still, about a quarter of the women in our program did attend the women's group at one time or another, with some coming regularly. We met once a week. After a few weeks, it was pretty easy to identify the factors that enabled these six women to come regularly. They were childless. They had been labeled mentally retarded in childhood and had never been trained for the workforce. They were "free" of the responsibilities of adult life.

One day in May, we decided to walk through the conservatory in Allen's Gardens, a park in our neighborhood. We were sitting outside eating sandwiches when Eleanor said, "It's time we did another book."

"What would it be about?" we asked.

"About how our parents make us give up our kids, and they shouldn't have done it," Eleanor said.

"Children's Aid shouldn't take our kids away," said Linda. "Social workers shouldn't butt in," said Eileen.

In our early meetings, we had spent a lot of time talking and writing about experiences like these. Several of the women in the group had lost their children and/or been sterilized against their wills. It seemed to us that everything we heard in the early meetings of the women's group was a form of the question, "Why" don't we have the right to grow up?"

One day we showed the group the Video "Stand Up For Your Rights," by the Catalyst



Theatre Company of Edmonton. This is the best resource we have ever seen for people who want to talk about the issues surrounding the label of mental retardation. It is about taking control of your life, and fighting for the right to make informed decisions about love and work and having a family.

BY SALLY MCBETH & VIVIAN STOLLMAYER

“The *public* should see this!” said Eleanor. “We are the *public*, Eleanor!” we said. But Eleanor meant that it should be seen by her parents and the professionals who had always made the important decisions for her.

Then we read the book *I've Come A Long Way*, by Marguerite Godbout. Marguerite is a learner in our program. Her book is always popular because she has had such an interesting life and has faced a lot of challenges, including a physical handicap. Everyone had been writing stories up until this time, but this was when Rose decided that she was going to write a book about her own life. Since Rose did not know how to write many words, Eileen, who could write but not spell, offered to put the words down as Rose dictated. This is what they put on paper in the first two weeks:

### First Week:

Nightmareurys

*About my father  
he bet me with his belt  
In My dream. I told him  
leave me alone  
after the dream I take dizzy  
don't touch me  
and Paul had to awake me  
When I was six years old  
My father starting betting  
I have burns on my body  
I had burns on my back  
I was sixteen I left home  
I went to see Paul  
My clothes were all ript  
Paul gave me some of his clothes  
Paul clean me up all the blood from the noise...*

### Second Week:

*My Dad take me to the hospital  
got my cords tied and burn't  
I don't understand what was happening  
When got hospital They gave me needle  
My older sister take home  
I ask my sister where am I when I woke up  
My sister said to me  
shouldn't get your cord tied and burn't  
My sister said to me I can't have children.*

This was not an easy story to tell. Rose did not know the words of many things she wanted to say, and she had a hard time remembering things in sequence. The women in the group gave Rose a lot of support. One day, when we were reading over an early draft, Linda smacked the table and said, "He was cruel, Rose. You did the right thing. You got out" Then she left the room and had a cigarette, and came back in and said it again: "He was cruel. You did the right thing, Rose."

Linda had a better sense of what needed to be said than we did. In the beginning, we asked Rose a lot of rather stupid questions about her father: What had his life been like? Did he beat her because he was drunk? And Rose dutifully tried to answer. Then we began to wonder if we had the right to encourage Rose to re-live these experiences. Michele Kuhlmann, who works at a shelter for battered women and their children, gave us some good advice. Nothing, she said, not his old war wounds, not liquor, made it okay for a father to beat up a little girl. Michele said it was wonderful that Rose was determined to write this book, and that many women and children would benefit from her courage. But it wasn't Rose's responsibility to make excuses for her dad.

So we decided that whatever picture Rose painted of her father, through her recollections or her nightmares, would be the true picture. And we decided to illustrate the book through a series of photography workshops, with volunteers acting out the scenes of Rose's life. We were going to show the blood and bruises and cigarette burns. Haley Gaber-Katz, the 12-year-old daughter of a literacy colleague, agreed to play Rose's part. This enabled us to use make-up and costumes to show Rose's life as both a child and a young woman. It also freed Rose up to direct the action. She cast friends at the literacy centre in the other roles, and helped to choose props, such as the vicious army belt similar to the one her father used.

Rose was a good director. We were all afraid of recreating some of the scenes, except Rose. She became more confident and more articulate as the production of the book went on. We published it at the end of the year, under the title *My Name is Rose* [see p. 57-60 of this issue for an excerpt]. It is very popular among literacy learners, although it has been criticized by literate women. One social worker returned her book order because, she said, her "clients wouldn't be able to identify with Rose, especially the happy ending" (Rose's book ends with her marriage to Paul, which is a happy one). However, most of Rose's mail is enthusiastic "[The book] helps us to become strong like Rose and go after our dreams and to be happy," one learner wrote in our literacy newspaper, *Starting Out*.

Rose's mail is enthusiastic "[The book] helps us to become strong like Rose and go after our dreams and to be happy," one learner wrote in our literacy newspaper, *Starting Out*. "Something we never knew much about- being happy and having dreams." One day Rose received a letter from a literacy policy advisor at the Department of the Secretary of State. He told Rose that he kept her book on his desk, because "It helps me to see it there while I work."

It will take along time for Rose to learn to read and write, and perhaps she will never be literate in the way that people who learned in childhood are literate. But the experience of making a book with Rose taught us that breaking the silence about abuse and violence is part of the process of becoming literate for many adults.

At the same time as we were working on Rose's book, the women's group continued to meet. One of the women who could not come very often was Debbie. As a single mother of two, she was not "free" in the way the other women were, and she had never been labeled mentally retarded. However, she wanted to work with us on the issue of childcare for women in literacy programs. After many days of hard work getting her thoughts on paper, Debbie came with us to a conference sponsored by the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues. On June 20, 1987, she submitted this brief:

*My name is Deborah Sims. I am 31 years old, a single mother raising two young children. When I was a child, I had polio and did not have the opportunity to get an education. When my older daughter was 5. I tried to get grade 1 but the Board of Education refused me because I was an adult and not a child. I did not know what to do but I went to a day school and quickly found out it was too advanced. I did not know enough. I tried another school but it did not suit me.*

*Three years ago someone referred me to East End Literacy because I could not fill out a form for an apartment and, in a matter of weeks, I had a volunteer tutor who came to my home.*

*In 1985, I had my second child; it lid seemed to work out fine because I worked with my tutor when my daughter slept, but I cannot do that anymore because she is older and more active. She needs daycare. My volunteer tutor is only available two hours a week. The only suitable day-care I can find will not accept my daughter for only two hours a week - the minimum time is five hours. I have to pay \$100 a month out of my Family Benefits Allowance for this service. That is a lot of money out of my monthly income of \$600. It's - strange but if I were in a class for 25 hours a week, I could be subsidized for day-care. I have tried to get into a 25 hour/week program but I have been refused because I am not yet at a Grade 5 level.*

*I have just finished Adult Basic Literacy. Parts 1 and 2, a Ministry of Education correspondence course. It was necessary for me to work with my tutor to complete this.*

*I am happy with the progress I am making at East End Literacy and want to continue there until both of my children are in school all day, and then, by that time. I expect I will*

*be ready and able to go into full-time education.*

*In the meantime, I wish there was more financial help toward daycare while I have my two hours of tutoring a week. There are a lot of women in the same position as me, who need daycare while they are working with their tutor.*

Debbie was shaking as she stood up and presented her story to a room full of educated women. But she succeeded in raising an issue that had not occurred to very many people. Debbie doesn't need full time, government sponsored job training right now. But she does need to read with her kids, help them with their homework, and get to know the school system. Because of what we learned from Debbie and many women like her, East End Literacy is working to get recognition of literacy as a family issue. That recognition would include flexible, part-time childcare for parents who are learning to read and co-operative programs with our libraries and schools that help illiterate parents to help their children.

Meanwhile, back at the women's group, we had started to talk about sex. Rose told us one day that she had a lot of pain when she had intercourse, and we were trying to figure out where it came from. Rose believed that it was a result of her tubes having been "tied and burnt" years ago, but that didn't make sense to us. To back up our argument, we drew a picture on the blackboard, showing the location of the ovaries, tubes, uterus and vagina. Then we asked Carolyn Klopstock, a sex educator from the Department of Public Health, to come in and talk. Carolyn helped Rose to figure out that she had a bladder infection.

The picture we had drawn on the blackboard was of particular interest to Dorothy. She had just found out that she was three months pregnant. She dictated this story:

*It showed how the egg gets to the uterus. It showed how the sperm reaches the egg to make a baby. It was very good to know how this happens.*

Through discussions like this, we realized that many of the women had not received basic information about their bodies when they were growing up. We tried, then, to focus the group on gaining this information, with help from Carolyn. There were problems, though. For women like Rose, Eleanor and Linda, knowing about their bodies did not repair the damage that had already been done to them as children or adolescents. Knowledge could not bring back their ability to have children. In a way it was too late for understanding, and so they lost interest. Perhaps the only thing that held the group together at this time was Dorothy. Dorothy's family had never pressured her about sterilization. She had not planned her pregnancy, but after a night of tears and soul searching, she decided to "face up to everybody and have her baby. The next day, she came to the women's group for support. Deciding to have a baby was a difficult choice for Dorothy, but it was her choice. For the group, Dorothy became the one who was going to break out of childhood.

Dorothy could not read, but she was hungry for information. Because there did not seem to be anything for adults in an easy-to-read format, the thought of making a resource book ourselves began to grow on us. After we finished *My Name is Rose*, began work on the

second manuscript, *I Call it the Curse!* a book periods, conception and menopause.

Like Rose, Dorothy had a limited vocabulary with which to describe the dramatic things that were happening to her emotionally and physically. She told us again and again about her decision to keep the baby; how she "faced up" to her parents, who stood by her, and "faced up" to her boyfriend and his family, who denied responsibility. Five months into her pregnancy, her doctor told her to have an abortion "because she said I am a slow learner and the baby will probably be a slow learner, too. Carolyn helped her to find another doctor.



photo by Sally McBeth      East End Literacy Women's

Dorothy delivered a healthy baby girl on November 9, 1987. Recently, she wrote this article for our student magazine, *The Writer's Voice*:

*I have been learning how to be a good mother. My mum, my doctor Cathy and the nurses at the hospital have been helping me. They showed me how to breathe at push the baby out. I called the baby Natasha. After, I went to different classes at the hospital.*

*They showed me how to bathe the baby how to change the diaper. How to burp the baby and how to feed her.*

*Now at home I do all the work and I also play with Natasha. She has a bath at 7:00 as and goes to bed at 8:00 My life has changed a lot. I am happier now and I am much busier than I was before!*

Dorothy had been coming to East End Literacy for several years before she got pregnant with Natasha. She of had always been extremely quiet and inarticulate. She had not made much progress at reading and writing. She could copy letters. and read simple stories that she had dictated herself.

When Dorothy got pregnant, she needed information and support. Because we were having a women's group at the time, she probably got more of these that things from us than she her would have before. After Natasha was born, Dorothy was away for awhile,

learning how to care for her newborn. The women's group which had only been funded for one year ended. But soon Dorothy returned to reading center for her weekly session with her tutor, Marty.

Dorothy was different. She was bustling, chatty and competent as she show off her daughter and bundled her back into her snuggli. And she also seemed able to learn faster. One day, we were working on the manuscript for *I Call It the Curse!* and we dropped in on Marty and Dorothy's tutoring session to test it for readability. We did not expect Dorothy to be able to pick out more than a few words but she read the whole thing with very little help.

"Dorothy! You can read so well" we said.

Dorothy, preoccupied with getting home to Natasha, didn't seem particular moved by this discovery. But after their tutoring session, Marty came into the office. "I'm so glad you noticed," she said. "I don't know how it happened. Before she had a baby she could read a little, but since she had her baby she really made terrific progress."

Of course we are not recommending having babies as a way to become literate. But Dorothy is a dramatic example of the way that self-respect and self-confidence affect people's ability to learn. There were many times in the course of the women's group, when we wondered what we were doing - sitting around and talking - had anything to do with literacy. Rose and Debbie and Dorothy taught us that it did. For many women, literacy does not start with instruction. It starts with getting the things that prevent learning out of the open and out of the way: the ugly, debilitating memories, the lack of social and economic supports, and the too many years of being told, over and over until you believe it, that you can't learn.

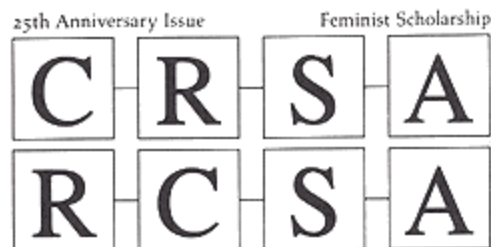
Community-based literacy programs are under a lot of pressure right now, from some funders, to justify the way we teach, and to report on learners and their progress in ways that can be easily categorized, and measured. This kind of reporting helps our funders to justify the money they spend, but it does not help learners to learn and tutors to teach. The Secretary of State Women's Program, which funded our women's group, allowed us the flexibility just to get the women together and see what happened. If we had been required to have a plan, we might never have found out what they wanted to learn, and what they needed before they could learn.

We do not know how to measure the learning that took place in the women's group. We hope that we have shown in this article why, sometimes, it is important not to try to measure, but rather first to listen, and to understand, and then to tell what happened.

*Vivian Stollmeyer became a volunteer at East End Literacy in 1985 and has been a member of the staff collective for two years. Before that, she worked in the theatre. She is pregnant, and looking forward to a different kind of learning experience in 1989. Sally McBeth has been a member of the East End Literacy staff collective since 1983. Before that, she worked in community journalism. She is the mother of a three-year-old boy.*



During photo-shoot of "I Call it the Curse!" photo by David Smiley



The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology  
La Revue canadienne de Sociologie et d' Anthropologie

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THE NEW START READING SERIES



## **MY NAME IS ROSE**

by Rose Doiron

## **MY NAME IS ROSE** by Rose Doiron

This book is published  
by East End Literacy Press in  
Toronto.

It was written by Rose Doiron, 32,  
an adult learner at the East End  
Literacy Project. Rose wrote this  
book for her mother, her aunt, her  
sisters, and her many friends. It  
was produced by volunteer tutors,  
learners and staff in the Project.

"If people read my story, maybe  
they will talk more about what it is  
like to get beat up," says Rose.  
"Maybe, someday, it will stop."

For further information about  
East End Literacy or to request  
copies of MY NAME IS ROSE  
write to:

East End Literacy  
265 Gerrard Street East  
Toronto, Ontario M5A 2G3

We reproduce here an excerpt  
from the text and illustrations  
from the book.



**My name is Rose. I live with my husband,  
Paul. We have been happy for many years.**

**But I still have bad dreams.**

**My dreams are about my Dad.**

**When I was six, he beat me up with his  
belt buckle.**



**My Mum loved me.  
She tried to help me  
but when she did, he  
beat her up too.**



**In my dreams I say,  
“Don't touch me!  
Leave me alone!”**

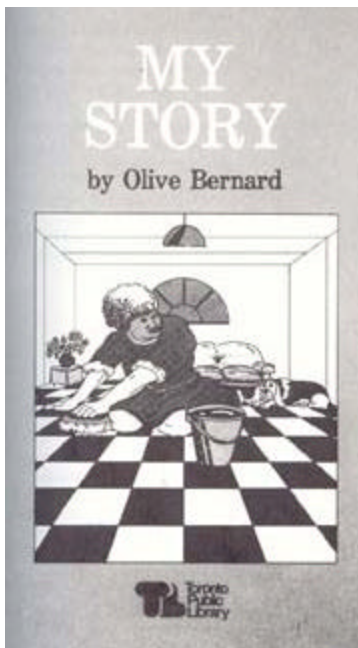
**Paul has to wake me up.**



In the morning, the dreams are gone.

The cat jumps up on the bed.  
She likes to play. I have my own life now.

But my dreams are true. This is my story.



### **MY STORY** **by Olive Bernard**

**This book was published by Toronto Public Library for Parkdale Project Read, an adult literacy programme in the west end of Toronto.**

**It was written by Olive Bernard, an adult learner who attends the learning drop-in at Parkdale Project Read. She wanted to write a book about her experiences because she felt it might be useful for other adult learners. The book was produced by the staff and learners in the programme.**

**For further information about Parkdale Project Read or to request copies of MY**

**STORY write to:**

**Parkdale Project Read  
1303 Queen Street West  
Toronto, Ontario  
M6K 1L6  
(416) 531-6308**

**We reproduce here the text of Olive's story and selected illustrations from the book.**



I came to Canada in 1969. I had some friends who came. One of them wrote and asked if I wanted to come. I was a little reluctant at first but after some persuasion from my mom I decided to come.

At first I hated it. I was away from home for the first time and I missed my family and friends.

I started working one week after I came. I was doing housework. The lady did not like me much so after a month she let me go.



After that I went to work for Mrs. Mason. She lived in King City. I had to live in because it was so far away.

Boy did I work hard for only \$35 a week. I asked for a raise. She gave me \$5 more. I did not think that was enough because the house was large and I had to take care of the dogs.

I kept asking for a raise. I was told they couldn't afford to give me one because they were building a swimming pool and buying horses. So I left.

I worked in a factory where they did electroplating. I became allergic to the chemicals and had to quit. I worked in another factory where they make paper products. I was laid off because the company went bankrupt.



I worked in so many places, I can't remember them all.

I did not like most of the jobs I did but it was nice to be making some money. I could send things home for my family and buy things for myself.



I still missed home but I was getting used to living here. I became a landed immigrant in 1975. I wanted to find a better job than the ones I had been doing, but because I could not read well I didn't know where to start. When I was filling out job applications, I had to ask a friend to go with me to help.



Ever since I came to Canada I wanted to go back to school but I was too afraid to let everyone know that I could not read. About three years ago, there was an article in the paper about literacy programs in the United States. I wrote for more information about programs in Canada.

They wrote back and told me to go to the Citizenship and Culture building downtown. They told me to go to Parkdale. I did go there and was amazed there were other people there just like myself.





It's a very nice feeling, the way tutors go out of their way to make you feel comfortable. We as learners really enjoy this because: it is something we never had when we went to school.

I don't feel so isolated since I started coming to parkdale. There are days when I feel that things are not going so well but there are days when I feel great.

Now I am going to a Board of Education Upgrading course and I am working towards becoming a health care aide.

I still go to Parkdale where I am learning to have more self-confidence about what I can achieve. A whole new world is opening to me. It is a lot of fun and I will continue with my education for a long time.



---

## Three Learners Review Olive Bernard's *My Story*

Olive Bernard's book has been very popular with learners and tutors at East End Literacy. Recently, our "George Brown" morning group read and discussed it, and three learners decided to write their own reviews. They have a lot in common with Olive. They are immigrants who have experienced similar joys and frustrations in Canada and they are working hard to improve their reading and writing skills in a community literacy program.

First of all I think her story is a good thing. To tell people who are not educated and don't have job status. There are lots of people who have this problem. I think the first step is to give them a chance they did not have.

Olive Bernard is determined to better herself by going back to school and not taking shit or getting pushed around by anyone.

\*\*\*

I read the story by Olive Bernard and it's a very touching story. It tells me that reading and writing is very important to people. It took courage to go back to school in her late thirties. Living in Canada without being able to read and write, no Canadian status and no job skills, it is very difficult to get by. Working for a person who knows your position can be a headache.

\*\*\*

To move to another country is very hard to do, especially when you can't read. I sympathize with Olive. She gives me a lot of determination because her life and mine are very similar.

I found it hard to fill out job applications. I began telling a friend who told me to go to a literacy program. After three years I can write my address and read my first book. It was the best thing in the world. I will continue with my education for a long, long time.

## Reviews of Two Literacy Publications

### SPIRITS RISING: A Collection of Native Indian Writings & Illustrations

Toronto: Frontier College Press, 1987.

#### **Priscilla Hewitt**

*Spirits Rising*, a collection of writings by learners attending the Native Tutoring Center in Vancouver, is appropriately named. The colorful, glossy booklet is indeed a showcase for the powerful stories by Natives who were told they could not write. My own spirits started to rise as I read, with pride, the fifteen selections of poetry, prose and short stories. The writers have captured the essence of topics which impact on the lives of our people-relationships, memories of the reserve, handling new situations and preserving our culture.





I could visualize clearly the animals and the birds that Russell describes seeing during his first visit back home in about twenty-five years. When Leonard writes about adopting his nephew, Matthew, and the poignant changes in both of their lives, I am reminded of how our extended family system is very much in place even today. Linda's poem talks about different types of hugs and their meaning. In some of our traditional ceremonies, hugs are used as a type of greeting, a way of showing that we come to the ceremony with an open heart and an open mind. The piece of prose submitted by Erica accurately reflects the sense of loss we feel when we see the beauty of Mother Earth marred by landmarks of the Industrial Revolution - factories.

Each of the writings is illustrated by either Michael Whiteloon, an Ojibway artist from Manitoulin Island in Ontario, or Duane Howard of the Mowachacht Band on Vancouver Island. Both Michael and Duane have incorporated strong overtones of spirituality into their illustrations - the eagle represents strength our culture and the two sides of a feather teach us that we must strive for balance our lives, the circle means we stand beside each other as equals and that we all have something significant to contribute.

We are treated to the viewpoints of people from different areas of life male, female, single, with family possibilities, youth and those who experienced a few more years.

The most powerful aspect of *Spirits Rising* is the fact that these pieces writing were submitted by PEOPLE WHO WERE TOLD THAT COULD NOT WRITE. Somewhere along the line, their spirits rose as came to believe in themselves, to feel they had something worthy to preserve writing and to share with others.

Thanks to the Native Tutoring Center in Vancouver for showing us what can be accomplished when we take the time share with others. Thanks to Frontier College for forming the partnership with the Native Education Center that result - in the Native Tutoring Center. Thanks the Ministry of Citizenship and combined efforts of the aforementioned, literacy programs have a role model to aspire and Native people have a publication of which to be justifiably proud.

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VOICES: New Writers for  
New Readers, Vol. I, No.1 (Fall 1988).

Published by the Lower Mainland Society for Literacy and Employment, Surrey, British Columbia.

***Carol Greene***

Voices is a new quarterly magazine for the newly literate. Published by the Lower Mainland Society for Literacy and Employment, its professed purpose is to share what the participants have learned and continue learning in this four-year-old learner-centered literacy program. The editors believe that students find the works of beginning writers

motivational and instructive.

The result is a beautiful collection of new writers' crystallized personal experiences, philosophies, disappointments, successes, anecdotes and politics.

*Voices* is divided into four sections: *New Writers First Words*; *Transitions/Later Writings*; *Work/Notes and Theory/Practice*. There is also a contributors page filled with short biographies, reflections and/or encouragements from the contributing learners and teachers.

The original manuscripts are left as much intact as possible. The stories in *Work/Notes* are accompanied by short analyses by the editors/teachers. These help readers to understand the process writing, and the kinds of questions of reader should ask herself about what she's reading. Here the editors applaud and encourage the use of common idiomatic expressions and honesty of voice.

The clarity of design exhibited in *Voices* has been achieved through the use of graphics, photos, larger type face sufficient white space and pull quotes. This design serves its readers very well.

The photos of some of the new' poignantly illustrate the invisibility of people with reading and writing difficulties. The only thing to distinguish is the anxiety they must have suffered before seeking literacy help. One writer alludes to becoming a "professional" at concealing her illiteracy.

Some writers rebuke the media for misrepresenting their experience. In her Letter, "Dear Sir," Ruth comments on the insensitivity of a CBC television interviewer on the evening Journal:

*The interviewer asked about the subject of literacy. There were two Adult Literacy teachers talking, and I was so interested in it. The newsman said, "Sorry, I don't have time to put the number on TV. People can look it up in the phone book." How can you look it up in the phone book if you cannot read or spell?*

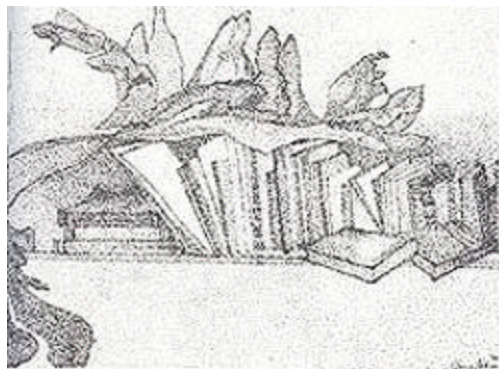


The descriptions of peoples' working lives, told so honestly and simply, are piercing. One gets a sense of a lifetime of thoughts distilled to a few clear paragraphs. Leslie Kish talks about the realities of his life as a longshoreman:

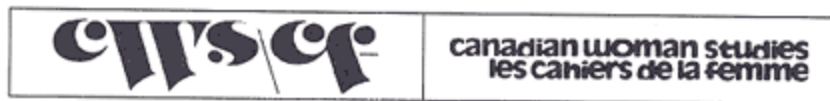
*Because I can never be sure of getting work five days in a row, my life is very chaotic  
When my day job finishes, instead of taking a chance on getting a job the next day, I will  
try to get on the graveyard shift which is dispatched as the next day's work. If I am  
"lucky," I will be at work again at 1:00 a.m. for another shift which finished at 8:00 a.m.*

The stories tell why some of the new Canadians chose or had to leave the countries of their first language, and of the joy the writers take in their newly developed skills. *Voices* is a very worthy publication that should reach all new readers and writers in Canada. I would encourage any programs, tutors, teachers and learners working to overcome illiteracy to subscribe.

For editorial or subscription information write to: *Voices*, 14525 110A Ave, Surrey, British Columbia V3R 2B4.



Janice Andreae, [untitled] 1986, ink on paper [actual size]



## CALL TO ARTISTS WHO ARE WOMEN OF COLOUR

Submissions asked for a special issue on art and feminism. If you are an artist, or if you write on contemporary art, Canadian Woman Studies. invites you to participate in our issue "Art and Feminism" which will appear in September 1989.

### **Suggestions for publication:**

- your reflections on the influence of the feminist movement on your artistic

- career
- photographs and (or) texts which explain your work
- collages, drawings or a short reflective essay
- theoretical writing, historical or thematic concerns on art and feminism

Please send your submissions before 28 February 1989 to Janice Andreae, 382 Glenlake Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6P 1G6.

### APPEL AUX ARTISTES

Soumissions demandées pour un numéro spécial portant sur l'art et le féminisme. Si vous êtes artiste, ou si vous écrivez sur l'art contemporain, **Les cahiers de la femme** vous invite à participer a notre numéro - Art et féminisme" qui paraîtra en septembre 1989.

#### Seront considéré pour publication:

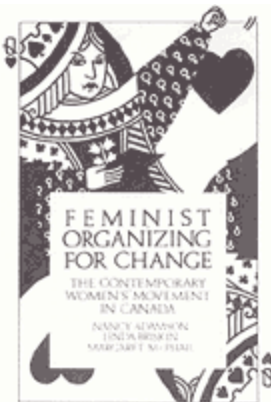
- vos réflexions sur influence du mouvement féministe dans votre démarche artistique
- photographies et (ou) textes explicatifs de votre travail
- collages, dessins ou mise en page prêt a impressio
- textes théoriques, historiques ou thématiques portant sur l'art et le féminisme

Veuillez faire parvenir vos soumissions à l'adresse ci-haut avant le 28 février 1989.

### FEMINIST ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

#### The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada

Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, Margaret McPhail



The women's liberation movement is one of the most successful social movements of the twentieth century. Most writing about it, however, has focused on the issues rather than the practices, ideology, organizations, and strategies of the movement itself. **Feminist Organizing for Change** fills this gap by documenting and analyzing the struggle of the contemporary Canadian women's movement to make change.

**Paperbound \$19.95**

**Oxford University Press, Canada**

# A Personal Story

## *About Learning and Medication*

**m**y name is Cathy, and I was at the tutor session on medication and learning. I got an idea to write about my experience as a ex-psychiatric patient that was on medication to try to help you all understand our story and life. I am 28 years old and have been in and out of hospitals since I was 19 years old. I've been on and off medication ("meds") and have lived in group homes and hospitals and I'm now on my own. I've been trying to improve my education for years. Now I would like to help you understand me.

### Life on Meds

When I think about meds and what I felt like on them I was so doped up that I couldn't think or see right. It became my only way of life. I was afraid to try other ways. The drugs can be very powerful and can cause you to be very sleepy and you have blurred vision. After about four weeks the side effects become less.

I would see someone getting more drugs and would become jealous and want more. When I was in hospital I would watch the others, act out and copy them. Then I would ask for extra it medication and get them.

Drugs become a way of life. Learning was hard. The first few days after a needle, you can feel high and can't come down.

I felt like I lost control of my life. The pills stopped me from feeling and growing. I felt I had lost a lot of my self-esteem. Some people don't feel this way. Some people can get on with their lives. But there are many that can't.

### Withdrawal

Sometimes doctors would take people off their meds to try new ones out They have to wait two weeks before they can start new medications. Some doctors do it slowly and some do it cold turkey. I've been on meds and through cold turkey withdrawal and slow withdrawal. Some people get the shakes and cold sweats and even get sick to their stomach on buses and cars. Some don't feel anything.

There is also a dependency that is all in the head. Getting used to not taking a pill. What I do about that is take a vitamin pill. It helps with that problem.

### Learning on Meds

It can be hard to learn new skills because you are so doped up. When I was on meds I only did a little at a time. If I learned a new word that would be great Now I've been off them for six months. I still feel like I've lost a lot of control in my life. I'm afraid to try new

things like school. I feel like I'm getting more control but it takes time. I also feel I'm gaining old skills back.

## Hints for Tutors

I feel you as a tutor need to be supportive and look at the good in your student. There is much more going on in your student's lives besides meds. The fear of being homeless, loneliness, fear of hospital and being discharged from a safe place to a cold world.

**BY CATHY JONES & CHRIS BROWN**

The greatest fear I have is losing everything because of a hospitalization. This all can effect learning.

It helps to try to make a lesson around some of these things, like job forms and income tax, budgeting, going to a store and shopping and going out to dinner and learning how to pay a bill, going to a bank, etc. All of this can help to make people like me feel more normal.

It's best to find out when they have had their shot and to set classes two days after it.

Praise is important to your student. It is also important to your student to feel good about their learning and self.

## How We Wrote the Article

The following is from the journal that Cathy and I keep to record her progress. As homework, Cathy wrote down everything she could remember about her time in hospital. This material was twelve pages long.

When we had our next session we edited this material together. I asked her to list on a separate piece of paper, in point form, all the things she wanted to say. Then I asked her who she wanted to talk to, and, from her list, what the most important item was that she wanted to tell them. We decided that this point would be last, and then together we worked out a logical way to get to that point using the other items in her list. This is the final order we came up with:

1. Introduction.
2. Medication. What it's like to be dependent.
3. Withdrawal.
4. How you lose skills.
5. Learning.

6. How I learn without medicine.
7. Ideas for tutors to help students.

We then read through all of Cathy's notes, cut the pages up with scissors into different topics, and divided these scraps of paper into piles on the table. We put the different piles in the order we wanted them to appear, based on the list we had made, and numbered each pile, so we'd know how to put the article together.

To avoid duplication and still get everything in that Cathy wanted to say, we read through each pile, pulled out sentences that were too much the same, and tried to make each sentence as to-the-point as possible.

We stapled our selected sentences together, then stapled all the piles together in the order we wanted them to be in, and read the story out loud to be sure.

Our last step was to correct the spelling, and the result was an article saying just what Cathy wanted to say. (We used the words that Cathy had trouble spelling as a spelling test later.)

This was Cathy's first attempt at organizing an essay - previously she wrote down what came into her head, without thinking about what she had just written or wrote after, or what she wanted to accomplish with her story. I'm happy to say that Cathy now can write stories without going through the motion of physically cutting up individual thoughts she makes her plan before she starts, and mentally puts her sentences and paragraphs together before writing her story.

*Cathy Jones was born in Toronto and grew up in rural Ontario. She now lives in Toronto, and works with a tutor at East End Literacy. She also has been active in various groups and the Evaluation Committee at East End, and contributes stories to their student-written publication. In addition, she now attends upgrading classes at Monseigneur Fraser School where she is working on Grades 9, 10 and 11. Cathy is very proud of the fact that has been off drugs for a year.*

*Chris Brown grew up on a farm in Uxbridge, Ontario, and now works for a film company in Toronto, doing internal communications. She took the volunteer tutor training course in the fall of 1987 and has been working with Cathy since then. She is also a member of the East End Literacy Press committee.*

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## People Who Need to Learn

**M**Y conscious awareness of literacy began last year when, as a *Globe and Mail* feature writer, did a story on Beat the Street. This Frontier College-assisted literacy program was founded by two ex-cons, Rick Parsons and Tracy LeOuvre. Tracy didn't learn to read until he was in his mid-30s, and had a record as long as both his arms. Rick had been brutalized by a stepfather and relegated to a home for "retards."

After the story appeared in the *Globe*, I volunteered as a tutor in Beat the Street, which was designed for street kids and other people who fall between the cracks. The day I phoned to make my services available, a woman who happened to be in the office at that moment looking for a tutor said she'd take me. Her name was Carole Boudrias. Her label: welfare mother of four.

A week later, I rode my bike over to Carole's lower-Riverdale, government-subsidized house, met her and her four kids, and set to work. She figured she had about a grade three or four literacy level. Her eldest son, Jay then 12, had taught her to read. We sat at her glass-topped dining room table, overlooking a giant TV screen that was always on, and





opened her Ontario government correspondence course.

So began an experience that unfolded in the most unexpected, sometimes joyful, sometimes painful, ways. I began as a romantic, thinking how wonderful it was that she and I though so different- could work together. We also had something in common: we both came from dysfunctional families, though my so-called "respectable, middle- class background" provided me with an economic security and a formal education that she had never known.

I had fantasies, I now realize, that Carole would be transformed, that she would become a regular member of society, with a job and an independent life that had so far eluded her. She has survived on welfare all her life, with the exception of two short stints on assembly line jobs, packing pickles and rolling Christmas paper. In contrast, I have worked all my life, in relatively privileged circumstances. I have a university degree, which my parents assumed I would get. I learned to read when I was four years old. I took it for granted. Reading is like walking or breathing for me, and one of my major pleasures. I had never encountered people for whom the reading-writing world was an alien, threatening place. Carole never got read to as a child, and her children rarely get read to. Her son Jay, I soon found out, could barely read a newspaper, felt great anxiety about reading, was in a "special" class, and was contemplating dropping out of school.

**BY JUDY STEED & CAROLE BOUDRIES**

Carole is one of ten children in a French-Canadian family. Both parents were alcoholics. She was sexually abused by her grandfather, abused by her mother, and sent through a series of foster homes. She finally ran away at 15, lived as a street kid, survived as a prostitute, and went on to have four children. She is a remarkable survivor, a good mother, a warm, sensitive, intelligent woman - and now an author. When we started working together, she told me she had always wanted to write a book. So she began her autobiography, which became the focus of our work together. I then helped her apply for a Canada Council Exploration grant. She got it. The first thing she did, when she got the check, was to buy a basic computer. She was stunned that she could have such a thing. She set it up, and started typing.

Eight months later, she has completed a first draft of her book. She is thinking about returning to school. Along the way, she and I have had our difficulties. Mostly the problems were of my making. I often expected too much. I would get mad when I would go to her place to work, and she would be too tired because she'd stayed up until four in the morning watching TV. I expected her to have work habits like mine. I was writing a biography of Ed Broadbent while she was doing her own autobiography, and I would sometimes feel she just wasn't serious. Then she would amaze me, producing an eloquent,

devastating chapter on say, the grandfather who repeatedly raped her, and I would be overwhelmed at her courage and stamina.

Then I would give her a lecture on the evils of Kool-Aid, which she served her kids in place of juice, and nag her about turning in her TV off from time to time. She would humor me, and then withdraw. I began to see myself acting in less than charming ways. Sometimes, I felt overwhelmed by her plight, alternating between feeling sorry for her and angry at her for having so many kids. She would then tell me she was a good, loyal Catholic and that she didn't believe in abortion. I would argue about "what kind of world did you bring your kids into, how can you have so many kids when you can't take care of yourself!" We would reach an impasse. On one thing we agreed: living on welfare is a rotten way to live. Carole told me: "It's so easy to get on welfare and almost impossible to get off."

Having gone through all these feelings, I'm hoping we can continue together this fall, and do the more mundane work involved in grade nine correspondence courses. I've come to treasure my friendship with Carole and hope we can make it through another year. I have finally realized that in her own way, she has achieved an enormous amount. And the bottom line for her is now clear: without an education, she's not going anywhere.

As for the straight world, there's lots to be done. If more people would team with more people who need to learn, we might get somewhere on a massive scale. We don't need more institutions. We need more attention to the people for whom this world is a nightmare.

## Why Me

*Carole Boudrais*

I was labelled "retard" and put in a special class. My education stopped there. I was ten years old. In this special class they taught me "how to become a good wife." My lesson involved paint-by-numbers and cleaning house. What a joke!

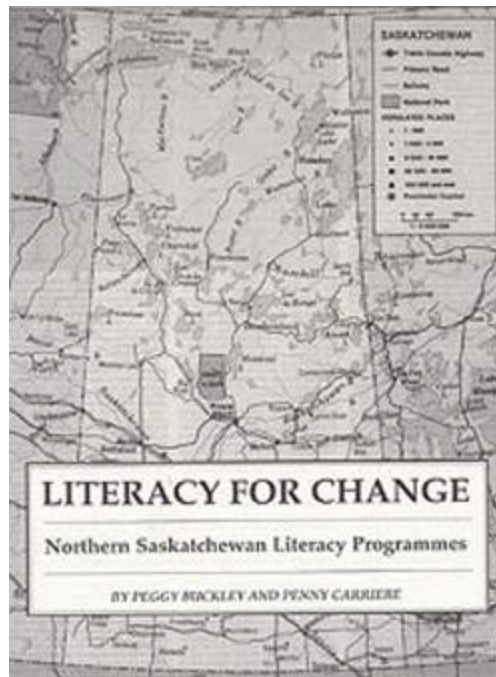
For many years I didn't know how to read or write. I was illiterate. Being illiterate is the most frightening thing. It's like being in a prison of your own self. It's one of the deepest secrets that you keep hidden inside, out of shame. Not being able to read street names, medical instructions or menus pose a threat to survival.

I learned to read and write for the second time at the age of 28. My son was my teacher. He didn't know that He was six years old. We both sat down and read his grade one book. That was the beginning.

In 1987 I enrolled in a literacy program called Beat the Street. With their help I got myself a good tutor named Judy Steed. Working with Judy she helped me build up my self-confidence and show that I could do it. Since then I have completed grade 9. I had

to work very hard and now I am finally getting somewhere.

I am now writing a book to tell others that they should not be ashamed if they are illiterate, if they have fallen between the cracks of the education system. I am now writing a book about my experience so I can help open doors for others so they know there is help out there for them. The name of my book will be “Struggle for Survival.”



The two training programs described in this article were designed to help women of native ancestry develop the knowledge and skills they require to better control and make decisions about their lives. Both are based on a broad definition of literacy, one that extends beyond the ability to read, write and do basic numeracy, or possessing the job and living competencies our society requires. The definition of literacy upon which they are based is the idea fundamental to Paulo Friere's theory and instructional techniques. Literacy provides people with ways to critically analyze and then to act to change their political, social and economic environments.<sup>1</sup>

**IN MANY COMMUNITIES, SUBSTANCE ABUSE IS A MAJOR PROBLEM, AND OFTEN IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD NEGLECT OR ABUSE. THESE ARE THE REALITIES WITH WHICH CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN WOMEN LIVE.**

The programs are located in northern Saskatchewan, that half of the province's land mass located between the fifty-fourth and sixtieth parallels. The approximately 30,000 people who live in this region are scattered among 45 small, widely spread out and relatively isolated communities. Some only recently have acquired road access; others can only be reached by air or, during the winter months, by ice road.

There are two distinct cultural and linguistic traditions in the north - Woodlands Cree and Dene (Chipewyan). Both are rich in their reflection of proud traditions which pre-date European contact. For the majority of Northerners, English is a second-language. This linguistic reality has a bearing on literacy programming and on schooling in the north.

In most communities, schools have been built only within the last ten years; to complete grade 12, many northern children still must board in larger centers. Reluctant to leave their homes, children often quit after grade 8 or 9. As well, since many families maintain a traditional life style which takes them to the trapline in the fall and spring, or out to the fishcamps in the summer, those in school often interrupt their schooling. Compounding the educational difficulties are the English as a second language/dialect nature of the learning situation and the relatively frequent turnover of teaching staff, especially in the smaller and more isolated communities. As a result, students completing grade 9 often have reading and writing skills below that level.<sup>2</sup>

In the north, the family is still seen as a very important element of social organization. As well, there remains a strong sense of kinship which allows aunts and grandmothers to play a role almost as important as that of the mother in childrearing. The closeness of family ties is a strong binding force in northern culture, and women are at its core.

However, as the north moves from dependence on a traditional land-use economy to a monetary-dependent economic base, there have been radical changes to traditional life-styles and structures. Many have not been positive. For example, there has been an increasing dependence through the region on social-assistance as the income sources of entire communities, especially when the trapping and hunting seasons are finished, or when seasonal jobs such as line cutting . and forest fire fighting are not available.

More and more family units are headed by single women. Frequently, northern women in their early teens have children and so stop their formal education. The network of

female kinship ties helps with the task of childrearing, but for the majority of women the responsibilities of raising children as single parents living on social assistance in small isolated communities is a reality from which there seems little escape.

In many communities, substance abuse is a major problem, and often it is accompanied by domestic violence and child neglect or abuse. These are the realities with which contemporary northern women live. The Women's Employment Access Training (WEAT) and the La Ronge Native Women's Council Counselor/Program Coordinator (CPC) programs were designed to empower women to address these realities. The WEAT program was a twenty-two week course, offered in La Ronge through the Northlands Career College, and funded through the Canada Employment & Immigration Commission's Canadian Job Strategies (CJS) mechanism.<sup>3</sup> WEAT qualified for funding as a re-entry program for employment of disadvantaged women. In fact given the extremely high unemployment rates in northern Saskatchewan (65.75% is the average in many communities; some it is as high as 98%), most of women who were selected to participate in the program were entering rather re-entering the paid labour force. Family responsibilities had served to keep out of paid employment, even when it was available to them.

The fact that WEAT aimed at preparing women to participate in the paid force is reflected in some of its objectives. These included the development of work habits and attitudes, exposure to various educational and occupational opportunities, and, of course, actual placements for the participant. However, in light of northern realities, program's objectives didn't stop there. They went further to address the need women to develop critical thinking analysis skills as well. This was done by concentrating on activities which developed the participant's self-confidence interpersonal communication skill assertiveness and decision-making abilities. Finally, an academic component aimed at improving actual reading, writing and math competencies rounded out the course content.

Fifteen women, ranging in age from 18 to 45, started the program. All but one had children; some had grandchildren as well. The majority were single parents, with from one to six dependents. While in the program, the women received training allowances from CEIC. These varied according to the number of dependents a woman supported. The academic skill level of the women selected for WEAT ranged from basic literacy through university; the average, based on last completed grade at school, was 6-7. Most of the younger women had dropped out of school because they saw little relationship between schooling and their lives. Many of the older women simply had not had the option of attending school either up to or beyond that level.

In addition to the WEAT academic and work placement program, there were workshops on a variety of themes: sexual harassment; first aid and CPR; alcohol and substance abuse; wife battery; assertiveness; basic carpentry; budgeting; sexuality; birth control and sexually transmitted diseases; resume writing; familiarization with computers. Finally, there were a number of field trips to educational institutions and training programs in places such as Prince Albert.

Eleven women completed the WEAT program; in addition, three received grade 11 standings on the GED. Four of the eleven have gone on to further employment-specific training; two are in jobs resulting from their work placements; four hope to take academic upgrading (ABE) through the local college, and one has opted to remain at home with her family.

There were four women who did not complete the program. Of these, some were simply young and only committed to taking WEAT because it was expected by social services. Others found the change involved in living in La Ronge proved too stressful for them and their families. One woman left because of the program's emphasis on helping women take control and make positive decisions. Another, although highly successful at both the classroom and work placement sections of the course, decided that being at home with her child was a priority at this point in her life. She withdrew before completing the program.

**PUNCTUALITY AND TIME SO HIGHLY VALUED BY  
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In their final evaluations, instructors, students and work placement supervisors agreed that the program had met its objectives. For example, attendance had been identified as a major problem area. At the beginning of the program, the women often neglected to phone if they were going to be late or absent. In part, this oversight must be attributed to the fact that many Northerners do not have telephones and so have not come to rely on them. As well, punctuality and time, so highly valued by mainstream society, are not seen as so crucial by traditional northern cultures, which tend to emphasize face-to-face contact and spending time with people rather than "at things." In any case, by the end of the WEAT program, the women had developed the habit of phoning in to explain lateness or absence, which almost invariably were related to family responsibilities.

Overwhelmingly, the women who took the WEAT program commented on the fact that the course had taught them about themselves - their strengths and weaknesses; their skills and abilities. All feel they have more options since taking the course. They are aware of the fact that they have choices, and they are confident in their ability to make a choice and take charge not just of their education, but of health and childbearing and rearing issues as well. Some commented on their pride in the fact that they had started and finished a course and that they can learn quickly. Many noted that they had learned patience through the experiences they had had in classroom exercises and on work placements. This is an attribute they now find invaluable when coping with family responsibilities. The WEAT program, by combining academic skill-building with self-awareness, communications and employment skills development, began the process of addressing the literacy needs of its participants. The northern women who were affected by it have developed some of the tools they need to better analyze and act to change their realities.

The La Ronge Native Women's Council Counsellor/Program Coordinator Training

Program (CPC) is also designed specifically for northern women. It is being offered by the La Ronge Native Women's Council, which is a pro-active organization of women working to affect social change in La Ronge and throughout the north.

Funded by Canadian Job Strategies for a 52-week period and certified by the Northlands Career College, the CPC program started on August 29. In describing the program and its target group, local Native Women's Council member Lillian Sanderson notes, "the council has identified needs of native women and, hopefully, this program will help fill the gap for the twelve successful applicants. Many native women have no working skills, little self-confidence, low education levels and serious child care problems."<sup>4</sup>

The program has both classroom and work placement segments. The classroom portion includes focused, skill-specific training, including 6 weeks of lifeskills and 12 weeks of counseling skills development. In addition, shorter, intensive workshops will deal with issues such as alcohol and drug abuse and cross-cultural communications. The guest speaker program will include local elders who will help provide a sense of traditional native approaches to social issues.

The program coordination segment of the course will consist of classroom theory presentation followed by work placement practice. It will last for 18 weeks, with women moving between the job and the classroom on a weekly basis to learn and practice skills like needs assessment, program objective writing, evaluation, and proposal writing.

Women selected for CPC come from communities in the north-central part of Saskatchewan. They range in age from 21-50. Some have experienced the social problems that they will learn to help others cope with alcohol abuse, battery, child abuse and neglect. Most are single parents, two are helping to raise their grandchildren. Some have virtually no work experience outside the home, and those who have had jobs in the paid labour force have not worked recently. Many of the women selected are strong community leaders, and it is hoped they will be able to use the knowledge and skills they obtain to further community-controlled and directed development in their home towns and villages.

On the academic side, abilities range from a rudimentary ability to read and write through GED 12 and some university level classes. Most of the women would not qualify for ABE courses because they function below the grade 8 level. The CPC program provides them with an opportunity to develop skills they can use in a job situation, while helping them upgrade their academic qualifications as well. Attainment of some level of the GED is an academic objective of the program. While in the program, the women will be employees of the La Ronge Native Women's Council. They will be paid minimum wage, which amounts to \$180/week.

Successful as they are, these two programs merely signal the immense need in Northern Saskatchewan for literacy programs for women. Even those not admitted to the CPC found the information they garnered at their interview about other educational and training options and social assistance helped them realize they did have more choices and options

than they had believed. Those who did not complete their program still learned how to gather information that can help them make decisions; they have increased their confidence and trust in themselves. Even these "small" changes reverberate as the women carry on their crucial role as the main community organizers in northern society and serve as positive role models for others with whom they have contact. Most important, these programs provide the women with an enhanced sense of self-respect and the understanding that they have the right to change their world in ways they deem important. This is the core of effective literacy programming; for northern Saskatchewan, these programs are a good start.

<sup>1</sup> *Paulo Freire, Cultural Action for Freedom (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 30-43.*

<sup>2</sup> According to a study done by Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, almost 45 per cent of Native people in Saskatchewan have less than grade 9 education. This compares with 22 per cent of the non-Native population of the province. See Olijnyk, "Desire to Leave School Traps Many Natives in Dead-end Jobs," *Star-Phoenix Special Report* (Regina: *Leader-Post*, 1987), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> This particular project was for a limited term. The College hopes to offer similar programs in other northern communities.

<sup>4</sup> "New Project for Native Women's Council", (La Ronge: *The Northerner*, August 24, 1988), p. 7.

*Peggy Buckley is an adult educator living in La Ronge, Saskatchewan. She has worked as an educational consultant for government, and as a private consultant in the areas of ABE, ESL/D and literacy. Ms. Buckley has also taught university courses in social work and teacher methodology. Most recently she served as literacy coordinator for the La Ronge Program Region of the Northlands Career College. Currently, Ms. Buckley is without wage labour.*

*Penny Carriere is also an adult educator living La Ronge. She is presently on leave from her position as ABE Coordinator with the Northlands Career College to coordinate the CPC program. Ms. Carriere has worked and lived in northern Saskatchewan for 20 years where she has worked in a variety of education capacities with children and adults. She is presently Deputy Mayor of La Ronge.*

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## A NOTE ON OUR CONTRIBUTING ARTIST JANICE ANDREAE

Janice Andreae, whose artwork appears on pages 35,40 and 67 of the current issue of **Canadian Woman Studies**, is a Guest Editor of our forthcoming **Canadian Women Artists** issue (Vol. 10, No.3), which will appear in September 1989. Her work will be included in an upcoming group exhibition at Garnet Press Gallery entitled **HOME WORK**. The exhibition opens on 14 January 1989 and continues until 25 February 1989. It also includes the work of John Abrams, Jane Buyers, Natalka Husar, Lisa Neighbor and Tom Slaughter. For further information, contact Carla Garnet, Director, Garnet Press Gallery, 580 Richmond St. West, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1Y9, or phone (416) 366-5012.



**TORONTO BIRTH CENTRE**

## **TORONTO BIRTH CENTRE INC.**

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**PLEASE HELP US!!!**

## The Social Dimension of Literacy

These words were spoken by a woman who teaches literacy and upgrading to women in rural Nova Scotia interviewed her with other tutors and participant from a variety of literacy, upgrading and training programs in 1986.<sup>1</sup> Her comment is similar to those of many of the literacy workers I interviewed, but contrast strongly with the accounts of the participants.

In this article, through the words of women who participate in literacy and upgrading programs, I want to demonstrate that many women are extremely isolated. This makes the social dimension of literacy programs especially important to them. It is only through the opportunity to talk together about their lives that women can share knowledge about the ways in which isolation is structured into their lives and can begin to find ways to challenge and change this situation.

*"I guess as I taught them I realized the only reason they had me there was so they could bake cookies and have tea and a social group... [We] dropped them off our case load because we came to the conclusion that they were there just basically so that I'd come out and a couple of neighbours would come over and they'd have tea and cookies and they'd learn, but..."*

It is essential to acknowledge the importance of the social aspects of literacy programs, so that those programs which do not currently consider the social dimension an integral part of their programs are encouraged to do so. The social dimension includes events, discussion groups and meetings, as well as informal opportunities for women to get together and share their experiences. Many community-based programs do integrate such social aspects into their programs, but the extent to which they can do this is limited by the scarcity of funds. Funders frequently fund only the serious work of "teaching" and see other aspects as peripheral.

Illiteracy is often considered a primary cause of isolation, especially for rural women. But many of the women I interviewed had been isolated in childhood because they had been unable

to make friends school and now as adult did not trust neighbours. Others had left friends behind when they moved to a new location with their husbands. Women frequently have total responsibility for children which keeps them at home and housework is hard work which is also carried out in the home Men often have the power to decide whether a woman will get out of the house. They may forbid women to participate in events or simply control this through lack of access to the family car. This control is usually seen as "natural." The gendered organization of society also makes it appear natural for families to live in a place that is suitable for the man's work and for women to stay at home as "housewives," with little access to transportation. The women I interviewed talked of being shut in the house with little or no social contact outside the extended family and little social life. Illiteracy is not the cause of women's isolation. Women are trapped in their lives so they cannot be freed from this isolation through literacy alone.

BY JENNY HORSMAN

When I began to understand the extent of the isolation these women experienced I listened more carefully to what they were asking for that would address this isolation. I first thought that what the women "really" wanted was some sort of social group. I thought that perhaps a "kitchen table" chat, where neighbours gathered together to talk and discuss their lives, might be more useful to many women than participation in a literacy group because they spoke so enthusiastically about the social aspects of the program. But the conclusion that they wanted a social gathering instead of education does not challenge the assumption that education is not social but a solitary, individual process.

A social event alone was not what the women wanted. Many women spoke strongly about their fear of being exposed to their neighbours. Some of them also made it clear that even though many men object to their wives or girlfriends participating in educational programs, others "permit" them to participate on the basis that improved literacy skills will enable them to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers better. The women wanted both social contact and an educational event.

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WIVES AND MOTHERS BETTER.**

Not only would the social aspect decrease their isolation, but they considered that the confidence gained through the social contact with other women who shared the same problems, would enhance their learning. They would also have the opportunity to consider what might need to change to reduce the structured isolation of their lives.

The lack of social opportunities in their lives and in the lives of women generally discouraged many women. The literacy program cannot meet all the social needs women have, but it should incorporate elements of social interaction: discussion, student meetings and social gatherings where women can get together and speak about their reality. This will enhance the learning that takes place in the programs. In this way programs can provide a forum within which women can question their situation and challenge the social organization that isolates them in the home.

The social organization of the women's lives as girls, kept at home to help with the work of the household, also contributed to the later isolation of many women. They had experienced abuse in childhood, both in the home and at school. This had silenced them and they had become isolated from other children, giving them little experience of making friends. Maxine spoke of her isolation at home:

*When I was a kid I had no friends. I stayed home and I helped with housework... I didn't do nothing right. Boy. there was a yardstick right behind me. You do that or wham.*

Mistreatment in school added to the solitariness and silence of some. Frieda described her experience:

*I couldn't take the criticism of the teacher. He stood me up in class, I just couldn't do math at all. He used to call me retarded in front of the whole class of children and then they used to chase me around the school grounds when I went out for recess: "Hey, look at the dummy. Look at the dummy." And he put a dunce's cap on me every time he got a chance.*

Maxine was also isolated:

*At school I'd just sit by myself. I never bothered anybody. I always wished I had friends when I was a kid.*

When these women describe themselves as "shy" during adolescence, they are describing a kind of silence. They are silenced at school and at home through threat or physical violence. Their negative interactions with authority figures defined and negated them. But these descriptions of "shy" focuses attention on the girls as lacking assertiveness, rather than on the situations and authority structures which silence them. The social organization of the school and home which some women experienced in childhood, contributed to their later loneliness and isolation.

Some of the women were also distant even from neighbours. Perhaps their lack of experience of friendship and their childhood poverty made them ashamed and afraid of being judged. They did not see neighbours as potential friends, but feared being talked about behind their backs. Maxine and Jean both describe this:

*When you get to know neighbours you're all right until they more or less stab you in the back.*

*I've seen too many of the people fighting with this or that one. They couldn't even go to the mailbox because they'd be talking about them and they'd be mad at them. They'd say, "Did you hear what she said?" It was awful. At least when I go down to the bottom of the hill people will wave to me. They don't say. "That [Jean] said this." That's the way I like it; stay out of their lives they stay out of mine.*

**“ I DON'T KNOW, I MUST HAVE A SIGN ON ME - I'M NOT ATTACHED, TRY TO PICK ME UP. I DON'T KNOW, YOU GET HIT ON SO MUCH AND PROPOSITIONED.”**

Some women were also suspicious of their families. Women, brought up by mothers who hurt them, found it hard to trust other women. Many felt that their loneliness led them to become depressed, or as the women described it, have trouble with their "nerves."

It is not uncommon for women to be uprooted and relocated to be near their husband's job. Those women who had made friends lost touch with them when they moved into outlying places with their husbands. Some men increase women's isolation by discouraging them from leaving the house or meeting alone.

Further, when women divorced partners and moved again they sometimes lost any friends they had managed to find during that period. They are cut off from their old friends because of the belief that women alone are a threat, likely to steal another woman's husband. As Alice described:

Where I used to live there was about twelve families and all us girls would go back and forth for coffee. We were friends. When you become a divorced person you don't have that anymore, because somehow they seem to think you're not attached to any man anymore, so you might grab theirs.

Other than an occasional bingo game or church group, women lack a social place where they can go without a man. They want somewhere where they can feel comfortable alone, a place to chat with other women. They spoke about being hassled when they went to the tavern even when in a group:

*I don't know, I must have a sign on me - I'm not attached, try to pick me up. I don't know, you get hit on so much and propositioned.*

Roberts (1976) has identified that when women are not with a partner, are seen as no man's property, therefore as "every man's prey" (p. 16). Neighbours accuse women of not caring for their children adequately when they go to the tavern. So, unlike men, women have nowhere to drop in and meet people:

*There isn't a place where it's just a drop in for women like the tavern is for men. They can drop in for a cold beer on the way home from work. Can we do that? Talk about discrimination.*

Jane explained:

*I don't drink or smoke or anything so there's not many places to go if you don't do those [things].*

Many programs, program workers and funders, saw time spent on social aspects as irrelevant, and an inappropriate use of time in a literacy or training program. Workers spoke of the need to curtail the chat and get down to work, and spoke disparagingly of those participants whom they felt were only in the program for a social time. But participants saw this chance to mix with other women as fundamental. It reduced their isolation and also made it easier to relax and seek help without embarrassment and so enhanced their learning. They were glad to get out of the house and to talk to other women or simply to get to know the woman who was their tutor so that she became a friend. Those who were in groups spoke of the group becoming like one big family. They enjoyed working together and helping each other, and they saw the opportunity to discover that their problems were experienced also by other women as particularly important.

Participating in the literacy program was a way of filling the time. Betty described saving her homework for that purpose:

*I could have sat right down and did it all and had nothing to do for the rest of the time until next Thursday. Well I leave it, or I'll do it when I get bored, which is very often.*

Mary said she would participate in the literacy program to give her something to do:

*Well I said, it might give me something to do to occupy some time, I guess.*

However, school work is not just a way of filling time. The social interaction is key for many women. Mary enjoyed the personal exchange with a woman about her own age. She did not think she would have the same experience with a man because the social dimension would have been different:

*If it was a man that was talking about it with me, I would be uncomfortable. I don't think I would be able to do it.*

When I asked what she got out of the lesson she told me how important it was "to have someone to chat with, to talk to." Her tutor comes twice a week and they do a lesson from the Laubach text and then they have tea and talk. The tutoring lesson does not however exhaust her need for social contact. I asked her if she would have preferred to do something that got her out of the house and meeting people and she simply said she would have liked to do something like that too.

Women enjoyed the opportunity a group gave them to make friends and realize that they are not alone with their problems. As Maxine said:

*I've made friends here. I'm pleased and I'm happy. I'm happier than I ever was.*

**PROGRAMMING, RATHER THAN REINFORCING WOMEN'S CIRCUMSTANCES, NEEDS TO PROVIDE WOMEN WITH THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIAL CONTACT AND CRITICAL DISCUSSION WHICH CAN CHALLENGE THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THEIR LIVES.**

They felt more confident working with others who shared the same problems and were in similar circumstances. Two women spoke of why they would like to work in a group:

*You'd do it sort of like together. Learning from each other. You're not the only one with this problem. There's other ones with the same problem. When you're in with [the tutor] alone you feel like you're the only one with a problem.*

Supportive relationships developed in the groups and these helped the women to learn. Jane had been afraid that in a group she would look stupid. Instead, she said: "we turned out like one big family." Pat also developed friendships and enjoyed the personal way that the teachers related:

*One teacher... who was at that school, God love us, she was sweet. She would say [Pat] if you need help give us a call. They met you on a personal level. Even through the study of the English we got talking and she had health problems. She was getting fed up and she was going to Halifax. We were able to share part of that frustration. They weren't just there to teach you your English, they were there to be supportive of what you were going through in society.*

This personal relationship gave her confidence and made it easier to ask for help when she needed it, as Pat said: "You felt comfortable... because they were so open."

In contrast, many literacy workers felt the women in groups were not "serious" students. They thought these women were there solely for a social event, to have a good time, and not to learn. When literacy is offered within a social context it can be a process that challenges the isolation of women's lives. It can provide the space for women to discuss their problems and identify what they have in common.

When program workers realize that women's circumstances often make it difficult for them to get out of the house, they often offer women individual tutoring at home. However, women often want to get out of the house and meet other women.

Programs need to find ways to inter-weave a social dimension into the learning they offer. Perhaps tutoring pairs can meet two or three other pairs once a month. Perhaps a small

group can rotate, meeting at a different women's home each week. Perhaps a learners' group can be formed and a variety of support, such as transportation and childcare, offered to enable women to attend. Program workers need to listen to women and find ways to provide programs which respond to their needs. The social dimensions which women say they want may help women to find ways to change their lives. Programming, rather than reinforcing women's circumstances, needs to provide women with the opportunity for social contact and critical discussion which can challenge the social organization of their lives.

When programs seek to enhance the social aspects of the program, and strengthen and expand the possibilities for meaningful interaction between students, they help to create a space for discourse which include women's shared realities. If programs integrate "work" and "social" time in the program, they help to create a discourse that contests the individuality of learning. This makes it possible to see education itself as social. If programs encourage sharing between women that not only allows them to talk about their problems, but also to look critically at the location of these problems, they will create a space for discourses of resistance with the potential to lead to social change.

<sup>1</sup>The interviews were carried out as part of doctoral research. I interviewed twenty women in literacy and other training programs and ten workers in those programs. The full study is described in my thesis, (1988).

<sup>2</sup>Laubach is a Canada-wide literacy organization which makes use of volunteers to tutor adult literacy students using a structured set of reading materials.

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## Kim McNeilly *A Portrait of the Artist and her Work*

**Kim McNeilly is currently living in Toronto, where she attends the School of the Toronto Dance Theatre. She is a recent graduate of the Ontario College of Art.**

**This past summer she was involved in three exhibitions: FREEDOM FEST: "Affirmation - Black Ontarian Artists" (an Ontario Black History Society Production); CARIBANA: "Caribbean and Latin American Artists" (a**



**Caribana Committee Production) at the Metro Convention Centre; and "WEAPONS OF CULTURE: West Indian Canadian Artists" at A Space.**

**Currently she is involved in: "BLACK WOMAN: When and Where We Enter," A Diasporic African Women Artists (DAWA) production, (a travelling show due to open in Toronto in February 1989 at A Space); Studio Residency Program, a Women's Art Resource Center (WARC) production (a community project around the issue of the marginalization of women), due to run February to June 1989; and "SOWETO, So Where To? ," a SIYAKHA Cultural Productions presentation (a cultural work in the genre of South African Township Theatre), also due to open in February 1989.**

**We present here four of her recent works, along with text she has selected or written to accompany them.**

**LA LUCHA ES DULCE; NICARAGUA**  
(Literacy Crusade, 1980)

She goes off at daybreak  
to sow the seeds of  
learning and teaching.  
In Pipante or down the Cayuco River  
with the future in her eyes  
she goes singing.

And when she arrived at the  
home of companero Juan Manuel  
who's as good as blind,  
because he doesn't know how  
to read, the lamp of learning  
bathed his entire cabin in light  
and a tear rolled down  
his cocoa-coloured skin.

*From a song "Josefana Goes" by Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy.*



**Kim McNeilly, La Lucha es Dulce; Nicaragua Literacy Crusade, 1988**

## FOR YOUR CHILD MY SISTER

Sporadic diasporic discussions - deliberations  
Diverse and dispersed - many are coerced  
Gathering together the forgotten fragments  
The scattered scraps  
Patching, puzzling, piece by piece  
With patience, with passion pursuing the  
purpose  
Collect, collage, connect, recollect  
Interweave, mend, healing ancient wounds  
Claiming, tapping nurturing the source  
We are the life line  
From ancestral mother wit whisperings  
To the hollering vanguards of tomorrow  
We labour, we carry the seed of the future's  
child  
We are creative, industrious, indigenous, genius  
We are empowered, ignited, excited .  
We discover We envision We reveal.



**Kim McNeilly, For Your child, My sister; Adjoa, 1989**



**Kim McNeilly, Diverse Deliberations; Out Here in Diaspora, 1988**

## **“BUT GRANDPA - ” ... “DON'T BE SILLY”**

“But Grandpa, how can the Zionists in Israel collaborate with the Nazis in South Africa?”

“Don't forget you're Jewish you know.”

“I know, but I'm Black, too.”

“Don't be silly.”

This old man  
He left his land  
Before the Second World War began  
He came to Canada looking for a better life  
With his little son and his wife

This old man  
Was an engineer  
And he was a pioneer  
But in Canada he had to change his name  
Anti-Semitism was immigration's game

Forty years  
Later  
He argues with his grand daughter  
Who doesn't understand his past or his  
pain

Of leaving Romania and never working in  
his trade  
And he doesn't  
Realize that she  
Has a very complex identity  
She is Black of mixed race Jewish and middle class  
She is Canadian and full of sass.



**Kim McNeilly,  
“But Grandpa--” ... “Don't Be Silly”, 1989**

## Why should we become literate?

**The following prose poem,\* put together by a group of poor and illiterate people in the state of West Bengal, India, who were involved in the country's adult education program of ten years ago, was adopted as a statement for all those engaged in literacy work by participants in the International Seminar on Literacy in Industrialized Countries, held in Toronto, October 1987, by the International Council for Adult Education.**

**It was read to a plenary session by Lalita Ramdas of the Society for Alternatives in Education in New Delhi, India, a seminar resource person.**

**'Why should we become literate?' was published in Bengali in an illustrated brochure by the Bengal Social Service League in Calcutta, and later published in English by the Central government's Directorate of Adult Education. Ms. Ramdas noted that 'it is a testament to the basic wisdom of one group of learners, yet it touches people everywhere.'**

What kind of people are we?  
We are poor, very poor  
but we are not stupid.  
That is why, despite our illiteracy, we  
still exist.  
But we have to know  
why we should become literate.

We joined the literacy classes before,  
but after some time, we got wise. We  
felt cheated. So we left the classes.

Do you know what we found out?  
The Babus take up this work  
in their own interest. Maybe the  
election is around the corner, or  
perhaps there is a government grant or  
something which must be utilized.

What they taught us was useless. To  
sign one's name means nothing. Or to  
read a few words means nothing.

We agree to join the classes if you  
teach us how not to depend on others  
any more.

We should be able to read simple  
books, keep our accounts, write a  
letter and read and understand  
newspapers.

One more thing...  
Why do our teachers feel so superior?  
They behave as if we are ignorant fools,  
as if we are little children.

Please do understand that

the teacher may know things  
which we don't  
But we know a lot of things  
which are beyond him.

We are not empty pitchers.  
We have minds of our own.  
We can reason out things,  
and, believe it or not,  
we also have dignity.

Let those who teach us  
remember this.  
We have enough troubles and  
sufferings.  
Why should we add to them by  
joining literacy classes?

If the learning centers can make us  
feel a little more cheerful,  
then we may feel an urge to  
join the classes.  
We are not children.  
Let the teacher remember this.  
Treat us like adults.  
Behave with us as friends.

And yet, something more.  
We don't get a square meal.  
We have few clothes.  
We don't have a proper shelter.  
And, to top it all, floods come and  
wash away everything.  
Then comes a long spell of drought  
drying up everything.  
Would it help if we become literate?

Can literacy help us live  
a little better? Starve a little less?  
Would it guarantee that the mother  
and the daughter won't have to share  
the same sari between them? Would  
it fetch us a newly-thatched roof over  
our heads?

Would it help us know  
how to raise our yield, and increase  
our income?  
And from there could we borrow money  
on easy terms, and what benefits  
would we get from the cooperatives?

Would we get better seeds, fertilizer and  
all the water we need? Would we get  
proper wages? And this we think is  
learning for living.

They say that the new program  
promises things like this.  
But, is it only writing on a scrap of  
paper?  
Is it like one of those very many  
past promises that were never kept?

Will this program teach us how to think  
and work together?  
Will "doing" be made a part of  
"learning"?  
If all this is done, all of us  
will join the literacy classes.  
It will then be  
learning to live a better life.

We are weak and are ill very often.  
Will the program teach us  
how to take care of our health,  
and become strong?  
If it does, then we shall all come.

They say that there are laws to protect  
and benefit us. We don't know these  
laws.  
We are kept in the dark.  
Would literacy help us know these  
laws?  
Would we know the laws that have  
changed  
the status of women? And the laws that  
protect the tribals among us?

Literacy should help us live better;  
at least we look at it that way.  
They say that things are being  
planned  
for us - the poor.  
Would literacy help us in knowing  
those government plans?

We want a straight answer.

Then we shall decide whether  
we should become literate or not.  
But if we find out that we  
are being duped again  
with empty promises,  
we will stay away from you.

We will say,  
'For God's sake, leave us alone.'

*\* This poem is reprinted from Literacy in the Industrialized Countries: A Focus on Practice (Toronto: International Council for Adult Education, 1987), pp.18-19.*

## Ganga Devi

### ***A Question of Literacy and Development***

*A case study is presented of an illiterate, but wise and knowledgeable Himalayan woman, who ably managed family and village affairs; farms, herbal healing; spinning and stitching. She could read the weather, the land, the trees, the crops, birds, animals and people. She is one of the millions of women who produce 50% of the world's food. She is also one of the 280 million illiterate women in India. But the present day agrarian-industrial development and the literate neo-Brahmins have not only bypassed, marginalized and devalued her, but have been living off the fat of her back and usurping the meager resources of the third world. This development-literacy axis has deepened the gulf between peoples. This gulf is the root of all dehumanization and violence. What are the limits of the arrogance of the written word is the crucial question.*

Ganga Devi - the river goddess-the river Ganges, the life line of the northern Indian plains stretches all the way east to Calcutta. Ganga Devi is aged beyond her years with the struggle of family cares. The abortion and births of eight or nine children have dried

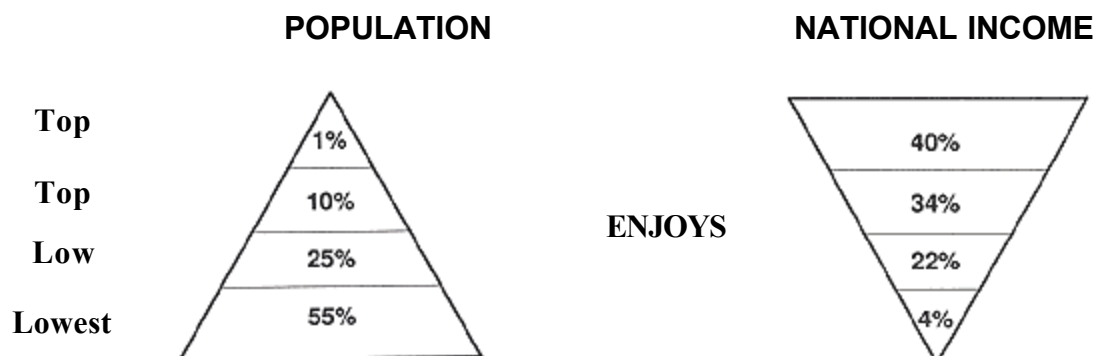
husband's business, the desertion of her eldest son after getting a good job; the death of her husband and grown up daughter have broken her heart. She has 'settled'; i.e., married and employed all the children, even the youngest, who is mentally handicapped - the most functional I have ever seen - working as a "peon" (mail, file carrier and odd jobs) in the Shimla Medical college, married to an orphan tribal girl. Yet Ganga Devi runs the household with an iron and knowledgeable hand.

Not a hair turns without her consent. She knows all the rites and rituals for every feast of the moon, every sacrifice, every offering for the pacification of the dead and the deified, and the dues to the hierarchy of elders. She prescribes the recipes for the daily fare, as well as the special fare for the feeding of the Brahmins to appease the dead, and the very, very special family recipes for preserves, pickles and rejuvenating, high protein tonics. She and her family are vegetarian, so high protein processing of wheat germ and cereal is carefully passed down from generation to generation. Yet Ganga Devi attends to and listens to people who come from far and near - massaging, healing, prescribing a diet, herbal medicine, advice and suggestions for local and family politicking; massaging a woman's stomach, directing her second son in setting a sprained ankle. Ganga Devi can hardly see, having sacrificed her sight to the stitching of clothes for family and village and spinning the finest wool into the small hours of night, to supplement and even at times support the meager family income. And all this after the household chores of fetching fuel and water from distances and heights in the hills to feed the family of man, children and cows.

The tragedy of Ganga Devi was that when she became ill with the burden of supporting the life and health of others, she was treated by alien (allopathic) health systems which had reduced the able woman to a helpless dependent on expensive drugs. She never recovered and died after a long resistance.

Ganga Devi was one of the 280 million illiterate women of India. A statistic we look upon with horror, dismay, shame. Yet Ganga Devi could read the earth, the plants, the woods, the trees, the sun, the sky, the clouds, the rains, the sowing, the harvesting, the seasons, the people, the births and the deaths. She could predict droughts by looking at the length and intensity of the orange-red coloration of the cob-like ovary of the Himalian Snake plant; the intensity of the summer by the redness of the flowers of the silk-cotton tree.

## INVERTED PYRAMIDS THEORY



I who have a Ph.D. in Psychology can read none of these. Yet me and the like of me are squandering the meager resources of the third and fourth world. We are valued, protected, reimbursed and set high in the peculiar value system of schools and ivory towers of learning in our morally decrepit and bankrupt, destructive civilization.

For the last two thousand years, the privileged, the elites, the parasites have been riding on the backs of the millions who toil to keep and maintain us, the top dogs. And we in our arrogance have not even acknowledged this service, never asked what price we have extracted from the wretched of the earth.

All over the earth, it is the illiterate poor, and it is the women who are the poorest of the poor and the most illiterate from the villages, that are the mainstay of a country's economy, through their cheap labour and their contribution in food production. In the northern states of India, by and large it is the women who are mostly involved in tending the land and the animals, whereas the men aspire to a more comfortable life in offices and cities. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has found that women in rural areas grow at least 50 per cent of the world's food.<sup>1</sup>

In India there are 343.3 million illiterate persons (approximately 49%). The southern state of Kerala has the highest literacy rate of 69% and the desert state of Rajasthan has a rate of 24% with the lowest female rate of literacy at 12%. In the Himalayan State of Himachal Pradesh, the literacy rate is 42.48% males, 58% and females, 31.4%. In the rural areas it is 46.42%: males, 51% females, 29%. In the urban areas, 67.44% males, 73% and females 60.6%. In the Shimla rural areas, 37.16% literacy males, 49.54% and females, 23.74%; e Ganga Devi lived and died in the village Ghana Hatti, 12 km west of the capital Shimla.

It is the rich and elite of the cities, the Neo-Brahmins, who are the beneficiaries of the country's educational system, a system which can be well represented by the inverted pyramids theory.

The top 1% enjoys 40% of the National Income and resources, whereas the lowest 55% gets only 4%. There are a number of schemes to alleviate poverty, but hardly a trickle filters down to those who really need it 52% of the population is below the poverty line; i.e., they hardly get two square meals a day. Malnutrition, anemia, V.D. and T.B. are rampant in the hills. Ivan Illich has been vindicated: the inroads of development have only bled the countryside. The so-called green and white revolutions (wheat, rice and milk) and the apple-revolution of the Himachal Pradesh have only gone to nourish the cities. These cash crops are not for the rural poor. Zafar Futehally finds, "What. ever development [there has been] has led to only menial jobs for the hill people with the bulk of profits going to outsiders from the plains."<sup>3</sup> Cement-concrete houses and Japanese watches (male properties) have been traded for nourishment and health. Again it is the women and children who are the victims of our present day 'development.' Mental illness has been found in Himachal Pradesh to be higher in females of agricultural occupation, lower casts, lower education and income.<sup>4</sup>



The current Punjab problem of Sikh terrorism and fundamentalism could be viewed in the light of 'development', where the green revolution has made the rich richer and the poor poorer. The poor peasants happen to be Sikhs and the rich traders and business men happen to be urban Hindus. Traditionally a wheat growing area, Punjab (and neighbor Haryana) has taken to growing high-yielding, high-quality rice - mostly for export and profit taking. This breed of rice requires a great deal of irrigation. The water supply being limited and coming from the rivers of the Himalayan mountains, water dispute is a major bone of contention and the resource of demand for Khalistan. Here again the main victims are women and children who suffer most brutally in the male games of violence and rioting. If development is counted in the industrialization of the country, most of the industries are capital rather than labour intense. They have helped largely in destroying indigenous cottage industries: plastic has replaced pottery; mechanization has deprived women of their traditional jobs of weeding and hoeing, harvesting, threshing, and marketing vegetables, fish, etc.

**FOR THE LAST TWO THOUSAND YEARS, THE PRIVILEGED, THE ELITES , THE PARASITES HAVE BEEN RIDING ON THE BACKS OF THE MILLIONS WHO TOIL TO KEEP AND MAINTAIN US, THE TOP DOGS. AND WE IN OUR ARROGANCE HAVE NOT EVEN ACKNOWLEDGED THIS SERVICE, NEVER ASKED WHAT PRICE WE HAVE EXTRACTED FROM THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH.**

They cannot operate tractors, threshers, harvester combines, air conditioned vending trucks - these have been usurped by the males. Whole communities of rural poor women and children have been forced out of their homes, into the city slums which are hot beds of crime, drugs and prostitution. If development means multi-million dollar huge dams, in India there is enough evidence to show that whole villages have been uprooted, forests, hundreds of years old, have been submerged, and the neighboring hills, the fragile Himalayas, made unstable, giving rise to landslides, floods and earthquakes. (For example, Tehri Garhwal Dam, The Narbada Project. The Bodhghat Project (sponsored by the World Bank) in the tribal Gondwana belt of Madhya Pradesh and others).<sup>5</sup> The government promises concrete houses, schools, and hospitals for the uprooted tribals, totally destroying their ecosystem, their indigenous herbal healing, their life-style of harmony with the forest, land and their thatched homes, practical in providing airy coolness during long hot and humid summers and easily renewable.

Education and literacy are said to be the fourth cornerstone of development. Much needs to be reflected upon regarding what, how and for whom. An ethics, a morality of development needs to be understood and implemented. Unless and until the various gaps in society, in living, the dualities between people, the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, the industrial and the agrarian, the first, second, third and fourth worlds, man and woman, father and child; between I and thou resolved, development, literacy and education will only breed violence, destruction and degeneration.

The power and arrogance of literacy knows no bounds. The arrogance of the written word

has brought us to the brink of annihilation. The very paper I write on, the very words that I am spawning, are felling a tree, a large price indeed for literacy. Ganga Devi remains a crucial question in our thrust for literacy and development.

<sup>1</sup>Kamla Bhasin and Bina Agarwal, *Women and Media: Analysis Alternatives and Acts* (Delhi: Kali for Women with ISIS, International Pacific and Asian Women's Forum, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>1981 Government of India Census figures.

<sup>3</sup> Zafar Futehally, "The Hills are Alive, Just Alive," (New Delhi: *The Express Magazine*, May 29, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Kishwar Ahmed Shirali and Sandhya Kanwar, "Mental Illness and Hill Women: A Demographic Study," (New Delhi: *Journal of Personality and Clinical Studies*, 3(2), 1987), pp. 103-108.

<sup>5</sup> Chandra Kant Naidu, "The Dam on the River Narmada," (New Delhi: *The Express Magazine*, May 29, 1988).

*Kishwar Ahmed Shirali teaches Psychology at Himachal Pradesh University. Shimla (Northern India). She is active in the women's movement in India, and participated in the Women, Literacy and Development Conference (World Literacy of Canada) held in Toronto, February, 1988.*



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## MASS EDUCATION: An Antidote For Violence

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Violence in our society has reached cancerous proportions. It manifests itself through the violence of unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, and physical and sexual violence against women.

As a traditionally dominated group, women feel the effects of violence in the home, at the workplace and through the various forms of sexual abuse which have extended to rape and murder of children.

At the same time, men, who are unfortunately the major users of violence, are themselves victims of their own violence and of the traditional expectations of them as men. Society, like a fish trapped by an octopus, is caught in the tentacles of the cancer of violence.



It was against such a background of violence that the first International Women's Day came into being. On March 8, 1908 women workers in New York , USA held a really to demand trade union rights which would ensure fair wages and safe working conditions.

The success of the rally encouraged women other American cities and other countries to organize for their rights. In 1910, March 8, was officially celebrated as International Women's Day. Today, 78 years later there is a greater need to rally around

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## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MASS EDUCATION

### NAME Newsletter

**NAME Newsletter is published by the National Association for Mass Education, an organization which promotes literacy and adult education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.**

**For further information about NAME or to request copies of the Newsletter write to:**

**Leon Romeo and Rebecca Jordan  
Coeditors, NAME Newsletter  
P.O. Box 304  
Kingston, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.**

**We reproduce here the cover [opposite] and excerpts from the text of Issue No.2 (January-March 1988), the theme for which is Women and Adult Education.**

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It was against such a background of violence that the first international Women's Day came into being. On March 8, 1908 women workers in New York, USA held a rally to

demand trade union rights which would ensure fair wages and safe working conditions. The success of the rally encouraged women in other American cities and other countries to organize for their rights.

In 1910, March 8, was officially celebrated as International Women's Day.

Today, 78 years later, there is a greater need to rally around the issues facing women, It is not enough to speak; it is time for action! An Education program is needed:

- a. for women to become aware of themselves and their worth, develop their self-esteem and skills, and to articulate their needs;
- b. for men to understand the humanity of women, their needs, their right to freedom, to pay them honour as the weaker vessel or dominated group, and to raise them from that position.

The good news is that **NAME** is well-placed to carry out this task, **NAME** believes that "...education should seek to enhance self-esteem, to develop one's potential, to equip the individual with the skills necessary to function in, analyze and change society." (Constitutional Guidelines). It is structuring its activities to fulfill these aims. Mass education is the antidote to the spread of violence as men and women work together in an atmosphere of equality to build bridges for women's total liberation,

## Is Your Program Helping Women?

**E**nsuring that Adult Education programs are improving the lives of women it takes conscious effort on the part of organizers, learners and tutors. **NAME** encourage each program to acknowledge International Women Day by examining how you are serving the needs of women's following questions may be useful as points for discussion and as suggestions for actions you can take:

1. How many women learners are in the program? Why do you think there are more or less than men? What problem do they face in coming to the program? Have you considered trying to organize childcare during classes?
2. What percentage of the tutors are women? If there are few women tutors, why do you think this is so? Have you considered recruiting more women? Are the male tutor sensitive to the needs of women learners?
3. Are women learners taking classes like carpentry? Are they encouraged to?
4. Are women always expected to cook and clean when hold special events? Could they play a more active role leadership and as organizers? Could they learn to operate Public Address systems, tape recorders, etc?
5. Are women encouraged to participate in sports and recreational activities?
6. Do women in your community face problems (poor health, violence,

- unemployment, etc.) that your program work to overcome?
7. Do you ever discuss the contributions of women when studying St. Vincent & the Grenadines and its history?
  8. Have you considered inviting a speaker to discuss situation of women within St. Vincent and the Grenadines or world-wide?

## Women Speak on Importance of Education

NAME asked several women involved in Adult Education what they consider the greatest obstacle women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and how they believe Adult Education could advance the cause. Here are their responses:

*It comes down to attitude, not just of men towards women but also of women towards themselves. For example, if men said you can do anything you want-that 50% of the police force and mechanics will be women- women won't take advantage if they don't feel they are able. Women have to feel that the sky is the limit and men must be able to accept a women's capabilities. There also the assumption that the man is the breadwinner, so he get more pay. That's ridiculous when the fact is that most families are headed by women in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.*

*We need to change attitudes and that comes down to education actually believing that you can do something. In an Adult Education Program, you have taken the first step when you Step through the door. Ideally there is the opportunity for speaking out, for decision-making, for taking risks and for developed leadership skills. There should be equality for learners in the groups. The groups should give the confidence so that if the electricity goes off, for example, you don't sit and wait for a man, you take care of it yourself Secondly, Adult Education Programs are the ideal opportunity to provide women with training in non-traditional skills. The programs also provide a chance to express feelings and gain an awareness of each other and respect. When men and women share and express their feeling, then they can recognize their sameness as well as their difference.*

\*\*\*

*Two things are responsible. One is work, the kind of work women do as well as the salary. They are paid less than men even if they do the same things. Secondly, a societal impression of women being the weaker sex, the subordinate person who can't perform as well as men can. Even if they do better, it still isn't accepted on par with what the man doe has to do with woman's place in the home. Perhaps it comes from the sex role that a woman plays. Men can do as they like and women can't.*

*Adult Education gives women more skills so that they can do more things - perhaps even as many men can do. Right now women's skills are limited to things in the home and office. Not many women are managers. But when women are trained they can do what men do. T more education and skills she has the more the woman can become the breadwinner along with man. It becomes a partnership.*

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*I would say that teen-age pregnancy is caused most of the girls by many young women not having anything to do. Most girls reached up to senior school and then dropped out. When you are at home, it's easy to get around the wrong people, get into trouble and get pregnant. When you have a job, you meet more people and experience a lot.*

*The Adult Education Program really helps a lot. I am meeting different people, going places I'd never been before, learning things I'd never heard about. I've learned to address a crowd, I've learned a lot in English like how to make sentences, form a letter and make a composition. In math I've been doing percentages and long division. We also had a six-week course in family Life Education and Teen-Age Pregnancy. We really learned lot. More courses like that would help.*

\*\*\*

*I think that the greatest obstacle to women's development is illiteracy. With it I would add the inadequacy of training in marketable skills.*

*For our women to be able to participate meaningfully in the economic, social cultural and political life of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, they need the armour of self-confidence which comes with the ability to understand and be understood together with the skills which would fit them for well-paid jobs. Educated for life and living, they will be able to function according to their maximum potential.*

\*\*\*

*The greatest obstacle against the advancement of women is the great lack of support structures" - the non-availability of adequate Daycare Centers, limited training opportunities, high unemployment and under-employment. The judicial system does not cater enough for women and their rights as a whole.*

*Adult Education can advance the causes of women in SVG by enhancing their all-round development, which will help them to be better citizens. It is evident that women are the main victims of the high rate of drop-outs from the school system. Therefore Education programs should place high priority in catering for the needs of women.*



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Paul Gottfried  
- WASHINGTON TIMES



# Eritrean Women

## *Dual Struggle in the Horn of Africa*



### **New Roles for Women in Eritrea**

Canada became aware of the Horn of Africa in 1984 when searing images of famine were televised throughout the world. Many of these images simply portrayed Africans as victims and obscured the real causes of hunger in the region. Hidden by these images of Suffering was the struggle of Africans, and especially African women, to transform the conditions of their lives.

In Eritrea, the former Italian colony on the Red Sea, the struggle has taken a dual character and has achieved remarkable success. On the one hand, Eritrean women are part of the gene struggle for independence from foreign domination. But they are also attempting to change the traditions which have relegated them to the status of second-class citizens. Twenty years Eritrean women lived a miserable existence: illiterate, barred from education, denied the right to speak in public and to own property, women were confined to domestic chores and back breaking agricultural labour.

Over the past two decades, in the context of Africa's longest war and devastating drought and famine, Eritrean women an begun to change their own lives. Literacy programs have central to this change, for they have enabled women to he together and articulate their common concerns. While women have taken up arms in the liberation struggle, they hav also participated in educational programs geared towards the total transformation of the traditional patriarchal society in the Horn.

**BY JOHN SORENSON**

## Women in Traditional Society

To understand the extent of the changes in women's roles in Eritrea it is important to understand the nature of the traditional societies of the region. As in other countries of the Horn, women were believed to be inferior to men, a belief shared by both Christian and Muslim groups into which the society is almost equally divided. Until the mid-1970s 95% of Eritrean women were illiterate. Women were not considered to have thoughts or opinions of any value, so there was no effort made to educate them. One traditional Eritrean proverb states: "Just as there is no donkey with horns, so there is no woman with brains," Such sentiments ensured that women were prevented from taking any political role or entering into discussions of village affairs.

These sentiments also ensured that women lived a precarious existence, subject to the whims of their husbands. Women bore many children to avoid the risk of divorce and received inferior health care. Improper nutrition also resulted from the traditional practice of eating only whatever food was left from a husband's meal. Women were expected to carry on all the domestic duties as well as working in the fields.

## Italian Colonialism

Eritrea was an Italian colony from 1890 To 1941, a period which brought extensive changes to Eritrean society. The influx of Italian settlers resulted in the widespread appropriation of the best farm land and the consequent urbanization and proletarianization of Eritrean society. Again, women experienced particular hardship and prostitution emerged among the most impoverished.

After 1941, Eritrea was administered by Britain for a decade. During this period, political activity was intense as Eritrea was breaking free of both feudal and colonial rule. The processes of industrialization and urbanization required new relationships and meant that old roles were now dysfunctional. Women's suffrage now became an issue but there was no organized body that could articulate women's concerns. Some attention to the specific problems faced by women was given by the trade union organization and the incipient liberation movement but real changes did not come until later.



## Women in the Liberation Struggle

While the other Italian colonies attained independence, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1951. The federation was imposed by the United Nations, against the wishes of most Eritreans, in order to satisfy Ethiopia's desire for access to the sea and U.S. aims to establish a strategic communications base near Eritrea's capital, Asmara. The federation was unworkable from the start in its attempt to merge a democratizing Eritrea with the semi feudal monarchy of Ethiopia. Violations of the Federation Act were consistent and ultimately resulted in Ethiopia's 1962 annexation of Eritrea, a violation of international law. Since that time, Eritrea has been fighting for its right to self-determination.

Particularly since 1974, the liberation movement has brought extensive changes to women in Eritrea. Previously women had supported the liberation struggle by providing food, shelter and information but with the emergence of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) as the main independence group, women's participation has become more direct. Women have now taken up arms and are said to comprise 15% of the combatants. They also form 35 % of the EPLF in other capacities such as doctors, teachers, administrators, mechanics, technicians and organizers. In 1987 six women were elected to the seventy-one member Central Committee of the EPLF.

There is general agreement that changes to traditional women's roles have been slower outside the EPLF and much work still needs to be done. Much of the impetus for change has come from the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), founded in 1979, and composed of women inside Eritrean and abroad. Its goals include the emancipation of women through education, equality in health care and employment and the protection of women's rights within marriage. NUEW works with groups such as the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) to establish literacy programs inside the EPLF-controlled territory.

## Colonialism and Literacy

Literacy and education in Eritrea suffered under colonial occupation. During the first phase of the Italian period, education was restricted to the mission schools and only in the 1920s were primary schools opened for Eritrean children, who were even then not allowed to progress beyond the fourth grade. The curriculum taught only basic skills and emphasized the glory of Italian history. Girls were almost completely excluded from any process of formal education under Italian rule.

During the period of British administration, the number of primary schools increased but they were segregated according to religion. Muslim schools taught in Arabic and concentrated mainly on studies of the Quran, while instruction in the Christian schools was in the Tigrinya language. This strategy also contributed to a division which the British would emphasize in their unsuccessful attempt to partition Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia.

Under Ethiopian rule, Amharic was imposed as the official language of Eritrea. This directly contravened the terms of the UN Resolution which had federated the two countries and presented great difficulties to Eritrean students who had to learn a new language in order to attend university (today, similar problems exist at every level of study). Books in Arabic and Tigrinya were burnt and the Ethiopian educational system mirrored the Italian attempts to establish cultural hegemony by emphasizing the grandeur of the Ethiopian state.

Despite the overthrow of the monarchy in 1974 and the ascension to power of a military junta (known as the Dergue in Amharic) led by Mengistu Haile Mariam and which professes to be Marxist-Leninist, Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea remains unchanged. While U.S. interests determined that the Eritreans were denied independence, Soviet arms now flow to the Dergue in its campaign to bomb Eritrea into submission.



## Literacy Campaigns in Eritrea

The EPLF places great emphasis on literacy in order to carry out its political education work; it stresses that every fighter must become literate. Women also have now gained the right to full education. Emancipation will not be achieved by an illiterate society and in recognition of this NUEW and ERA have worked together to bring literacy campaigns to the remote areas of the Eritrean countryside. Under the cover of trees or in camouflaged dugouts where they can avoid being seen by Ethiopian war-planes which patrol the skies and restrict much activity in Eritrea to the hours of darkness, women gather to study how to read and write.

At the First International Conference on Eritrean Women held in Bergen, Netherlands, during March 1985, NUEW described the efforts it had made in bringing literacy to the

women of Eritrea. A 1983 literacy campaign launched in 103 rural areas had reached 9,000 women. NUEM announced that its 1986 program was targeted towards 15,000 women in the provinces of Sahel and Barka. Frequently, the literacy campaigns involve the activities of cultural groups which enact dramatic presentations representing the aims and nature of the campaigns.

Much of the literacy training, of course, has not gone past basic levels. However, in the Solomuna camp for those displaced by drought and war, some of the women have now reached the sixth grade level. Comments from the women involved in the literacy campaigns are enthusiastic. One woman said, "There is great joy in being able to read and write - in being part of the changes." Another said, "It was like being in the darkness and now I am beginning to see the light." One of the women who had fled her village when it was attacked by Ethiopian troops said, "Now I have learned to read and I understand the problems of my country. I can communicate in a way I could not before. I can do things like our cultural shows and handicrafts. Once you get educated, you fight things, and you tell others how to fight."

Because Eritrean society consists of nine separate ethnic groups which speak mutually unintelligible languages, there are special problems in attempting to mount literacy campaigns. Books are being printed in all the written languages, but because a number of these do not have their own script it has been decided to transliterate material into Latin script.

Additionally, literacy campaigns must be adapted to the circumstances of different modes of production. The basic division is between highland farmers and lowland pastoralists but there are numerous combinations of both forms of livelihood. Literacy campaigns in general must be geared towards the exigencies of various ways of life. For example, shorter courses have been designed to meet the needs of semi-nomadic groups. In agricultural areas, literacy classes have been timed according to the seasonal activities. There have also been longer and more comprehensive courses held in which women would be away from their homes and duties there for two to three months. After completion of the course, the women then return to their village to educate other women. Among the different ethnic groups there have been varying degrees of acceptance of the need for educational classes for women.



These are the words of Mama Zeineb, national poet of Eritrea:

“I do not have much education. I was not taught by my father. I can only write my name and my father's name. I started my poetry In 1978 after the strategic withdrawal. I was in the town and when the Dergue came I had to leave. I left to the mountains. I was crying and crying, things were burning me inside. My poems are about the suffering of the Eritrean people.’

**Mama Zeineb    Photo by Beate Müller-Blattau**

There are also problems involved with the attempt to bring literacy to the number of Eritrean refugee women living in camps in Sudan. Because the numerous wars in the Horn have generated the highest refugee population in the world, Sudan is now overburdened with new arrivals. The life in these camps is extremely harsh and literacy work must often be subordinate to the sheer struggle to survive. However, ERA is supporting a number of schools in Sudan.

In addition to problems stemming from oppressive traditions, the literacy programs have also been slowed by the lack of even the most basic materials. Paper, notebooks, pencils, chalk and blackboards are all in short supply. A library has been established and books are being printed in the written languages of Eritrea but progress has been very slow due to the lack of materials.

Some support has come from outside. NUEW's programs in literacy have been supported by Canadian organizations such as Canadian Organization for Development through Education' (CODE), OXFAM, Development and Peace, and the Eritrean Relief Association in Canada. Corso of New Zealand and Trocaire of Ireland have also contributed to women's literacy campaigns in Eritrea. Much of the support stems from NUEW's own activities in Europe and North America, however.

NUEW's work in the area of literacy is tied to its activities in other aspects of women's lives. One of NUEW's major projects was the construction of a factory in Eritrea for the production of sanitary towels for women. It also operated programs in agricultural training for women, sewing and handicraft production, and medical education regarding general problems as well as training for midwives and addressing dangerous specific practices such as infibulations and clitoridectomy. These latter practices are considered to be among the major health threats to women in Eritrea but health workers prefer to deal with the issue through educational methods rather than through imposing strict prohibitions. Most opposition from religious leaders has been provoked when a 'head-on' approach had been taken.

NUEW's projects in women's literacy are in accord with the motto of the Education Department: "All knowledge to the people." The aim of education in Eritrea is to link theory and practice to effect positive changes. To bring education to all areas of the country, students from middle-school are sent to remote areas to conduct basic classes at the community level. Education is linked with practical concerns in agriculture, health and technical training. During one training course directed specifically at women, for example, literacy was linked with participation in village activities, increasing productive work and provision of basic health information.

## Mama Zeineb - Eritrea's National Poet

NUEW and ERA have found that one of the main problems encountered in attempting to bring literacy to women in Eritrea has been the shyness and reticent behaviour which had traditionally been expected from them. But even older women are now speaking out against the oppression they face:

*I do not have much education. I was not taught by my father. I can only write my name and my father's name. I started my poetry in 1978 after the strategic withdrawal. I was in the town and when the Dergue came I had to leave. I left to the mountains. I was crying and crying. things were burning me inside. My poems are about the suffering of the Eritrean people.*

These are the words of Mama Zeineb, the national poet of Eritrea. When I met her in 1978 she was living in a small refugee camp hidden in a rocky valley. She discussed the hardship women had faced in traditional Eritrean society and how they had been isolated through a lack of education. Although she is illiterate herself, she is a strong advocate of literacy programs for women and a powerful symbol of Eritrean resistance:

*Women participate equally in the struggle. They work in the garages, as doctors. they are in the front lines. Women are oppressed but our main priority is the struggle against colonialism. Since the women of Eritrea have seen their children shot in front of them it is no problem for us to join the struggle. I go to many meetings and give speeches. Whenever I think about Mengistu and colonialism I get angry. It burns me inside.*

*It has been twenty-five years since our struggle began. Even the unborn will continue this struggle until we win our independence. If peace comes everyone will have the chance for education and a good life. But if there is no peace we will continue to fight. John Sorenson is completing a Ph.D. on war and famine in the Horn for the Social and Political Thought Program at York University. He also works for the Eritrean Relief Association in Canada.*

<b>KATHY FRETWELL</b> <b>Poetry Society</b>		
Poetry's reeve invades my dream, her truth well-paved, mine slanted through evergreens.	I close the door on my poems ripped from journals - ink bleeding on her fingers.	I awaken to mint sheets, rumpled pillow. No philistines march to my defection; the woods - my quilt, books intact.
She raps ideas to order on upright pews, time for tea, manna pressed into squares.	My solo keens into the wind's Precambrian tales whispered long before she triple-tested feelings.	Still, our friendship flickers. Childhood needles her seventy years, she pines to write.

**Todos a alfabetizar**  
*Women and Literacy in Nicaragua*

In Nicaragua, 50% of the adult population is single mothers. Abandoned by their husbands, or widowed by the war, they are often left to support large families. Through necessity their involvement in the revolution has been aggressive and radical. When women fight for their children they fight for everything real.



But prior to the Triumph of the Revolution in 1979, most of these women were uneducated, and many had never seen the inside of a school. Obviously it was not in the interest of the Somoza government to provide easy access to education for peasant or working class women. In their daily struggle to survive, the women themselves had little time to consider education a priority either.

So although literacy was a mandate from the beginning for the FSLN, the commitment to learning to read and write on the part of the people themselves seems to have some directly from a swelling political involvement and participation in the revolutionary process. As women started to gain power in the revolution and over their own lives, they then felt the need to learn to read and write. They needed to take notes in meetings, to understand the graffiti and posters of the underground, to have a voice in the neighborhood civil defense committees, and sometimes to carry messages to the Front. And they recognized that the opportunity to learn was a major part of what they had been fighting for. Here the idea that literacy was a right (and not a privilege) was more than just mere rhetoric. The Literacy Crusade was a direct proof of empowerment

The Literacy Crusade was planned prior to the Triumph and it was put into affect within months of the victory. Modeled after the Cuban literacy crusade, it had both political and practical aims, and used Paulo Freire's pedagogical framework to achieve them. For six months in 1980, 100,000 volunteers, including 60,000 high school students in the cities, took time out of their own studying and working to go to the remote areas of the country and teach 500,000 students. Adult volunteers joined them in teaching neighbors throughout Nicaragua. Along with the equally ambitious Health Crusade, this Popular Education movement probably made the greatest difference to the people of the country, so many of whom had had no education available at all to them in the past. Great hope was placed in the Crusade and people listened eagerly to the broadcasted literacy census that reported how many people in which region had learned to read and Write according to results of an organized testing process. After five months, the '*brigadistas*' had reduced the illiteracy rate from 70% to 11%.

This Literacy Crusade mobilized women in crucial ways. First, sixty percent of the 60,000 teenagers who went into the country side as literacy *brigadistas* were young women, as were the majority of the popular (uncertified) teachers in the cities. Their participation would make or break the experiment. Many must have felt for the first time that their efforts were valuable to the success of the Revolution.

It's hard to guess how many of the learners were women. Amongst them there were certainly the expected problems.

BY JO LAMPERT

Though everyone might agree that literacy is a good thing in theory, Nicaragua still has its share of machismo. Women who become educated are a threat to domestic and traditional life, especially if they appear to be learning more quickly than their husbands or if the school takes them from their chores and families. Without question, though, the women who participated found their worlds opening up. Not only could they now do practical things like read the newspapers and the labels on medicine for their children (for instance, the national campaign to promote breast feeding and to inform on what to do in extreme cases of infant diarrhea required a certain level of literacy), but they began to gain knowledge of their own world's transformation. Students learn words necessary in their own lives, they read about their own revolutionary history and are encouraged to take a look at their own situations and conditions and actively make change. Through the literacy campaign as both learners and brigadistas, women became empowered and were perceived nationally as essential to the post-Somoza liberation of the State.

**SIXTY PERCENT OF THE 60.000 TEENAGERS WHO WENT INTO THE COUNTRY SIDE AS LITERACY BRIGADISTAS WERE YOUNG WOMEN ... MANY MUST HAVE FELT FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THEIR EFFORTS WERE VALUABLE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE REVOLUTION.**

Since the Crusade in 1980, the news has been less optimistic. The American supported Contras have consistently made schools and teachers a target for terrorist action. A trip to the Literacy Museum in Managua makes this devastating apparent. The gallery of heroes and martyrs here displays rows and rows of photographs of young *brigadistas* who have lost their lives while teaching. These are pictures of young smiling women who believed strongly enough that education would make a difference that they put their own lives on hold to live in the difficult conditions of the remotest regions of the country. Their clothes and few belongings are displayed under glass, and we are given details of their death: shot while walking along a road in Muy Muy, killed in an ambush in Zelaya on the Atlantic Coast. These deaths have nothing to do with education, nothing to do with Nicaragua's attempt to attain autonomy, but they have an obvious effect on both.

These tragedies are the events that mobilize women and that have made their response powerful. An example of their response is the movement Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs. In Esteli, a town near the Honduran-Nicaraguan border, the movement has a building from which women disseminate information about the atrocities the war has inflicted on them. This movement has united women who have lost their children to death, who have seen their children raped and tortured, or whose children have been kidnapped by the Contras.

Also present in the country is AMNLAE, the strong and vocal women's organization. They originally saw their objective as allowing women an active role in overthrowing Somoza. In the years leading up to the Revolution, AMNLAE organized safe houses, sent women to carry messages through the war zones, and coordinated hunger strikes, amongst other things. Now they are beginning to deal with issues more closely related to women's rights. Women are still second class citizens and have a higher illiteracy rate than men. There are just starting to be laws created that demand responsibility on the part of fathers

who have abandoned their children. Recently an amendment has been passed to allow unilateral divorce, and only in the last year have women who are family heads been allowed to buy a home. The issue of equal salary for equal work is just being raised, AMNLAE sees education as a key part of their work.

By some estimates the illiteracy rate in Nicaragua is now up to 25% again. The economic and military realities of a country at war makes it difficult for Nicaragua to keep up the momentum of the literacy campaign. Most children are still not getting past Grade Six (their efforts are often needed in the fields) and this is seen as a major problem in the battle against illiteracy. But teachers are receiving better training now, and the Ministry of Education is optimistic that the situation will improve. The dream is that in three years Nicaragua will have reached total literacy. The Ministry of Education gives a Grade Four national literacy level as its goal, suggesting that when people have securely reached this level they are unlikely to forget what they have learned if classes must be interrupted.

It is reasonable to suggest that women have been strongly affected by the Nicaraguan literacy movement. Because many men work long shifts, or are serving their time in the Military, it is often women who participate most regularly in literacy programs. In Managua, where each *barrio* has a CDS (*Comite Defensa Sandinista*), which approves and organizes a neighborhood literacy program, often as many as 80% of the participants are women. Most of the volunteer popular teachers are women too (though, predictably, many of the paid administrators are men). So, in essence, these programs model a situation of women helping oilier women.

The commitment asked of these learners is remarkable to a North American eye. Groups of nine to ten meet as often as five days a week, two hours a day, to work on fairly formal lessons, prepared by the Ministry of Education. Students do exercises and practice writing. Often they attend these classes in less than ideal conditions. In a building in the very poor *barrio* of Ciudad Sandino, torrents of rain pour through the doors and windows. Most schools don't have enough chairs, and the blackboards haven't been in useful condition for years. Books are supplied to every program, but there are certainly no extras. Something is bringing people out to these programs, some personal satisfaction or knowledge that studying brings them closer to power for themselves and for the whole community. This notion is unfamiliar to us, but it seems natural to a people whose struggle has been a collective one.

**I**F THE READING MATERIAL SUPPLIED BY THE STATE APPEARS AT FIRST TO FOCUS AS MUCH ON REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY AND RADICAL VOCABULARY AS IT DOES ON THE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET, THIS IS BECAUSE HERE LITERACY IS POLITICIZATION.

Such a literacy movement could not exist without flexibility and more than a nod to reality. Many women with families cannot leave for classes five days a week. Consequently, literacy classes are offered both in the centers and in the homes of the learners. Predictably not all of the men in the households (though the majority of families are without men) are in favour of these programs, and organizers often find themselves in the position of having to raise the consciousness of men in the community in order to do productive literacy work.

This is less of a contradiction in Nicaragua than it is in North America. Becoming literate is perceived as just part of a larger process of education and empowerment. If the reading material supplied by the state appears at first to focus as much on revolutionary history and radical vocabulary as it does on the letters of the alphabet, this is because here literacy is, by definition, politicization. Literacy teaches people who causes the war, who carries the guns. Literacy reminds people of what their struggle has been and where their strength could take them. The Nicaraguans know what we pretend not to; that education is always ideologically based. So for women, empowerment comes not only from knowing how to read and write, but from reading about and discussing their own situations as women. Dialogue is a major part of each lesson and is crucial to the process.

The changes are slow in a post-revolutionary country halted by the American economic blockade and the war with the Contras. Nicaragua is frustrated in its efforts to progress in education and health care by lack of resources. It's too easy to glance at literacy in the small Latin American country and see only the surface details of a large number of small community based literacy programs. But the Crusade itself and the strength of the movement nine years after the Revolution are almost too radical to believe. Can it be true that 80-90% of adults in Nicaragua are participating in the programs? Can we quite grasp the notion that literacy is a priority and a national mandate of the Sandinista government? In a country that has fought bloody wars and lost many children in the quest for autonomy, literacy is a tool being offered to the people to achieve this end.

For women in Nicaragua, '*alfabetization*' means change. Mothers express the wish that their daughters have opportunities that weren't available to them, that they not find themselves poor and illiterate and mothers themselves before they finish their schooling. But these mothers themselves see a new future in their own lives, and access to schooling is a concrete manifestation of their own hopes and dreams.

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*Jo Lampert teaches English at Seneca College in Toronto. She is one of 16 people who went to Nicaragua this past summer with the Canadian Light Brigade.*

PATRICIA ELLEN K. ANNWN CRESSWELL

Reading daughters of Copper Woman

I dove into your words  
as a child dives into a pile  
of crisp brown leaves  
tossing them into the air  
pushing my way to the center  
to make a warm dry nest  
hugging them to my breast.

I drifted on my back  
in the middle of your  
words  
feeling them buoy me up  
their direction mine  
we flowed together  
into ancient knowledge.

“How I Spent  
My Summer Vacation”

*Letters between Literacy Workers*

*Tannis Atkinson has worked a literacy worker in a community-based program Toronto. She has also been instrumental in the formation of an Ontario-based literacy network. She is currently freelance writer and continues to be involved in the Ontario literacy community.*

*Anne Moore is an active member of Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML), and a literacy worker at Park Project Read (PPR) Toronto. She brings to work a rich experience working in and visiting developing countries.*

We are three women who have worked in community based literacy in Toronto over the last several years. We decided to write a piece together about women and literacy but we didn't have time to get together. As we were all off on our summer vacations we realized that we would all be thinking about work anyway, and decided to write letters to each other.

Letters were a natural choice for all of us for different reasons: Tannis had traveled a lot and found through letters a strong connection with friends; Anne felt it was a personal way of communicating her ideas because she knew who she was talking to; for Tracy, letter writing is informal and direct and allows you to have a voice a way that essay writing doesn't. All three of us are white, middle class, university educated women with a shared experience of the education system. We all feel that the education system discouraged us from writing from a personal perspective. The directness and honesty of the learners we have worked with has inspired us to rediscover the voices we lost through our formal education.

The place we all visited this summer helped us to focus our concerns about education and women. When we met after our holidays we were delighted and surprised by the number of shared themes running through our letters and

*Tracy Westell has been a literacy worker at PPR for years. She has contributed a lot of time to the formation the Ontario Literacy Coalition and to lobbying the provincial and federal governments for literacy funding.*

thoughts.

In September we sat around a kitchen table and read our letters aloud to one another. We realized that these were things that we had all been thinking about for years. We had never before talked about them and felt unsure whether anybody else of shared our feelings.

Our letters were affirming for each other but also saddened us. Around us in our work we see the energy and ideals of community literacy workers being worn away; the obstacles standing between women, and education that affirms us; the way the education system unjustly and ineffectively uses its resources.

Particularly we were struck that although women are the majority of literacy workers, volunteer tutors and potential learners, women's issues are virtual of ignored, even by ourselves. Like pots simmering on the back burners, we have kept quiet for too long. It's time we take a risk and come to a boil.

**BY TANNIS ATKINSON, ANNE MOORE & TRACY WESTELL**

DEAR ANNE AND TANNIS:

I am sitting on a hill above the ocean in Nova Scotia. Thinking about work in this context brings up strange images: in the distance lies a tranquil sea that gives off a steady rhythmical sound and that fertile, moist smell that draws me back again and again to this spot: I know that if I walked down the hill to the rocks I would be drawn in to the overpowering intimacy of the sea, alternately frightening and soothing with its crashing waves, untenable/unknowable presence and murky depths. The tide goes in and out. My rhythm changes by the sea; I move languidly in and out of feeling the intensity of my connections to people and understanding the necessity of distance, the distance that gives perspective and occasionally, understanding.

You may wonder what all this has to do with working as a feminist in a community-based literacy program. I am confused by the role I should play as a feminist teaching adult women to read and write. In discussions with Anne, I have realized that my educated, middle class feminist consciousness is being raised and that my teachers are the poor, educationally disadvantaged women in my program. Anne reminded me of a quote from Alice Munro, "Any woman who tells the truth about herself is a feminist." If this is true, and it makes enormous sense to me, then all of the women in our community literacy program are feminists. We encourage, and indeed to some degree, insist that the learners write 'experience stories' about their lives. These stories are often

heartrendingly honest and revealing about the struggles that these women have endured in their lives. Not only do we draw these stories out of women, we then publish them for other learners to read and reflect on. The writing is a testament to their honesty, courage and, yes, feminism.

Ironically the women and self-proclaimed feminists who work in literacy programs rarely write with such honesty and openness about their lives or work. Our middle class upbringing and stronger sense of self ensures that we protect ourselves from such open revelations about our personal struggles as women. We struggle with the distance that education, money and class creates between us and the learners. Like being by the sea, we try to keep our distance from the force and power of these women's stories but at the same time are drawn in to emotionally charged, intimate relationships. I think we ideally would like to walk a line somewhere between working as social service type educators and becoming wholly an equal member of a collective of strong women finding their voices. Sometimes you can walk that line, if you are very careful and don't let the waves catch your feet.

The tide is coming in. With some vision, perhaps we can welcome the tide instead of trying, vainly, to chase it back. Ultimately we do not teach but facilitate learning and critical awareness among the learners in our programs. We must ensure that there is a non-threatening and comfortable learning environment; we must welcome the new feminist voices and join our voices to the cry for decent housing, for food, for a non-abusive home life and for decent childcare and responsive health care. Many of the women trying to learn in programs across this country will leave those programs short of meeting their learning goals because their mother is sick, they cannot find decent, subsidized daycare, their husband is jealous of the time spent learning, or because they do not have enough money, energy or self-esteem. Facilitating learning therefore, does not simply mean providing books, pens and ill-prepared volunteer tutors (generally women) but also fighting the barriers that often stop women from pursuing their education. I don't believe we will be able to ensure women's access to learning/education until we have told the truth about ourselves. Like the women learners, we will have to be honest in the face of a threatening world, a world that often does not want to face the truth of women's lives today. The threats we may receive will be about funding cutbacks, about how we are too "radical" or "fringe", about being ungrateful. Telling the truth and retelling the truth again and again, is often very uncomfortable. Perhaps it will not hurt to feel a little uncomfortable and exposed, to get our feet wet from those waves, perhaps it will help to narrow the distance between us, the literacy workers, and them, the learners.

I have often wondered if the fact that community based literacy is predominantly staffed by women has affected the learning/teacher methodology we use (learner centered, non-formal). I think it has. We try to affirm the skills already present in the learners (and they are many and varied) and incorporate those skills into learning how to read and write. We do not use a set curriculum but rather encourage people to discover their own patterns of learning. We try to explore learning using different contexts such as social events, drawing, sewing, discussions about health, work, and family. We approach education as a holistic experience that hinges on a whole range of factors not usually present in the classroom, but underlying everyone's ability to take in and process new learning. The circular patterns of our lives, our unconscious worlds, informal, day-to-day communications with one another - all of these things are close to our female consciousness. Our non-traditional, alternative approach to education is informed by thousands of years of living in a patriarchal world but learning at the feet of our mothers and grandmothers.

According to Barbara G. Walker's The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets, Scotia (as in Nova Scotia) is the Latin form of the "Dark Aphrodite," a death goddess but also thought by some to be identical with Caillech, or Crone, who created the world. In my mind something is restlessly stirring. I look out onto the water, that symbol of birth and rebirth, of regeneration, creation, fertility and transformation. The experience of sitting with learners as they have found their voices, created new stories from old tales and transformed their lives, has opened up ways of learning for me, long ignored. As I make the connection between the water here before me and the learners back home, I have a renewed sense of conviction that our instincts about the informal learning methods we use are right.

We once spotted a whale in this beautiful Nova Scotian bay. The whale provoked a lot of excitement and awe: awe because it seems to be so totally at home in this turbulent, killing sea, its only fear is man. Unlike the whale, I am happy to stay in awe of the sea and to remain enticed by its ability to draw me out, shift my vision and realize my connectedness to the world and people. For now, I will say good-bye and look forward to sharing our thoughts about women and literacy.

Love Tracy

DEAR ANNE AND TRACY:

I am writing from my grandmother's house in a town of 400 due west of Winnipeg. For the past two days, we have been working on a quilt. The pattern is called "Tree Everlasting." I found it in a book on the history of quilting in Canada. Grandma had never seen this pattern before but she is impressed by the gaiety of the psychedelic materials I brought. Before we cut out the pieces, she showed me three of the quilts she



has made over the years.

She pieced them together herself - the first when she was in her twenties - and all were quilted by groups of women in town. Tonight on the news there was coverage of an archaeological dig near Lockport. It has found evidence of Manitoba's first farmers, native people who lived there between 1200 and 1500 A.D. Apparently women brought their knowledge of farming when they married into the tribes from further south. Interesting that instead of this, the common idea of Canadian prairie farmers is the male homesteader who arrived early in the last century to tackle the untitled frontier...

So what does this have to do with women and literacy? Both quilting and farming are complex skills, yet they are learned without the aid of a text. They are shared among people regardless of their prior knowledge or their speed. They reminded me that non-formal ways of sharing knowledge have existed for many, many years.

My main experience with non-formal education has been my experiences of community-based literacy programs. I can't begin to describe how much I have learned, and from so many different people! People older, and younger, than me. People with less education and more education. People of various races. People of every class background. People with completely different experiences and outlooks. People who wanted to learn any number of things - and were allowed to!

And always at the center of the literacy community there have been women. Women committed to education which was inclusive, which refused to label people, which validated and built on people's experiences, which encouraged people to work and learn together, which allowed people to talk about what they wanted to learn and what they thought they were learning.

Somehow this has made me think about how different my experience of formal education was. I was privileged within the school system - I could read before I started school - but still, I was always aware that competition was the driving force at school.

In Grade Four in Winnipeg I remember there were different groups in the reading class. Each group was named after a bird. I can't remember what the group I was in was called, maybe it was the swallows. The slowest readers were the ravens. Guess who got the breaks? Swallows were not allowed - in reading class, anyway - to consort with the ravens or even to help them fly. Instead, we had a virtually free period, in which we were sent to the library to read at our own pace and write book reports.

And then there was high school. As a "good student" I was constantly plagued by doubts about how socially acceptable it was to do well at school. And no matter what I did, I STILL got good marks. Talk about being a frustrated rebel!

Let me tell you a story about an adult literacy program in 1988. It is located in a church in a neighbourhood in Toronto which has remarkably few "human services" and an

abundance of factories which exceed the city's pollution standards. We have a menu of scents to delight our respiratory systems: the sharp whistle sweet of the glue factory, the dull thick ache of the animal rendering plant. So far nobody can smell the PCBs or nuclear fuel pellets. Among the riches of these beneficent factories, the adult literacy program I worked in was in a tarnished state.

One afternoon twelve adults huddled around a table trying to read together. Several rubbed their hands, blew on them to warm their fingers. The furnace had gone out as it regularly did. The janitor had showed me how to adjust the thermostat: how was I to know the unlady-like and house-bound procedure of relighting the pilot? And then we heard a mad beating of wings. Opening the office door, we discovered a terrified pigeon flying into the walls and ceiling. Our only recourse was to rip the plastic that stapled the cracks in the window shut. We left the window open to the prevailing wind. The pigeon found its own way out. We got colder.

This building, this place for people, this place where people gather, has been searching and searching for money to start. The adult literacy program is one part of this place. Basic education students learn in conditions like this. At the same time they have to acquire their education while working in one, sometimes two, sometimes more, jobs. And for women with children, having 'baby-sitting money' hardly means it is easy to find a sitter. ("She had them, she should look after them!") And 3/4 of the illiterate adults in the world are women.

In Canada, the majority of continuing education courses available are taken by university-educated adults. And 'training' is all the rage. Yet, in the past thirty years, Canadians have been sending aid to 'developing' countries - strings attached, of course. With this money we say, listen, education is important for your development. And what has been developed at home? A country where books belong to the few. Where reading is still a privilege. And where non-print, non-formal traditions of learning are deliberately ignored. Who can read a wampum belt when it is locked in a scientific, hermetically-sealed glass box?

Much of adult literacy in Canada is taught by women. In several provinces, programs with paid staff are being replaced by volunteer programs. The majority of volunteers are women, too. Women in paid positions have long hours, little job security, low levels of pay, few benefits... but I don't need to rail on about this to you! It has been your experience as much as mine. When I was in the Caribbean this May at the literacy and second language teaching workshop I noticed that most of the participants were women. They face very similar working conditions. A friend who trained as a teacher in Winnipeg has not-fond memories of paying for the privilege of being a student teacher. Her brother, the medical student, was paid for his apprenticeship.

My lover's brother is working at the SkyDome now. He says They don't know yet if the roof will work. Everything he does is ripped out and done three times - They keep changing Their minds about what They want done. Regularly there are tourists there, white men in business suits and white hard hats, seeing how their money is doing.

On the plane out here, I had settled into my seat when a man sat beside me and said not a word, not hello, nothing. He wore short grey hair and a red and white striped shirt and he looked straight ahead. As we sat there a woman a few rows behind, who spoke only halting English, discovered someone in her seat and helped them find their own. Along came a man in a business suit with a lime green airport security card pinned to his pocket. He looked at my neighbour and said, "You have 29F, too. I'll have to get to get the girl straighten this out." Without further interaction he headed up the aisle to find the 'girl.' My neighbour turned to me and pulled out his boarding card. "I don't have my glasses with me," he said, "Which seat does it say I have?" I pointed out 26F, three rows up. But before he had a chance to begin to move the executive was back, allowing the flight attendant. She, for the business man, asked to see my neighbour's boarding card and repeated what I had just said to him. Well, it *is* her job...

In June I was camping in a provincial park in eastern Ontario. One day we hiked along the trail which leads to a pond and Beaver dam. The pond was huge, covering what once may have been meadows. We stopped to listen to the frogs croak, to hear the splash of their return to water. We watched dragonflies dart among the bulrushes on invisible wings and wings that buzzed when they touched each other. We delighted to see the blanket of lily pads, the blooms of the Fragrant Water-Lily and the American Lotus. We saw a snake sunning in the branches of a bush. Then the path led beyond the dam and we were on the other side of this haphazard pile of sticks that rose several feet over our heads and kept back all the water. It struck me as an irony that the beaver (Castor Canadensis) is Canada's national animal. These animals created this environment in which so many different beings thrive. This was my first glimpse of their power. Why are we so unfamiliar with it? Instead, we are familiar with having 'beaver' thrown at us as a word we should shrink from.

What pattern is this? Has it been seen before? Maybe we just need to keep putting the pieces together in their haphazard way, binding the layers together, creating our own patterns with careful threads. We can sit around the frame wearing our protective thimbles, stitching and talking. Whoever said crazy quilts weren't beautiful.

See you in September,

Tannis

## DEAR TRACY AND TANNIS:

How are you? Nicaragua sends its warmest revolutionary greetings. I hope the program is holding together relatively well through the inevitable summer slump. (Why am I always concerned that things are going to fall apart while I am gone?) And I hope that you are surviving it all in good spirits. We agreed to go off on our various trips and think about women and literacy. Well this is a natural place to do it. Women, literacy and the struggle for justice are about all you can think about in a place like this. I find myself wondering around in a daze thinking of the contrasts between Ontario and Nicaragua. Its enough to make you head reel and the similarities are enough to keep you permanently cynical about the struggle for justice in this world. I want to tell you what I did today so that you can get an idea of how inspiring our tour has been.

I have just left a meeting with a literacy group in a small town outside the capital called Ciudad Sandino. This program was given honourable mention by UNESCO last year, for their accomplishments in the field of literacy, which included the creation of some new materials. All this from a program completely reliant on volunteers with meager resources and absolutely no budget for paper or staff (Don't tell our funders.) Most of the volunteers were women from the neighbourhood. During our visit they explained their methodology which was a direct application of Freirian philosophy. I couldn't help but notice with envy how easily Nicaragua fit this model with their language and political climate. (Especially when I think of how we stumble around trying to make Freire fit into downtown Toronto.) They explained that the goal of all education in Nicaragua is participation, and that a high number of community leaders come out of the literacy classes.

They showed us the standard workbook which they use for the majority of learners who have just started classes and who have never written before. The first page I opened said, (and I translate), "Women have always been exploited; the revolution creates the possibility of liberation." While the director of the center was calmly explaining how this statement is used to initiate conversation with the learners about their lives and how the revolution has affected them, I was going through a revolution of my own. I was suddenly struck with the huge difference between this reality and my own back in Toronto. In Canada we dare not speak in such direct political language although we are frequently dealing with the same exploitation. I must admit by this point I was feeling completely overcome with envy and was thinking of arranging a leave of absence from my work in Canada for the next ten years.

Before we left the literacy program that morning, the volunteers started asking us about our program in Canada. We told them about our struggles with funding and our waiting lists. We started to compare their shortage of paper and pencils to our shortage of government commitment. Ironically enough we all came to the solemn conclusion that our situation was worse because without ideals they insisted, education is meaningless. I will probably never forget that brief conversation. It left me with so many questions about our own program, about literacy programs in the developed world and most

importantly about the messages we send to women learners in our own program. What messages do we give to women in our own programs?

Why are we still struggling with even the most basic political notions - especially when it comes to women? And why are we so frightened to assume any political ideas on behalf of the people who come to our programs? Remember what we went through trying to create a group for women to get together and how nervous we were about actually calling it a women's group since that assumed a certain type of commitment? And why in this affluent land we call home are we still stumbling around trying to find sufficient funds for baby-sitting subsidies and bus tickets? In this context all of those struggles seem almost ludicrous given that our resources are nowhere near as depleted as in Nicaragua.

In the afternoon of the same day we visited a ceramics factory, owned and operated by a women's collective just outside of Estelli in the north of Nicaragua near the Honduran border. The factory itself was surprisingly beautiful with high ceilings, white plaster walls, lots of natural light coming through an inner courtyard and a steady cool breeze wafting in through large spaces left between the wall and the roof. A woman from the collective explained that most of the women had been either labourers in a nearby tobacco factory or prostitutes before the revolution. After working in oppressive environments for most of their lives the women had made a conscious effort to create a work place that was pleasant to be in, and believe me they were successful.

It saddened me to hear that one of the major obstacles in getting the factory started was the attitude of the women's partners. Many women were finding themselves working full days at the factory, going home to the normal load of house- work only to be beaten by their partners, who were probably jealous of their success. The women's collective realized it had to take action because many of their members were suffering to such an extent that they could no longer do their work. With the help of the local women's organization (a branch of AMNLAE), they got organized, and told the men to stop. In many cases the violence didn't stop after the first warning. The women responded by beating the men in turn. As you might guess most of these relationships quickly dissolved (the men are probably still in shock).

Its funny our reaction to that story at the time was basically, right on and then we laughed at the simplicity of it all. Whenever I tell the same story here people respond with shock or surprise and quickly change the subject. I'm wondering, is their reaction due to a dislike of violence, or are they suddenly struck by our own passivity in the face of the same situation here? I was convinced before I went to Nicaragua that we in the literacy movement are doing our best in a difficult situation. Now I believe our resources are being wasted and our government is not committed to educating everybody. They hover over the middle of the road when it comes to women's issues and literacy and we never quite get to the point where programs have enough secure funding. What a dream it would be to be able to plan and run a program that could afford to support the special needs of learners - especially of women. We could then

ensure that this time their encounter with learning will actually be a positive experience.

When it was time to leave Nicaragua I felt a quiet respect and sadness for this tiny nation that dares to stand up to a world power. After seeing all this in Nicaragua, I return to Canada a little deflated and depressed. I recognize that they are a nation ripe with difficulties but they still have a great deal to teach us. I was impressed with the fact that it is a country with ideals that it is using meager resources to their fullest advantage and most importantly that it is taking education seriously. There is something very humane about this. Something that is lacking when I go back to my program in Toronto and greet yet another homeless single mother who can't read. At this rate she probably never will. It's time to turn in for the night. What a way to spend a summer holiday. Next year I swear I will take a real vacation where I won't end up thinking about literacy at all. Maybe I'll go play miniature golf in Florida or something.

Until we meet again.

Love and hugs, Anne

## A NOTE ON OUR COVER ARTIST

Buseje Bailey is a Black artist and activist who lives in Toronto. Born in Jamaica, she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from York University, where she majored in sculpture and printmaking. Her way of being active in the community is through her paintings. She is developing her curatorial skills, co-curating a show due to open in February 1989 for Black Women, "When and Where We Enter," at A-Space Gallery. She is also starting a collective and organizing space for the Centre for Black Artists.

The painting [untitled] on our front cover is a portrait of her daughter Cherrel, and resulted from the artist's need to incorporate child rearing into her work as an artist. "Third World Madonnas," which appears on the back cover, is a response to the art-school notion of classic European madonnas; represented are Black mothers who are struggling to raise their kids - and, in the artist's words - "through the ages we've done a pretty good job, in spite of the European intruders' assumption that they know better."



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## e-MAN-ci- patory Literacy

*An Essay Review of Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*

**I HAVE FOUND THE WORK OF FREIRE TO BE** important to the development of more critical approaches to education; I don't want to lose this in my rage at the stagnation and closures within the work and the refusal of THE MAN (or his followers) to hear what feminists are saying. While he exposes a politics of listening to "the people", of "speaking with" rather than "speaking to," women are present as window dressing (the foreword by Ann Berthoff) or as an afterthought (occasional references to women). Maddening, because the text has much to offer in constructing critical approaches to literacy which feminists can draw (and have drawn) upon in their practice.

In writing this review of *Literacy* by Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1987), I struggle with my anger at the sexism that implicitly defines the text, as well as with my continuing ambivalence about the work itself.

The book consists of a collection of essays written by Freire since 1980 in which he reflects upon his work in various literacy campaigns, as well as several collaborative essays and dialogues written with Donaldo Macedo.<sup>1</sup> There is also a major, theoretical introduction by Henry Giroux. There are chapters about (il)literacy in the USA, as well as in Africa, but distinctions between the two very different situations are sometimes blurred. This is most noticeable in the melding together of Giroux's analysis of literacy as cultural (re)production and resistance, particularly among school students in North America, with Freire's work among adults in villages within countries

undergoing revolutionary change. Extensive excerpts from the literacy notebooks designed by Freire for use in the literacy campaigns São Tome and Príncipe form the longest chapter, providing a concrete sense of the pedagogical and ideological approach of the program. Of special interest are the dialogues with Macedo. Rather than dialogues, I found these to be more like sympathetic interviews in which Macedo provides Freire with a space to answer his critics.

BY KATHLEEN ROCKHILL

The most controversial aspect of the book and, to my mind, the most significant, is the dialogue about the literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau, Freire reveals that he argued against the use of Portuguese as the language in which the literacy campaign should be conducted, but, once Mario Cabral decided that this was the only viable way to proceed, Freire suppressed his disagreement in the interests of unity, arguing that: "What I could not do in Guinea-Bissau is overstep the political limitations of the moment," A letter written by Freire to Mario Cabral in 1977 is published for the first time in the appendix (this letter was withheld from the collection, *Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, by Freire - a moment lasts ten years!), In this letter, Freire advocates the use of Creole rather than Portuguese, insightful outlining the consequences of teaching literacy in the language of domination namely the reproduction of the class structure and perpetuation of the colonialist mentality, as well as the failure of the literacy campaign for the "masses", That literacy cannot be taught in the language of the oppressor without perpetuating [his] hegemony is, at last, acknowledged not only in discourse, but in practice as well.

The issue of Guinea-Bissau is important, for it brings out the enormous problems with a mandate for political unity, one that has contributed to the perpetuation, world-wide, of



literacy being taught, unproblematically, in languages of domination, This practice has raised severe problems for the teaching of literacy in formerly colonized countries, such as Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, I also observed the severity of this problem in my work among Spanish-speaking immigrants in Los Angeles who were attempting to become literate in English, The difficulty, as Freire points out, is that literacy must be an integral part of the social practices of people's everyday lives if it is to be meaningful, and if the necessary opportunities for practice are to be available. What Freire does not address is how literacy, as a social practice, is gendered. It is particularly problematic for women to become literate in the dominant language as they tend to be denied access (sometimes forcefully by the men in their lives) to the public spheres of interaction where the dominant language is spoken; so practice becomes possible only in the classrooms (if they are "permitted" to attend), or in doing written work within the privacy of their homes. A related issue is that the form of the dominant language, as a "man-made language," eclipses women's presence, cuts out their discourses, and effectively silences their gender-specific experiences.

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However flawed, it is the attention given to language that is one of the key contributions of Freire's work. Language is not simply a tool, or a medium of communication; it is "packed with ideology" and reproduces the oppressor's world. Because literacy is also about learning a language, it involves more than the technical skills of reading and writing. As Freire puts it, one must learn to read the world, as well as the word. His project is to develop a literacy for emancipation; critical literacy is essential if the practices of the oppressor are not to be reproduced as [his] language is learned. Yes, the dominant language and the attendant discourses must be learned, eventually, but first one must begin from one's own language, one's history and experience. In literacy for emancipation, popular culture is the starting point, but one must learn both to reclaim one's culture by naming the world, as well as critically to reflect upon the world as socially and politically constructed. Experience is the crucial point from which one works,

experience as well as the reasoning behind it." Also key is the idea of "illiteracy" as an act of resistance, that is, of refusal to take up the language of the oppressor. The challenge for the teacher is to use the few spaces available within education to build upon this resistance. To do this, the teacher must have "political clarity" - that is, know how to "properly" read the world - and respect the experiences and linguistic codes of the students. There are no "how-to's"; one must figure it out in the process of revolutionary practice.

While I agree with the points about language, experience, critical literacy and resistance, I strongly disagree with the facile treatment of the teaching situation. There is an underlying assumption of unity in Freire's work which I find disturbing; I find it even more disturbing when unity is raised to the level of a "first principle" for "proper" political practice. We see this reflected in the literacy notebooks where students learn; "The national reconstruction demands of us: *Unity, Discipline, Work, Vigilance*. And "unity" kept Freire from publicly disagreeing with Cabral. And "unity" is used against feminists throughout Latin America; it has long been used by the "left" in oppositional political situations (including in the USA and Canada) to silence feminist concerns. In the "politics of possibility" which Freire advocates, is it not possible to imagine a world in which political solidarity does not require the silencing of differences; a world in which Freire might have supported the work in Guinea-Bissau, but maintained his difference with respect to the language issue? Might have "saved" the literacy campaign? And isn't the attention to difference, to disagreement, essential to a critical politics of transformation?

Along with the emphasis upon unity comes a penchant for orthodoxy and the assumed authority of the "proper" political perspective. Thus, the work stagnates; it cannot handle critique - ironic, when his is what the approach is about. While Freire, Macedo and Giroux raise the question of differences and the need to respect them, these are not developed. Apparently, all teaching situations abound with the unity of teacher and students against a common oppressor, variously named as capitalism or colonialism. The only exception, named by Giroux, is the example he gives of a *feminist* teacher (the most lengthy reference to feminism in the book) in which the teacher engaged in the "wrong" practice of inciting the "scorn and resistance" of the students when she showed them "a variety of feminist articles, films, and other curriculum materials." Clearly the teacher's error is assuming an authoritative stance, yet there is no analysis of how the raising of gender might create this dynamic in a way that raising issues of class does not. Issues of authority, power, and value differences within the classroom, differences among students, as well as between students and teacher, are ignored. Not only am I angered by Giroux's example, but I find the work in general glosses over serious teaching and learning issues. I don't want a "how-to" manual; I would like to see serious analysis of the problems faced, especially of power dynamics within various educational situations. Orthodoxy brings with it a deification of Freire, as well as a didacticism in textual material that leads to precisely what Freire talks against - the lack of coherence between discourse and practice. Nowhere is this lack of coherence between discourse and practice more evident than in the treatment - or non-treatment - of feminism. Yes, there are a few references to feminism as an important movement of resistance, which is popular these days, but nowhere is the challenge of feminism addressed, let alone taken seriously. Even the

simplest tenet of feminism - the use of non-sexist language- is not adhered to. Especially ironic is that Freire is "the one" who pointed out the power of naming, of voicing, of fighting the oppressor's language , by naming the world from the perspective of the oppressed. Not only is the generic "he" used throughout but there is also the invisibilisation of women in the reference structure and content of the text. This comes home in the literacy notebook where work is presented as man's work the only productive spheres being the farms, factories and schools as experienced through the eyes of Pedro and Antonio.

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When Macedo directly questions Freire about feminism, Freire answers that all "factors" have to be understood in terms of a class analysis. I agree that class is central, but, what about gender? What is troublesome is the systematic non-reference to feminism; even indirect questioning about "differences", Freire typically turns to other oppressed groups, never women, to illustrate his points. Apparently, patriarchy does not exist. When Freire refers to oppression by elites, he includes women, as well as men, as oppressors, making no references to the difference in women's access to elite circles. While he argues that the critical educator should make the "inherent theory" in practices of resistance by feminists and other oppositional movements "flourish so that people can appropriate the theories of their own practice," he does not do this himself in the case of feminism.

While the text incites my anger, it is also well worth reading for the clarity that Freire, Macedo and Giroux bring to critical educational practice and theory. Vital to feminist practice in education is their analysis of language, experience and resistance. As to the difficult and conflict ridden issues of difference, power and authority, we need to continue to forge our own way. While class, gender and race are crucial to critical analysis and practice, they don't work in the same ways. Consciousness raising may be a feminist variation of critical consciousness, but to work we cannot assume unity , either among women or between men and women. Politics - that is, struggles of power and difference - pervade not only our classrooms, but the most intimate corners of our lives. Discourses of

optimism and revolutionary transformation need to be tempered by a hard, and often painful, look at the contradictions, conflicts and chaos within and among us. This is especially true in literacy work where issues of gender, class and race are deeply structured, pervading theory and practice. However painfully and haltingly, we are learning to confront these issues, as well as each other and ourselves. Emancipator literacy is borne out of a politics of anger, as well as hope; confrontation as well as love; conflict as well as unity; chaos as well as discipline.

<sup>1</sup> Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, was exiled from his home country for his radical approaches to teaching literacy among the peasants. He wrote about this work in the classic, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which captured the imaginations of radical, progressive and liberal educators around the world.

While in exile, Freire, through the World Council of Churches, was influential in the design of literacy campaigns in socialist revolutionary countries, especially in Africa, but in Latin America as well. The premise of his work, that learning to read "the word" must not be separated from learning to read "the world" critically - that is, with attention to the engineering of oppression through capitalism - has been fundamental to the development of critical approaches to education, as well as the teaching of literacy, around the world.

Freire stresses the contradictory nature of education. True, education is a tool of domination, but it can also be used as a tool for liberation. It is his emphasis upon the political uses of education for liberation which has provided an important platform for revolutionary educators, a politics of hope replacing the pessimism of other Marxist approaches to educational analysis.

## Tutors' Reflections

**B**ecoming a Volunteer Tutor opened a new world tome. I am a Senior and past the usual age of gainful employment but I'm still anxious to work at something useful and challenging. [After a short training program at Fraser Valley College, Chilliwack, B.C.], I returned to my small town of Hope in search of students. The student who cannot read or write English is sometimes hard to contact He or she is proud and shy and unsure about going back to school, but the local branch of Fraser Valley College lined up some candidates and I was in business...

D. had attended high school, rather intermittently. Now he wanted to register for a welding course but he had not got a Grade Twelve "equivalency." To get this he had to master "the paragraph"...

M., from Honduras, wanted to be able to read and write English. [We started with] the ABC so she could use the telephone book... We used advertisements... because she craved to understand bargains... illustrated cookie recipes [introduced] her to Canadian cooking...

G. [at first was] so deeply shy and [had] such a small vocabulary that it was hard to coax her to communicate... Her real need was to talk.

The fun and fascination of being a Volunteer Tutor is unending. Because each student has his or her own special needs there are no text books to suit every situation, and imagination and ingenuity are essential... One day you may be showing a student how to make correct change for a twenty dollar bill, the next you may find yourself explaining the contour lines on a map, on the next your student may be struggling to explain to you, in English, how to make "chapattis." Volunteer Tutoring [is a wonderful world] and I'm grateful it opened up for me.

***Joan Greenwood, Hope, B.C.***

When I volunteered to be a literacy tutor, I expected to do a lot of giving. I wasn't prepared for what my learner would give to me. Heather is a 36-year-old mom on social assistance... one of the many who... go to school, but for whom standard teaching methods are not successful. She has made tremendous progress not only with respect to literacy, but in the realm of personal confidence and independence... on her own, with very little support from those around her... I have taught Heather about reading and writing, but Heather has taught me even more about human dignity and courage... Thank you, Heather.

***Barbara Franck, I-CARE PROGRAM New Westminster, B.C.***

I will never forget the first time I saw Lena [*not her real name*] read... I was overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task I had undertaken... Lena knew a few words by sight like "sale" and "exit," but she couldn't sound out the words she didn't know ...I was terrified. Who was I to think I could teach someone to read and write? I was no teacher; just someone who liked to read and wanted to contribute some time to a worthwhile cause.

Lena was 26 years old, divorced, and living on welfare. She had a five year-old daughter who was born deaf but had recently been given an operation to restore her hearing. One of Lena's goals was to be able to read her daughter a story ... She had quit school in Grade Nine after it became apparent to her that she could not possibly keep up... Listening to Lena talk, I felt my panic subside. She was the one facing the challenge. All she asked was for me to be there to help her.

Before the end of our first two-hour session Lena was reading three letter words.. .One short month [later] she came to class with the news that she had read her daughter a story book for the first time... Six months later, Lena still has problems with long, complicated

words but she is usually able to break them down and sound them out... Along with her reading skills, her self-confidence has grown enormously. By shaking off the stigma of being illiterate, Lena has found a new feeling of self-worth.

I, too, have gained a lot from our tutoring sessions... Lena has made me aware of [how inability to read and write limits people's possibilities]. She also has shown me that the problem can be solved...

***Terry Dahlgren, Timmins Literacy Council***

**E**ducation to me is very important and one must have it in order to even try to stand on the solid ground. Literacy is the biggest issue we all face and this problem involves not being able to read or write. But this is misunderstood. People see it as if the person has a deformation, and they seem to stay away from a person that doesn't have this ability... Anyone who knows someone who has this problem should take the time to try and help. It will only take a few hours out of your life, where this other has to suffer for the rest of her or his life not being able to read or write. All women should also do something now while there is still time, for our children will soon grow out of our reach, and most of them will have this disability and then it will be too late to help them.

***Meeqwetch!***

***Irene Stead, Literacy Coordinator, Wauzhushk Onigum Nation, Kenora***

## Is It Her Voice If She Speaks Their Words?

**A** superintendent of education speaks to adult literacy practitioners about new literacy policy. He tells them they are to use a "learner-centered approach" and have as their objective the "empowerment" of learners. Everyone appears pleased. Some think that practitioners have finally made a lasting impression on the way boards of education will think about literacy, others feel challenged to do their literacy work in a more enhanced way. But some listen and feel disheartened.

We who work in the literacy movement as feminists and political activists are among the disheartened. We believe that this superintendent's words, although they sound progressive, do not represent the interests of literacy learners. This is because we analyze the problem of illiteracy by looking at the economic place literacy learners hold in our society. For the most part learners are under-educated and have very little socioeconomic

privilege. This understanding of literacy learners' place with in society leads us to claim that learners' interests will only be represented if literacy practice reflects a commitment to a more equitable society. This locates our literacy work in a broader movement for social change. Although the superintendent talks about the empowerment of literacy learners, we know that his intention is different from ours. As a result we listen carefully to the meaning of his words.

We have learned from feminism that the same words can be used to describe two very different goals. For example, feminism is used to describe the goal of women climbing up the corporate ladder and it is also used to describe the goal of women creating collective working structures. While these goals were very different, the word feminism is used to mean both. For women interested in social change this has been a serious problem. One of the ways this problem has been addressed has been to refine our understanding of feminism through terms such as radical feminism, socialist feminism and liberal feminism.

Our experience as feminists helps us in refining our understanding of literacy practice. It helps us to understand that when the superintendent uses the term learner-centered he probably means literacy learners receiving individualized instruction. And that when we use the term learner-centered we mean literacy learners participating in a movement for social change. As it was for feminism, the disguising of this difference is problematic

**BY ELEINE GABER-KATZ & JENNY HORSMAN**

One of the ways that we can address problem is to develop a theory of which will clearly reflect the work we do. It will also help us to understand practice and articulate our goals. When words embody our practice they will not easily be co-opted and rendered meaningless. If our practice is to be our political project for social change we will need to learn how to articulate the political perspective which guides work and generates its meaning.

A theory of literacy will assist those programs which have social change as their goal to identify the differences between the various literacy practices. This theory of literacy will articulate the range of perspectives: critical, liberal and conservative. It will enable us to identify a critical perspective from which we will develop a critical pedagogy. In the process of refining our understanding literacy practice we will be uncovering the differences between a critical pedagogy and a good pedagogy. Good pedagogy assists adults to learn to read and write, but a critical pedagogy also words towards social change based on an understanding that "society ; is both exploitative and oppressive" (Weiler, 1988).

One way of beginning this process of refinement is to learn more about the theoretical assumptions which underlie our work. Even though some practitioners argue that they have no need for academic theory because it is remote from their practice, theoretical contributions have already influenced literacy work. However, these contributions have not always been identified. Sometimes we assume that literacy practice comes from common wisdom. We have not yet rigorously scrutinized the theoretical assumptions which have shaped what we do. As a result we are unaware of the origins of the theories and the perspectives that they represent. In addition we do not keep up with the new contributions to these theories, and we are prevented from participating in developing them further.

For example, the language theories of Ken Goodman (1982) and Frank Smith (1978) have strongly influenced literacy practice. These theorists recommend using meaningful language when teaching reading and writing. This has meant that practitioners teach reading from units of meaning which are whole - that is to say, from sentences rather than from parts of words such as letters and syllables. Hence this theory is known as the whole language approach.

Whole language is the theoretical basis for using language experience stories. In this approach learners tell stories about experiences in their lives. The tutors act as scribes writing down the learners' words and use these stories as reading material in literacy lessons. Language experience is frequently used in a wide variety of programs. Regardless of the goal of the program, this method is touted as successful.

But whole language theory has never had to withstand criticism from a critical perspective. We have not yet asked whether the whole language approach is simply good pedagogy or whether it is also the basis for critical pedagogy. Because language experience stories are used by programs with different perspectives, we will want to know the difference between how this approach will be used by practitioner using good pedagogy and a practitioner using critical pedagogy.





John Bull's Farm alphabet [c. 1879].  
'J's for John Bull, who this pretty  
farm owns; He's watching the  
women who pick up the stones;

Another theory which has guided literacy work is found in the writings of Paulo Freire. One of Freire's contributions to our work in Canada has been to pose a concept of empowerment for literacy learners. Freire suggests that learners are empowered by entering into dialogue with their peers. Through! this dialogue they learn to read and write as they name their experience and speak about their world.

Many Canadian practitioners state empowerment as a goal for their literacy work. Freire's work in critical pedagogy has led us to a community orientation for our literacy practice. The concept of empowerment provides the theoretical basis for creating learning environments which are friendly, accessible and comfortable. Literacy work often takes place in local centers in the community with practitioners, learners and volunteers working together as equals to build the community.

But when we work with Freire's ideas, we draw from societal contexts other than our own, When Freire talks about empowerment it is within a revolutionary context, However, because our context is advanced western capitalism, we have come to mean by empowerment an individual, personal empowerment and not the transformation of society. For example, we call it empowerment when literacy students fill in application forms or go to the local shopping mall by themselves for the first time. When personal empowerment is interpreted as achievement within an educational setting the transformative aspect of this theory is lost. As a result we need to work further with the concept of empowerment to find out if it can be the basis for a transformative pedagogy in the Canadian context. As it stands now, it is not yet an appropriate critical pedagogy for adult literacy work in Canada. The question is where do we go from here?

When we develop a literacy theory from a critical perspective we will benefit from feminists who argue that there is a dialectical relationship between theory and practice. This understanding will contribute to developing a literacy practice oriented to social change. Theories that are conceived by those who are not familiar with the lived experiences of literacy learners, nor with the societal context in which they live, do not provide an adequate basis for developing a literacy theory.

Both critical education theory and feminist theories of language have a lot to offer literacy practitioners. In spite of the limitations of Freire's critical education theory for literacy work in Canada, like Weiler we believe, "both critical educational theory and feminist

theory share an underlying concern with the relationship subject and an oppressive social structure", both emphasize that social structures and knowledge are socially constructed and thus are open to contestation and change" (1988, p.4). This belief that social change is possible, and that literacy learners must also participate in creating a more equitable society, are vital concepts for a critical pedagogy for literacy.

Before we had a feminist theory, we found that our experiences and our interests as women were not well represented in theories. Part of the process of beginning to create a feminist theory was a process of naming our experiences and demanding that these experiences be discussed and considered in the public realm. The practice of writing down the lived experiences of adult literacy learners, who are disempowered by society, will also be part of the process of creating a critical theory of literacy.

We believe that our practice will change when we begin to engage in critical pedagogy. Discovering the difference between the two is in itself exciting and stimulating. The language experience approach is one example of practice which could either be used to further the goal of good pedagogy or also to further the goal of critical pedagogy.

Earlier we suggested that language experience as a method is probably good pedagogy but is not necessarily critical pedagogy. We cannot be clear about what critical pedagogy is when programs which have different goals all claim that language experience should be used because "it works." If we talk about this method in terms of its success without tying it closely to a clearly articulated goal, we blur the different ways in which language experience stories can be used. It is extremely important to our work for social change to know precisely why we use language experience stories, because it shifts how it is that we use them.

When we look carefully at language, we see that language has the power to shape our experiences. Referring to Whorf's work, Dale Spender observes that "language is not neutral. It is not merely a vehicle which carries ideas. It is itself a shaper of ideas" (1980, p.139). Like women, literacy learners need to become aware that language is not neutral. Language shapes their experiences and as a result their experiences need to be represented in the language. Part of our political project then becomes finding ways to include literacy learners in the public realm by assisting them to create language which represents their experiences. A feminist critique of language says women must become visible in the language. As Spender observes:



*Alphabet of Common Objects*  
[c. 1860]. 'The Lion was not  
drawn from life: the  
Milkmaid was;

*Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories and the meanings which have been invented by males - though not of course by all males-and they have then been validated by references to other males. In this process women have played little or no part. It has been male subjectivity which has been the source of those meanings, including the meaning that their own subjectivity is objectivity (1980, p.143).*

Many literacy practitioners recognize language also excludes those who are poor. The goal of a critical pedagogy will be to teach adults to read and write language, all the while being cognizant that language is subjective and has the power to shape reality. How can we justify teaching literacy learners a language from which they have been excluded.

We know that it is "crazy-making" if our experiences are misnamed or if there are no names for our experiences. Chris Weedon says that, "What an event means to an individual depends on the ways of interpreting the world, on the discourses available to her at any particular moment" (1987, p. 79). For example, what language describes the events in your life if you are a single mother on benefits who has a female partner/lover? Are you a housewife? Are you a working mother? How do you see/describe yourself compared with how others see/describe you? Where are you represented in your children's readers that depict "family" life?

This experience of going through life and not finding your experiences represented is what literacy learners experience. It is powerful when literacy learners get together in groups and name their experiences. We have learned from feminism of the power of getting together with other people who think and speak the same as you do: when your experiences are affirmed you know you are not crazy.

It is true that language experience stories told by learners to tutors are part of good pedagogy. The stories create effective learning exercises for literacy students. They may also be shared with other learners because they are good learning materials. Learners find these stories interesting when they see their own struggles reflected. Because the language of learners is used in the stories they are easy to read. Language experience stories can also provide a source of inexpensive and creative reading material where materials are direly needed.

But these stories, if they are part of critical pedagogy, will also have another dimension. This dimension will reflect the intention to bring learners' language into the public sphere. It is within this sphere that the stories demonstrate their power and they make visible the

class, race and gender bias in language.

It is a transformative act to document learners' lives: to publish oral histories and to bring them into the public realm. Through this act we are challenging what is considered to be literature. In part, literature is considered "good" because it accurately reflects the experiences of its readers. Historically literature has been primarily the domain of a male white elite and what passes as good literature is what accurately reflects their experiences.

Two instances where learners' stories challenge the common conception of "literature" come from literacy programs. In one example from Britain, literacy practitioners sought government funding reserved for the "arts" to publish student writing. In doing so they asserted that the stories of working class writers are literature. This challenge to what counts as literature forced the funding body to articulate why the working-class stories were not literature. In doing so they revealed the class-based nature of that which is recognized as "literature" (Maguire et al., 1982).

Our second example is from a community-based literacy program in downtown Toronto. East End Literacy published some of their learners' stories as part of a reading series for literacy learners. A recent book launching for a story about a woman who was physically abused and sterilized was a major celebration. This public event, which hundreds of people attended, presented the learner as author, not as poor literacy learner. This challenged our notion of who creates literature in our society and allowed us to see literacy learners as story-tellers and authors of words.

East End Literacy's practice of encouraging learners to take on the rigorous work of authoring also acts as a catalyst for their learners working together in groups. They take ownership over the production process when they write and edit stories together. Teams of learners work on many of the stages of the production process. In this collective process of producing print materials about their lives learners share their experiences and find a language to speak together.

In conclusion, we no longer feel disheartened by the superintendent's words but are challenged by them. This is because they lead us to a process of discovering how our voices can speak the meaning of our words. This article, which was inspired by numerous discussion with feminist colleagues working in literacy, begins that process. As practitioners we have a strong commitment to working for social change. As feminists we know any theory will have to reflect our experiences and articulate our goals. When search for the meaning in what we do we build the theoretical basis for developing a critical literacy practice.

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Smith, F. *Reading Without Nonsense*. New York: Teachers College Press 1978.

Spender, D. *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

Weedon, C. *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Weiler, K. *Women Teaching for Change: Gender, Class & Power*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1988.

*Elaine Gaber-Katz and Jenny Horsman are feminist literacy practitioners from Toronto who have collaborate Dona number of different literacy projects. They facilitated an evaluation of the Community Literacy Program in which Elaine was working. Together they co-chaired the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy for several years. Now they've begun to write together.*

## Feminist Pedagogy *A Short Bibliography*

**Implicit in many of the articles in this issue is the idea that women have unique ways of knowing and unique needs as learners. More important, how we teach is a matter of political choice. This brief bibliography is intended as an introduction to some recent thinking about feminist pedagogy.**

Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, D.M., Goldberger, N.R., Tarule, J.M., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self Voice and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

An exploration and attempt to validate die "ways of knowing" that women have cultivated over time, and that have sustained them in their struggles for identity. The book explores women's knowledge within both traditional educational institutions and unofficial learning contexts.

Bricker-Jenkins, Mary and Hooyman, Nancy. "Feminist Pedagogy in Education for Social Change" in *Feminist Teacher*, Vol.2, No.2., 1987. (Bloomington, IN: Feminist Teacher Editorial Collective, Indiana University), pp. 36-42.

An exploration of how certain feminist themes would influence classroom practice: ending patriarchy, empowerment; the personal as political; acceptance of the non-rational or the idea of "many truths."

Bunch, C., and Pollack, S., (eds.), *Learning Our Way: Essays in Feminist Education*. Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983.

Good collection of essays written over a number of years, reflecting on the assumption that feminist education is political. Topics range from teaching specific skills (reading, writing, computer technology) to developments in feminist theory and knowledge.

Cully, M., Portuges, C., (eds.), *Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

An excellent collection of essays on feminist pedagogies written over a number of years and reflecting a wide range of classroom experiences. Topics include attempts at defining feminist pedagogy; analyses of the teacher as "other" and of the uses of authority and anger in the feminist classroom; investigations of how race, class and political orientation inform feminist inquiry.

Eichler, Margrit. *Nonsexist Research Methods: A Practical Guide*. Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, Inc. 1988.

A set of guidelines for uncovering sexism in research and practical suggestions for avoiding it in the future.

Finn, G. and Miles, A., (eds.). *Feminism in Canada: From Pressure to Politics*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982.

Essays concerned with feminist scholarship in a variety of disciplines and feminist politics. Topics include ideology, women and power, women in Jamaica and feminist praxis.

Gaskell, J. and McLaren A., (eds.). *Women and Education: A Canadian Perspective*. Calgary: Detselig, 1987.

An excellent overview of women and education in Canada which argues that we must reformulate how we look at issues in education both inside and outside educational institutions.

Gilligan, C. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

A classic in understanding women's development which examines how certain psychological theories have misrepresented women and explores female psychology from a feminist perspective.

Hoffman, L., and Culley, M., (eds.). *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985.

Essays about "personal narratives," such as letters, diaries and oral testimony, as particularly a women's form. Most of the essays are themselves autobiographical and concerned with how literature is produced. Collection attends to specificities of culture, class, race, gender and history.

Hooks, B. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Powerful challenge of feminist theory that ignores the experiences of women at the margins - women of colour, poor and working class women, disabled women. While recognizing that difficult theoretical language might be necessary for developing feminist thought in the academy, Hooks also insists that feminist educators must make those ideas comprehensible to a variety of audiences.

Howe, Florence. *Myths of Coeducation: Selected Essays*. 1964-1983. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Essays on women and education that span twenty years of Howe's life as a teacher, writer and scholar. She explores how male curriculum has devalued women's experience and develops an historical perspective on women's education in the United States over the last 150 years.

Hull, Gloria, T. Bell Scott, Patricia, and Smith, Barbara (eds.). *But Some of Us are Braves: Black Women's Studies*. Old Westbury NY: The Feminist Press, 1982.

A wealth of materials of relevance to Black Studies and Women's Studies, including essays, bibliographies, lists of resource centers and course outlines.

Morgan, Kathryn Pauly. "The Perils and Paradoxes of Feminist Pedagogy". *Resources for Feminist Research*, Vol. 16, No.3, September, 1987.

Exploration of the paradoxes that ensue from teaching in a feminist fashion within academic settings that embody patriarchal beliefs.

Rich, A. *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Classic collection of essays by poet Adrienne Rich on a variety of feminist issues. Several discuss matters of particular relevance to feminist pedagogy; for example, "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" (1972); "Claiming and Education" (1977); "Taking

Women Students Seriously" (1978).

Spender, D. *Invisible Women: The Schooling Scandal*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing cooperative, 1982.

Looks at how women are educated, the myth of equal opportunity and the exclusion of women from knowledge. Spender suggests that the 'powerless' (women, blacks, working class people, old people, homosexuals and disabled people) must develop their own knowledge.

Thompson, J.L. *Learning Liberation: Women's Response to Men's Education*. London: Croom Helm, 1983.

Focusing particularly on sexism in adult and continuing education, Thompson argues for women-centered education and for the importance of subjectivity in the formulation of theory .

Weedon, C. *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Examination of how post-structuralist theory affects feminist critique and practice. Weedon outlines key principles of post-structuralist theory and some applications.

Weiler, K. *Teaching Women for Change* Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1988.

Focusing on the feminist teachers and administrators who try to implement change, Weiler develops a critical perspective on the educational system and classroom relations and evolves a teacher-focused feminist pedagogy .

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Granada Publishing, Ltd. 1977 (first published, 1929).

Woolf's classic work on the obstacles facing women in society focuses on the woman as writer. She argues that women will be free only when they have the autonomy provided by "a room of one's own" and an independent income.

Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977 (first published, 1938).

Sequel to *A Room of One's Own*, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf launches a scathing attack on the patriarchal ruling class; challenges England's right to call itself a democracy while women are not free; continues her discussion of educational opportunities for women; and argues that funds for the military should be diverted to the needs of women.

*Radical Teacher*, Issue #18, 1981. (Cambridge MA: Boston Women Teachers Group).



Special issue of a news journal of socialist theory and practice. Notable is Bernie Fisher's historical study of the idea: "What is Feminist Pedagogy?"

*Women's Education des femmes*

Published quarterly by Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW), articles deal with education and learning from a feminist perspective, and with an emphasis on women and literacy.

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## Discourses of IL/LITERACY A LITERATURE REVIEW



In most of the literacy discourse "illiterates" are not differentiated by gender, but the reader can usually infer that "people" are actually men. In this way women become "other" in relation to men as the norm. There are many feminist critiques which argue the need, not simply to "add on" a female perspective, but for a revision of the world (Callaway, 1981). There are an increasing number of accounts that seek to enter women's experience into the account of illiteracy and to re-consider the issue of illiteracy from a feminist perspective. (e.g. Bhasin, 1984; De Coito, 1984; Ellis, 1984; Hale, 1986; Kazemak, 1988; MacKeracher, 1987; MacKeracher et al., n.d.; McCaffery, 1985; Ramdas, 1985; Rockhill, 1987a, 1987b; Thompson, 1983a, 1983b).

Much of women's writing on the subject of illiteracy is a critique of the material which leaves women invisible. It is not only the academic literature which leaves women out but, as McCaffery (1985) has observed, it is also the publicity for literacy programming which often focuses on images of illiterate men and their situations. Thompson (1983b) speaking of adult education in England generally sums up the issue:

*So long as the opinion leaders and policy makers in adult education continue to describe the world as though women don't exist, or to associate women simply with domesticity and child rearing, adult education will continue to reinforce inequality between the sexes to the long term detriment of both men and women (p.151).*

When women are visible as the objects of literacy programming they are portrayed as helpless and incompetent Bhasin (1984) and Ramdas (1985) have drawn attention to the blame-the-victim problem which focuses on the "illiterate" rather than on the need for structural change. Bhasin argues that illiteracy is not a disease that needs to be eradicated, but a symptom of the disease of poverty and inequality (p. 42). She argues that many of the slogans and arguments about the "problem" of illiteracy are insulting and offensive to illiterate women. She is critical of the inclusion of women as targets of literacy programs especially when they are described in the same less than human way that men are often portrayed.

Throughout the literature, whether women are writing about the situation in India, the Caribbean, Ethiopia or England Bhasin, 1984; Ellis, 1984; Junge and Tegegne, 1985; Ramdas, 1985; Thompson, 1983a, 1983b), they all draw attention to the problem that when women are included and considered as participants or potential participants in programs, it is always in relation to their roles IS mother, and wife that they are deemed "need" literacy. No-one speaks of men leading literacy because they are fathers and need to be literate for the sake of the next generation, but many writers observe that this is frequently the case for women. Thompson for example (1983a) says:

*When the attention of providers is directed at working-class women "in the community", in "outreach work" or in "adult basic education" schemes, a further element becomes seemingly obligatory: child development and parent craft. For those who are "isolated", "unable to cope", "bad managers" and pejoratively described as "single parents", relevance and the development of skills is regularly defined in terms of being "better mothers". So that despite claims about "individuality", "personal development" and "educational self fulfillment" so beloved by adult educators, where women are concerned, it is as appendages of homes, husbands and children that they are usually assessed and catered for (pp. 84-85).*

Bhasin criticizes Indian programs as preserving stereotypes which are not true to the lives of working class women. Primers depict women as wives and mothers in the household and ignore the roles women have as producers of food and laborers. They do not tell women of their rights, but seek to make them "better" wives and mothers. Junge and Tegegne (1985) speaking of the effect of a program on women's lives in Ethiopia mention that women "seemed to be conscious of taking better care of themselves and their families" (p. 612). Ellis (1984) is more critical of the problem of teaching women only roles of homemaker and mother. She suggests that women need to be taught more about their rights and given a broader understanding of the "attitudes and perceptions that determine and define the place of women in Caribbean society" (p.49).

When women are acknowledged as recipients of adult education programs, Thompson argues their "needs" are defined by men (1983a):

*Women's real needs (i.e.. the definition women would make about themselves and their lives if men were not around or if men were not structurally in charge) are not being recognized or met (p. 86).*

Women are taught to "cope" and adapt, to carry out their traditional roles better:

*The suggestion that women might see the world differently or might deny the values and standards determined by men, appears incomprehensible to those well used to "meeting individual needs" and supplying "confidence" in remarkably predictable and sexist ways (p. 85).*



Solity (1986) and MacKeracher (1987) both draw attention to the need for a "women's studies" model which encourages women to look at their own personal experience and locate this in terms of a "sociological and historical framework" (Solity, p. 4).

MacKeracher states the criticism of traditional programs and demands an alternative:

*Academic equivalency programs, which essentially provide for the remedial application of more basic education, may prepare women for occupational training and participation in the male- dominant world of work but do not solve the problem of "literacy for women". Programs which allow women to explore their own experience. make sense of that experience, and promote this "sense" into personal concerns and public issues can be best understood, not as remedial education. but as transformative participation in better basic education (p.12).*

Many writers emphasize the importance of acknowledging the social constraints on women's lives. Hale (1986) draws attention to the inappropriateness of assuming that women will be made better mothers through increased knowledge, stressing the importance of understanding the social context of women's lives. In the Indian program she was studying, it was assumed that women needed knowledge of nutritious foods. But the impact of the education program's attempts to alter eating habits, was lessened because of a variety of material factors which were ignored by the program. The program had little effect because it taught women about nutritious foods, but ignored the fact that it is men not women who usually have the power to make the decisions over what is eaten in the household, and women's nutritional needs are traditionally accorded little importance. Its effect was also lessened because the women who actually carry out the cooking in the household had no spare time to attend classes. The material circumstances of women's lives are often ignored in this way, then women are blamed for lack of motivation when they fail to implement changes. McCaffery (1985) described the same problem in programs for women in England. She observes that as women's days are regularly scheduled round family needs and they are rarely able to spend money on their own education, they need programs offered at appropriate time, childcare provided and programs subsidized financially. De Coito (1984), from a study carried out in Canada, also identified the need for childcare to enable women to attend literacy and upgrading

programs.

Thompson (1983a) sums up the invisibility of women, except as mothers, in adult education. The social conditions of being a woman in society - both material and personal relations and inequalities of power, and the control of men over establishing women's "needs" are frequently ignored:

*The organization and provision of classes takes very little account of the social, economic, cultural and political conditions of being female in our society. The career structure, the responsibility for organization and control, the arbiters of the curriculum, and the opinion leaders and policy-makers... are invariably men - men who operate firmly and squarely within the organizational structure, the cultural assumptions and the thinly disguised prejudices of patriarchal society. It is for reasons like these that so far as Russell was concerned, women were visible only as mothers, and totally invisible in every other respect (p. 81).*

McCaffery briefly directs attention to the way literacy enters into the power dimensions between men and women in the household- She mentions male hostility to women not being at home when they return from work, and male refusal to "babysit" the children in the evenings. A recent media account also speaks of literacy as power: "Male egos take another battering in the war of the sexes.

The Southam Literacy Survey shows women are more skilled readers." The article is addressed to "all men" and ends... "say while your wife is reading that book why not hide this [article]" (Calamai, 1987b). Although the male author writes jokingly, in the assumption that it is a problem for men that women are more "skilled readers", women's literacy is shown to be a threat to their power. Rockhill (1987a, 1987b) develops these themes much further in her articles based on a study with immigrant women in the United States. She concludes that literacy is lived in women's lives as threat and desire:

*Women engage in literacy practices as part of the work of the family. When it becomes associated with education, literacy poses the potential of change and is experienced as both a threat and a desire. Thus the anomaly that literacy is women's work but not women's right (1987b, p. 330).*

She argues that the assumption that literacy is "neutral" causes us to miss the charged dynamic around it for women, and urges the need to look at the "personal" to understand the gendered practices which reinforce the domination of women. In this way she suggests: "perhaps we can begin to find ways to address the contradictory constructions of women's subjectivities with respect to literacy/learning education" (1987a, p. 166).

The work by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) studies women's ways of knowing. From their research with North American women, Belenky et al. identify five "epistemological perspectives from which women seem to know and view the world." In a recent article Kazemak (1988) argues that this work is important for literacy workers. Kazemak suggests that an understanding of these "stages" may be significant for

understanding how women approach literacy and literacy instruction. She suggests that this understanding might lead to programs for women that are less "individually oriented" (Fingeret, 1984) and more in keeping with women's understanding of themselves as contextually-bound in caring relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982).

I want to draw attention to the image of "silence" that Belenky et al. chose for their "first stage" of knowing. While the authors do not claim that the perspectives they describe are stages - in fact they say: "we leave it to future work to determine whether these perspectives have any stage-like qualities" - they do present them as a hierarchy, and speak of Women developing from one perspective to the next. They are also cautious about the meaning of the category "silence" because in their study few women fell into that category. They speak of aiming to "share" their data rather than "prove" it.



Although they do not state that those who were placed in their first category which they call "silence" were illiterate, they do say that: "the silent women... had had little formal schooling or had found school to be a place of chronic failure". They argue that :

*In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write – sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. Without them, individuals remain isolated from others; and without tools for representing their experiences, people also remain isolated from the self (p. 26).*

They describe the "way of knowing" of women in their first category as "silent" and see this silence as resulting from isolation from the self. But the women they call "silent" are not silent. They do speak, and they explain vividly that they have become fearful of speaking because the power of others has forced them to see their voice as a danger to them. They have suffered violence when they dared to speak. Belenky et al. speak of women who "worried that they would be punished just for using words - any words," but they do not explain that this silence may have been learned for the sake of safety because they have been punished for using any words. The suggestion that these women who are labeled "silent" lack voice because they are "isolated from the self" fails to convey the materiality of the unequal power dynamic within which many have lived.

One "silent" woman speaks of being a loudmouth," perhaps picking up the discourse that has told her that as a woman, speak at all, is to speak out of turn. Belenky et al. depict the "silent" women; fearful of the power of authorities:

*In their experience authorities seldom tell you what they want you to do; they apparently expect you to know in advance. If authorities do tell you what is right, they never tell you why it is right. Authorities bellow but do not explain (p. 28).*

But this leads them to depict the "silent" women: "like puppets moving with the jiggle of a thread. To hear is to obey." his image suggests that to see oneself as powerless in the face of authorities is to be "puppet," an image of being less than human.

Their depiction of the "silent" women does not allow the material circumstances of the women's lives to be considered, making it possible to see them as stupid because they simply fail to know and use the power of voice:

*Because the women see themselves as slated to lose, they focus their efforts on assuring their own continued existence during a losing battle. They wage their struggle for survival without an awareness of the power inherent in their own minds and voice and without expectation of cooperation from others. It is a stacked game waged against men who seem to be bigger and better, men who think they have a right to be the winner to be right no matter what the circumstances (p. 30).*

But women do have to fight against odds to survive. It is not simply in their own minds that their voices are powerless and that they fail to receive cooperation. Men do not just "seem bigger," they often are and they exercise their right to a voice by physically silencing women who have been trained to believe men have that right. The type of account Belenky et al. give does not show us that the women are silenced, unheard and trained to believe that their smallest voice is too loud. Instead it leads us to blame women for their "silence" and to assume that illiterate women, particularly those who live in the face of male violence, need to be taught to speak, when what is needed is that men who silence women need to listen.

Kazemak refers to work such as this one by Belenky et al. to argue that by failing to study the relationship between women and literacy, scholars have given only a partial account of adult literacy. She says the absence of such study suggests:

*...at the best a naivete or ignorance on our part as literacy scholars and, at the worst, a conscious or unconscious disdain for the specific literacy needs of women within a patriarchal society. This omission of information on the functions, uses, and needs of literacy among women makes any theoretical or practical discussion of adult literacy incomplete, if not suspect (p. 23).*

I want to agree with her that the omission of studies of women is crucial, but suggest that we need studies which start from the standpoint of the women who are labelled "illiterate" or "silent", not studies which continue to leave the women themselves silent and unheard.

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# Reading Our Own Stories

## *Literacy Materials for Women*



The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for women (CCLOW) is currently undertaking a project to develop an annotated resource guide to Canadian literacy materials for women. It will involve the identification and collection of high quality literacy materials for women - materials which are non-sexist and which respond to and reflect the varied aspirations, interests, and learning needs of adult women literacy students.

**Our first step...** As a first step, CCLOW sent out a questionnaire to women's groups, literacy groups, literacy practitioners, and others involved in women's literacy education. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information about, and examples of, recommended literacy materials for women. Replies have been received at the CCLOW office and information is now being entered on computer in preparation for production of the resource guide.

**What we are discovering...** Initially, when we launched this project, we were uncertain what we would find. There was little information available about Canadian literacy materials, and even less about literacy materials for women. We knew, from an earlier CCLOW study, *Women and Adult Basic Education in Canada: An exploratory study* (1984), that there was a dearth literacy materials available for women in this country. This was quickly confirmed by a number of the replies we received: "We were certainly aware as we visited literacy programs the there is a great void of good relevant materials for adults and particular for women" (Literacy coordinator, St. John's).

But, at CCLOW we had heard that adult learners in a few community literacy programs were beginning to write and publish their own materials. We wanted to learn more about the and other new initiatives, and to share this information with others.

Response to our questionnaire was overwhelmingly positive with most of the three hundred respondents writing in support the project. Although many respondents could not recommend any literacy materials for women, most indicated that the needed women's literacy materials in their program. They we hopefully enthusiastic about the project: "The best materials' home grown. Maybe your survey will help encourage more home grown efforts" (literacy coordinator, North Bay); "I hope you uncover vast hordes of easy to read

materials" (Literacy searcher, Halifax); "I am extremely interested in your project - there is a tremendous need for this sort of resource. Having just begun a literacy project focussing on women, I feel as if I am working in a vacuum" (literacy worker, Kingston).

## BY GLADYS WATSON

As we had expected, we received replies from practitioners in community literacy programs, from workers in women's upgrading groups, and from staff in community colleges and boards of education. Many expressed a strong concern about the lack of good Canadian literacy materials for women, and talked about discovering some excellent women's literacy materials from England, and some from Australia as well. Many referred us to the new materials about women's life experiences being published by learners at East End Literacy Press in Toronto, and to other materials written by adult women learners, many of which are unpublished or published in local newsletters. These and other materials will be documented in our resource guide.

We also received a surprising number of replies from other groups and individuals. Here are just a few examples.

*We heard from several of the Elizabeth Fry Societies about the need for women's literacy materials for women in prison and women who are returning from prison to the community. The Elizabeth Fry Society also urged federal government employees responsible for adult education and literacy training programs in our federal prisons to contact us. This project served to raise their consciousness and to encourage them to ask questions about women's experience of the prison education system. including the supposed gender "neutrality" of learning materials used in the prisons.*

*Some health organizations, such as an immigrant women's health center and an association concerned with anorexia nervosa, sent us samples of their materials and expressed concern about the need to have easy-to-read materials on women's health issues. At the same time, we received a set of guidelines for writing easy-to-read women's health materials which appeared in a recent issue of Health-sharing, and a copy of a new, easy-to-read handbook on women's health.*

*DAWN, the disabled women's network, wrote to confirm that reading and writing difficulties are experienced by many disabled women and to emphasize the need for programs and materials to be accessible to disabled women.*

*From native and Inuit groups, we learned about the importance of developing materials for native women in their own language. materials which respect and reflect their own culture. From one native program in northern Ontario, we received a paper which explores the implications of teaching methodology for native adult learners. From an*

*Inuit adult education group in the North West Territories, we received an English translation of the scripts for a short, easy-to-read play about taking action on spousal assault.*

A vocational training coordinator reminded us about the technical skills that women want to learn: "I have found that materials that show simply and easily how to do something (repair an electrical plug, boost a car) are a very popular learning resource for women."

**Our next step...** CCLOW is organizing a volunteer working group of women literacy practitioners and women with experience in plain writing from across the country to review and evaluate recommended materials for inclusion in the resource guide. We anticipate that as we assess the materials, the literacy practitioners involved in the working group will work to find a way of involving interested women learners from their programs.

The working group will also be addressing some of the questions raised by the respondents, identifying gaps in the kinds of literacy materials available for women in Canada, and developing guidelines for assessing literacy materials for women. An important task of the group will be to look to the future - to explore the possibility of developing women's literacy materials and curriculum.

**Looking forward...** As we work with the findings of the survey, I am struck by the fact that there is the potential within our Canadian literacy and women's movements to create not only examples of women's literacy materials, but also to explore the larger questions about whether and how we develop literacy curriculum for adult women learners.

- Is there a need for feminist curriculum at the literacy level? Who should be involved in developing it?
- How can we support literacy projects to involve adult women learners in developing their own materials and their own curriculum?
- What are the guidelines for assessing and developing feminist literacy materials?
- How do we respond to the argument that literacy instruction is gender "neutral"?
- Is there a need for a network of feminist literacy practitioners?
- Is there a need for a network of women literacy learners?

As I have reviewed the respondents' comments and pursued feminist readings on the theme of literacy, I have been impressed by the fact that a number of feminist literacy educators and feminist theorists are challenging us to think about women's literacy materials not so much in terms of women's needs, but in terms of women's strengths and their resistance to the class, race, and gender oppression they experience. There are many unanswered questions and there is much to be done, but it is clear that we need to give adult women learners an opportunity to express their own voices, to share and develop their own culture, and to participate in Canadian society.

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A copy of the CCLOW resource guide to Canadian literacy materials for women will be distributed free of charge by CCLOW to all those who sent in information to the project, and on a cost recovery basis to others. It is anticipated that the resource guide will be ready for publication early in 1989. Readers who have materials to recommend or are otherwise interested in the project should write to: Gladys Watson, CCLOW, 47 Main Street, Toronto, Ontario M4E 2V6; or telephone (416) 699-1909.

*Gladys Watson is an activist in literacy and adult education for women. As a librarian and researcher working from a feminist perspective, she is interested in materials and resource centers for women literacy learners and practitioners. Currently, Gladys is on staff with the Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW).*

## Defining A Feminist Literacy

As feminists, we tend to look outside ourselves in search of blame for the world's being the way it is. We claim we have no voice because the patriarchy has drowned us out or gagged us with a dust cloth. We dismiss our inner voices as either internalizations of male language or as "gossip."

Yet to label as "gossip" the unfamiliar voices that somehow seep through our gestapo-like, traditional linguistic filter is already to have internalized patriarchal language. Not to listen to the voices because they are unfamiliar is to have internalized the patriarchal value system as well.

"Our customary literacy language is systematically gendered in ways that influence what we approve and disapprove of, making it extremely difficult for us to acknowledge certain kinds of originality" (Ostriker 3). Yet, even as feminists attempt to "make female speech prevail, to penetrate male discourse, to cause the ear of man to listen" (Ostriker 211), we continue to find our voices silenced both by the big, bad world out there - that we, of course, have nothing to do with perpetuating - and by our internalized selves that are really just slightly altered facsimiles of the outer world.

After all, if our inner voices are somehow different from our learned outer voices, why do we continue to hear only the "voices inside [us] that tell [us] to be quiet, the voices outside [us] that drown [us] out or politely dismiss what [we] say or do not understand [us], the silence inside [us] that avoids saying any- thing important even to [ourselves] (Annas 4)?

Yet, if woman's voice is still silent, whether from internal or external censors, what is feminist criticism? What is feminist literary theory? What is different about the "different truths" (Gilligan 156) men and women have if we continue to privilege difference between genders, rather than traits, in order to truths these truths?

Academic feminists, warns Betsy Draine, especially need to be more aware that being able to write from "'a woman's position' about 'subjects of interest to women' in language that women recognize as their own is no guarantee that [women authors] understand the first thing about women outside their class or outside their publishers' readership of white, upper-middle-class, females in Britain, Canada, and the United States" (Draine A40).

Indeed, it is interesting that silence is still a central theme of feminist theory even as feminists have begun creating their own canon, a rather ironic predicament for a movement that originally sought to "dispel the idea of a fixed literacy canon, which served to insure for so long the virtual exclusion of women from literary history" (Draine A40). In our efforts to de-canonize knowledge and overcome our past of silence, have we not merely become silencers ourselves? By making feminism another category, instead of changing the presupposed idea of categories, have we not become another exclusionary entity, inadvertently building more linguistic barriers even as we claim to be tearing them down? Is the woman in the car next to you on the freeway more concerned with phallocentrism or the price of eggs? Does she have the faintest idea what deconstructed neo-post-modern, revisionist feminism is? If she doesn't know, does that make her a literate woman or an illiterate feminist? If, by chance, she does understand, is she then co-literate, or is she now an illiterate woman and a literate feminist?

**BY DANA BECKELMAN**

The point is that feminists have ceased to be feminists in order to study feminism. In our zest to define ourselves, we have forgotten that it was the traditional definitions of women that ultimately led to our outrage. We have merely replaced patriarchal definitions with feminist definitions. Refusing to admit that the process of defining, rather than defamations themselves, is the true source of power. We fear that if we don't defame ourselves we won't exist. The question is whether after twenty years of liberating ourselves from societally-enforced definitional confinement we have not begun to confine ourselves anew.

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This becomes especially interesting when pondered alongside the much heralded crisis in literacy. If, in fact, we have begun to confine ourselves by our own definitions, have we not simultaneously begun to exclude the majority of the very sex we sought to make equally included in society? Have we not, even as Allan Bloom calls us "the latest enemy of the vitality of classic texts" (65), become just as elitist as the institutions we sought to make more equitable for everyone, regardless of gender, race or income?

As Lillian Robinson points out, "'Elite' is a literary as well as a social category. It is possible to argue for taking all texts seriously as texts without arguments based on social oppression or cultural exclusion, and popular genres have therefore been studied as part of the female literary tradition... But in a context where the ground of struggle - highly contested, moreover - concerns Edith Wharton's advancement to more major status, fundamental assumptions have changed very little" (116). It is ironic, of course, that, even as Robinson admits that "conclusions about 'women's fiction' or 'female consciousness' have been drawn or jumped to from considering a body of work whose authors are all white and comparatively privileged" (114), she chooses Edith Wharton as her example, rather than Leslie Silko or Toni Morrison.

I dare say that in our quest to create a "literacy" of our own, a feminist language, a feminist vision, a space where Catharine Stimpson says "women of language become richer, deeper, at once more enigmatic and more clear" (xii), we have done as much to perpetuate illiteracy as to create a new literacy. As Andrew Sledd aptly notes, "...literacy and illiteracy develop together, defining each other" (495), while Robert Pattison claims "literacy must not be treated as a constant in human affairs but as an evolving and adaptable attribute of the species" (18). As a result, Sledd contends that the much publicized crisis in literacy is actually no crisis at all, "that both the crisis and the means to resolve it have been manufactured" (495) by "a two-tiered educational system producing... a minority of overpaid engineers and managers to design technology and provide supervision for a majority of docile data processors and underpaid burger burners" (506).

Feminists, of course, would be the first to point out that the majority of over-paid engineers and managers are men, while the majority of data processors and burger burners are women, and that these facts of life have hardly been manufactured by female academicians seeking a marketable dissertation topic. Still, the female burger burner, more attuned to Janet Jackson than Hélène, Cixous, should be able to ask the female academician, "What have you done for me lately?" and be answered a tad more specifically than, "We are stealing the language and writing the body."

The burger burner asks, "What can I be?"



Julia Kristeva answers, "A woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being" (137).

The single, working mother exclaims, "I feel like I'm going out of my mind." Sonia Johnson soothes her with, "Since truth is reversed in patriarchy, to go out of our minds is to become truly sane. (vi).

Or perhaps a better example is a colleague's outrage at *Women Who Love Too Much* being placed in the feminist theory section at a bookstore. "Can you imagine?" Trash right next to important theory." No, I can't imagine. Have we become more concerned with writing the body than with protecting it from abuse?

While these conversations make light of the barriers that exist between academic and non-academic women, they show why many women, obviously with good reason, are "word-phobic and will even classify the written word as an instrument of oppression that has too often been used against them - an echo of the theme of 'words as weapons'" (Belenky, et al. 74). Indeed, feminists must begin to realize that while we may not have manufactured a sexist society, we are, in fact, creating a two-tiered woman's society in which a minority of academically educated women have begun to tell the majority of alternatively educated women what constitutes "woman." We have done nothing to change the Aristotelian idea that to be literate about something is to understand its definition. Even as we still complain about being silenced, we have done nothing with our words to change the concept of what constitutes literacy.

As a result, perhaps feminists should consider implementing a "dysfunctional literacy, for literacy itself guaranteed nothing" (Sledd 499). Since E.D. Hirsch has so graciously told us what every culturally literate person should know (Hirsch 146-215), perhaps feminists should consider advocating what we shouldn't know. We shouldn't know, for example, how to build a nuclear warhead. Or what constitutes "masculine" and "feminine." (After all, do masculine and feminine even exist if the major biological difference between men and women is genitalia? Will my clitoris enlarge if I am logical? Does a man's penis shrink when he cries?) In fact, perhaps that which we should most not know, is what we should know, for "the world is covered with signs that must be deciphered, and those signs, which reveal resemblances and affinities, are themselves no more than forms of similitude. To know must therefore be to interpret" (Foucault 32).

Any act of defining what constitutes literacy, then, is merely the definer's interpretation, which may be futile to discuss at all, "for there is no thing, literacy, only constellations of forms and degrees of literacy, shifting and turning as history rearranges the social formations in which they are embedded. Pieties about Literacy with a capital L ought to be scrutinized: Which Literacy? Whose Literacy? Literacy for what?" (Sledd 499). Indeed, such questions can just as easily be applied to feminism: Which feminism? Whose feminism? Feminism for what? There in lies the parallel between issues of feminism and literacy, for to continue to privilege definition over interpretation is to perpetuate the domination cycle of our present culture. To continue to use the metaphor of silence to imply that women are voiceless or that the general populace is illiterate is to continue to

privilege communication outside one's self, which, effect, nullifies all inner voices, for they do not exist if they cannot be heard.

I am not suggesting that women, minorities, and non-traditionally educated people have indeed not been maliciously silenced throughout history. But I do wonder if, like most groups that inevitably become dominating in order to overcome being dominated, feminists haven't become extremists, ignoring "the silence in women" in which "anything that falls into it has an enormous reverberation" (Duras 175). For example, as of August 28, Elizabeth Morgan's silence is still reverberating in the form of protection for her daughter. Morgan, a plastic surgeon with degrees from Harvard, Yale and Tufts (does that make her "literate?"), has spent the past year in a solitary cell at the District of Columbia Jail for refusing to divulge the whereabouts of her six-year-old daughter. Morgan hid her daughter rather than allow her ex-husband, who she claims has continually sexually molested her daughter, to have unsupervised visits with the child.

As a result, the judge holding her in contempt of court has ruled that Morgan could remain in jail until her daughter turns eighteen. While incarcerated, Morgan has published a textbook on cosmetic surgery, written several short stories, and completed a children's book (Prasso 6). Like reporters who refuse to reveal their sources, her silence, rather than her communication, is what is being "censored."

Perhaps, in our zest to be heard, we have "censored" our own silence as well. The patriarchy ran a blue light special, advertising "silence as ignorance," offering two for one voices, and we shopped until we dropped. Somewhere along our supposedly liberated hermeneutic spiral, we stopped listening and started talking. Yet, as Marguerite Duras suggests, what isn't said can be just as powerful as what is. "I know that when I write there is something inside me that stops functioning, something that becomes silent everything shuts off - the analytic way of thinking, thinking inculcated by college, studies, reading, experience... as if I were returning to a wild country" (175). Ultimately, to deny silence is to deny one's self, which, in the end, may be the only concern about which one can be literate. If there is, indeed, a need to define literacy it is only because we have a need to define the self, for the literacy crisis "is finally a crisis of identity in which tests and television, schools and a blur of culture conspire" to create "a denial of self" (Wheeler 17).

I believe feminists have not only a unique opportunity but a moral obligation to become more involved in the process of literacy, not to define it, but to keep it from being defined, no to limit it, but to continue to expand its boundaries. It is not enough to encourage women to write the body; we must encourage all people to write the self. "Identity - a cube of ice, unmeltable, at the center of oneself, formed from all sorts of sources - is a force that allows every writer - even students of writing - to write well" (Wheeler 16),

Women, especially, who "have always been encouraged to take their opinions from others, to depend on others' approval for their own sense of self-worth" (Hedges, Wendt 82), should be all the more conscious not only of what determines ourselves, but also of what determines the concept of self in general. It helps little to have a self, if that self is considered illiterate. It helps little if Virginia Woolf is now accepted in the canon if the

person who most needs to hear her voice cannot get into the university. It helps little to advocate writing the body if that body must conform to MLA style. it helps little to encourage the development of an imaginative self if our task is "to develop the reality principle, to enforce the status quo and equip the super ego with all its niggling conventions, down to and including, if possible, those of orthodox punctuation" (Sledd 503).

Feminists need to be aware that while we are expanding what it means to be women, men such as Hirsch and Bloom are narrowing what it means to be literate. In Texas, as of 1989, all students at state-supported universities will be required to pass a competency exam in reading, writing, and mathematics before being allowed to graduate. Once again the questions proliferate: What constitutes competency? What constitutes reading? What constitutes writing? Who will construct the test and who will decide what it is supposed to validate? If the test is anything like the *College Board's Test of Standard Written English*, it will be "designed to distinguish on the basis of trivial dialect differences between the upper-middle class and working people. After all, college and its textbooks are not for everyone This may be good training for what life has in store, but it is not education" (Sledd 503).

It is interesting that while the body of scholarship in feminist, Afro-American, and Native American studies has increased in recent years, so has the number of standardized placement and competency exams. While we were defining our voice, those enamored of the status quo were defining our audience. While we have been developing the self, the patriarchy has been determining who can have one.

**FEMINISTS SHOULD DEMAND AND IMPLEMENT THE  
ACCEPTANCE OF FRAGMENTED LITERACIES. INSTEAD OF  
TRYING TO MAKE THE BURGER BURNER RELEVANT TO  
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THE CANON RELEVANT TO THE BURGER BURNER.**

The problem is they didn't expect us to have so many. You know how we women are - we never can make up our minds. So we have an intellectual self and a down-home mother self, a lover self, and a pseudo-self, a self created "in love and in joy, in sorrow and in despair, in response to the realities of [our] lives and as an expression of [our] dreams" (Hedges, Wendt 8). As such, "feminism has split again and again until it has become feminisms, a set of groups, each with its own ideology, identity, and agenda" (Stimpson 191).

Yet, in the same way feminist have learned to live with multiple meanings, so should we be the initiators of multiple literacies. Like feminism, literacy should be "beyond restoration." Feminist practitioners "are too numerous, too dissimilar in situation, for one agreement to accommodate all the theories, ideas and perceptions by and about women in the post- modern world. The question is not how to paste and staple a consensus together

again but rather how to live culturally and politically with fragmentation" (Stimpson 191).

Similarly, feminists, especially those of us in academe, should demand and implement the acceptance of fragmented literacies. Instead of trying to make the burger burner relevant to the canon, we should be finding ways to make the canon relevant to the burger burner. Instead of dutifully accepting policies for testing competency, we must actively promote diversity, recruiting from barrios and condos alike, challenging not only the tests themselves, but the idea that one test can somehow judge an infinite variety of people. We must pull ourselves away from our dusty bookshelves and put activism back in feminism. Ultimately "we must move from cultural explorations to explicit political practice" (Stimpson 196),

To overcome silence is not enough; we must allow silence to have its own literacy. To write the body is not enough; we must write our minds and our dreams, our run-on sentences, and our images that do not make sense, and do not have to. When internalized patriarchal voice starts to criticize us, we can say, "You are merely one of many." When we embrace our many voices, we embrace pluralism rather than dualism, co-existence rather than competition, a spectrum of color rather than black and white. Ultimately, when feminists embrace multiple literacies, we embrace ourselves.

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# «J'ai oublié mes lunettes, lis pour moi»

## *L'analphabétisme chez les francophones*

**Avoir 20 ans aujourd'hui et être analphabète est une situation impensable pour plusieurs. Le développement d'un système public d'enseignement donnant accès à chacune et chacun à un niveau raisonnable de scolarité rend les analphabètes responsables de leur ignorance. Pourtant, le sont-ils vraiment? Plus d'un facteur entre en ligne de compte et en milieu minoritaire le défi de l'alphabétisation tient non seulement de l'importance de l'autonomie personnelle mais aussi d'une fierté de sa culture.**

**E**n novembre 1985, un centre d'alphabétisation populaire *La Magie des lettres* a vu le jour à Ottawa. Comme bon nombre d'entreprises sociales et communautaires, cet organisme à but non lucratif est l'oeuvre d'un noyau de personnes bénévoles qui y ont travaillé avec énergie. Cette année grâce à une subvention du Ministère des affaires civiques et culturelles, le centre peut à l'instar de dix-neuf autres centres francophones en Ontario offrir aux analphabètes Franco-Ontarien-ne-s l'occasion de remédier à une situation qui limite l'expansion de leur propre potentiel. FEMMES D'ACTION s'est entretenue avec la coordonnatrice de la Magie des lettres, Ginette Laganière.

Pourquoi le problème de l'analphabétisme est-il plus grave chez les francophones en milieu minoritaire que chez les non francophones?

Il y a deux causes qui expliquent cette situation. D'abord cela relève de l'Histoire même des Canadien-ne-s français-e-s, des effets du Rapport Durham et de la Conquête. En Ontario, il y a eu le Règlement 17 qui a empêché les francophones d'être éduqué-e-s dans leur langue. Ainsi, un bon nombre n'a pu bien maîtriser ni le français, ni l'anglais. C'est sûr que le développement des écoles publiques par la suite a aidé mais le processus d'assimilation était quand même assez avancé.

**PAR MICHELINE PICHÉ**

L'autre explication est de nature sociologique. C'est-à-dire qu'avec toutes les transformations que l'industrialisation a apportées, il y a eu une espèce de division culturelle du travail qui fait que les francophones se sont retrouvé-e-s à exercer des occupations manuelles. L'accès à l'éducation étant très élitiste seule une minorité de francophones a pu en profiter. De là, les répercussions sociologiques face à l'importance ou la non importance accordée aux études en milieu populaire.

*On utilise aujourd'hui l'indice de scolarité de moins d'une 9<sup>ième</sup> année pour estimer le nombre d'analphabètes mais selon des études, de plus en plus de jeunes qui ont complété une 9<sup>e</sup> et 10<sup>e</sup> ou même 12<sup>e</sup> année n'ont pas développé leurs habilités à lire et à écrire, pourquoi?*

Il y a toutes les critiques traditionnelles du système d'éducation, de son fonctionnement, des valeurs que l'on y véhicule et face auxquelles le ou la jeune de milieu défavorisé ne s'identifie pas. Il y a la qualité de l'enseignement qui doit être identique en français comme en anglais. Dans le système actuel on peut, par exemple, par divers échappatoires contourner les difficultés que l'on éprouve au niveau de la lecture, de l'écriture même jusqu'en 12<sup>e</sup> année. Lorsque les acquisitions sont fragiles et que l'on n'a pas l'occasion de les utiliser on risque de les perdre. Il y a un entraînement qu'il faut poursuivre dans l'usage de la langue écrite et parlée.

*Voyant leur difficulté à utiliser la langue française comme outil de communication, les francophones n'ont-ils pas plus tendance à utiliser la langue anglaise?*

Je pense que cela fait partie du processus d'assimilation où la langue française est perçue comme difficile et surtout non rentable au niveau économique. Beaucoup vont appeler ça de l'analphabétisme culturel: tu ne possèdes plus ta culture, tu ne possèdes plus ta langue. C'est un phénomène qui existe...Pourquoi c'est comme ça? Historiquement, l'anglais est la langue des affaires, de la réussite, du succès. C'est une idée préconçue contre laquelle il faut lutter.

*Les personnes qui décident de venir dans un centre d'alphabétisation francophone comme le vôtre doivent donc être convaincues qu'elles viennent y chercher quelque chose d'important.*

Au départ, elles sont motivées par l'aspect pratique de leur apprentissage: savoir lire, écrire, se débrouiller seul-e, être plus autonome. Ici, on le fait en français parce qu'il y a un principe pédagogique qui veut que l'alphabétisation dans la langue maternelle c'est vraiment la situation idéale. C'est ce qu'on explique aux étudiant-e-s. Même si ils ou elles ne possèdent à peu près pas leur français, c'est tout de même leur langue maternelle et culturellement parlant la communication écrite sera pour elles plus facile à maîtriser. À cela s'ajoute toute la dimension de l'identité et la fierté culturelle qu'on peut arriver à développer dans un projet à long terme.

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HISTORIQUEMENT,  
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LA RÉUSSITE, DU SUCCÈS.  
C'EST UNE IDÉE PRÉCONÇUE  
CONTRE LAQUELLE  
IL FAUT LUTTER.

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*Le gouvernement de l'Ontario. par ses subventions aux organismes comme la Magie des lettres et sa campagne de sensibilisation cet automne semble être plus sensibilisé que d'autres aux problèmes de l'analphabétisme, qu'en pensez-vous?*

Les pays industrialisés ont besoin d'une population qui soit éduquée. Le développement technologique fait qu'on a de plus en plus besoin de personnes qui utilisent bien la langue parlée et écrite. C'est sûr que le gouvernement, à cause des incidences que cela peut avoir sur la production et l'économie ne peut pas négliger ce problème-là. Il y a aussi tout l'aspect politique qui entre en ligne de compte. Jusqu'à quel point et pourquoi le gouvernement a priorisé cet aspect, je ne saurais répondre. Reste que le développement social et le développement économique vont de pair et il faut arriver à concilier les deux.

*Quelles sont les particularités de l'enseignement dans un centre d'alphabétisation?*

Le système scolaire actuel, bien qu'essentiel, est un système qui ne peut convenir à tout le monde et c'est à ceux et celles à qui ça ne convient pas que s'adresse notre centre. On essaie de voir pourquoi, de leur faire une place alors qu'ailleurs ils et elles n'en ont pas. Pour faire de l'alphabétisation communautaire, il faut avoir de bonnes connaissances en français, c'est sûr. Mais c'est au niveau des aptitudes et des attitudes que tout se joue. L'animatrice-teur doit être une personne authentique avec laquelle le ou la participant-e se sent à l'aise. Elle met l'accent sur l'échange et l'apprentissage commun. C'est-à-dire ce que l'un-e et l'autre s'apportent mutuellement. L'alphabétisation populaire comporte deux volets. Le politique qui amène le ou la participant-e à prendre conscience de sa propre dépendance et le social qui vise à sensibiliser la communauté et à créer une demande pour que les gens arrivent à une réinsertion sociale.

*Outre le dépistage des personnes qui ont besoin d'aide la sensibilisation du milieu est aussi très importante?*

Oui, car reconnaître un problème de cet ordre là, ce n'est pas facile à admettre. On remarque par exemple que beaucoup de personnes ont hésité à venir au centre par peur que leur milieu de travail n'apprenne leur handicap. Il faut se dire que l'analphabète doit



être deux fois meilleur pour conserver son poste à cause des préjugés à son égard. Il y a là toute une mentalité à changer. Ce n'est pas parce que la personne n'est pas bonne en lecture et en écriture qu'elle ne peut pas bien faire son travail. Cela limite les possibilités d'avancement mais l'obstacle n'est pas infranchissable et les réussites obtenues dans les centres d'alphabétisation le prouvent bien.

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FAYE D. FRITH

### Have You Had Mammography

Not looking up from my file at her desk in her cool backroom of their Danforth office north shining window sucking dry for morning east light blood pressure's fine un hnn fine fine fine fine bloodsugar's fine blood type un hunn here's your card carry it on you un hunn make a n appointment with your gynecologist - here's your lab form for an ECG here's your do-it-yourself-&-mail-it Colo-Rectal Test - they'll let me know have you had a mammography? - no - receptionist will book you in - check with her before you go I think that's (smiling up) it-

There was a cool wind but the warm sun was beating us pushing tax through deadline twelve: thirty pm & slam through wind subway Greenwood Sherbourne wind & down on down to a Princess Margaret mammography at one - ahhhhh somebody say it hurts - damn damn - incontinence when rushing - so far all small grievances - *grandma died of breast cancer*

Down on down Sherbourne - got to be & there it is & down on down following the orange & quickly in as if quickly mattered & down on down into the small room with the white woman with her white clothes & under the white terry robe I'm naked to the waist & down on down onto the chair ahhhhh - hardly room catcornered from each other & slammed into angles either gray end of General Electric space arm ray with breast holding hand of platform shape - white nice lady hand arranges slides adjusts each single breast between clear plexiglass black film - now hold your breast - now hold your other hand on head your breath don't breathe and 2 x vertical & 2 X horizontal softly flattened unhurt breasts are rayed - just wait outside & quick as wink - fine you can go - ahhhhhh find & follow the orange out out & up up Sherbourne in to Loblaws for - supper's snow peas bread carrots & mushrooms & through the 6 Items Only &

on & stop in front of a WIN box -

WIN a BMX bike no purchase necessary & there on the poster young person "Tide" rides on helmet CO shirt gloves I think & there's the entry form & I put down my groceries & apply & walk at least a block without my groceries & have to go back back at least a block back back & *grandma died of breast cancer*-cancer dead Anne Sexton said in *The Awful Rowing Toward God* on page 16 that "when you face old age and its natural conclusion/your courage will still be shown in the little ways/... and at the last moment/when death opens the back door/you'll put on your carpet slippers/and stride out" - & today I wore my walking shoes & entered the kid contest -

*Senile, my mother does not sing anymore* - senile, my mother has Alzheimer's now & before she sang like a lark & we sang together ahhhhhh - "Senile, my sister sings" Irving Layton says on page 104 of *Droppings From Heaven*.  
*Senile, my mother doesn't know me now (& we each have an inverted nipple like maybe grandma had but thi nks I resemble her some*

*body say mammography &  
somebody say mamma but they're all gone now  
somebody say they banished Great Mother &  
somebody say Eve drowned &  
somebody say Mary a virgin &  
grandma dead of breast cancer & mamma  
I have old kids but mamma  
I entered the kid contest - mamma*

*mamma*



NO MAN'S LAND: The Place  
of the Woman Writer in the  
Twentieth-Century

Volume 1: The War of the Words

Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

## **Terri Doughty**

The title of Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's long-awaited sequel to *The Madwoman in the Attic* carries powerful images of both the battle-scarred terrain of twentieth-century literature, site of bitter war between creative men and women, and the more idealistic landscape of a female utopia, along the lines of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. *The War of the Words* is the first volume in a projected trilogy, to include *Exchanges and Letters From the Front*, which explores these two poles of women's experiences in the world of modern letters. Gilbert and Gubar present the first volume as "an overview of social, literary, and linguistic interactions between men and women from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present." An ambitious undertaking, certainly, and at times the scope of their task results in the co-authors being unable to elaborate on different propositions; nonetheless, their wide-ranging approach has much to recommend it, as they tantalize and provoke their readers with a radical revision of literary history, which claims that many of the features we associate with literary "modernism" have their roots in "an ongoing battle of the sexes that was set in motion by the late nineteenth century rise of feminism and the fall of Victorian concepts of 'femininity.'"

Sex antagonism is a central topic in *No Man's Land*, and despite their profession of description over prescription, Gilbert's and Gubar's text itself becomes an antagonist in the sex war of the twentieth century by engaging with (male) literary history, as well as by exchanging a sexually monolithic canon for a dialogue between the sexes. The first two chapters relate "The Men's Case" and "The Women's Cause," describing how male anxiety in response to the developing feminist movement engenders misogynistic texts, which in turn produce a complex female response. In terms of male writers, Gilbert and Gubar trace a linear development of hostility to women's aspirations beginning with Tennyson's *The Princess*, continuing through writers like Eliot, Nathanael West and Henry Miller, on to Ted Hughes today. However, despite the optimism of turn-of-the-century feminist polemicists like Christabel Pankhurst, women writers from Emily Dickinson to Sylvia Plath display unease with matching the directness of male antagonism, and they also have difficulty imagining women triumphing over men's brutality. Only with the second wave of feminism, particularly in the genres of science fiction, fantasy and lyric poetry, do Gilbert and Gubar see a revival of belief in the possibility of female triumph.

The field of literary history is the most difficult for women to assail, as not only must they face the resistance of male writers safely entrenched in tradition, but they must also contend with what Gilbert and Gubar term the "female affiliation complex." That is, modern women writers have to resolve their relationship to their literary mothers and sisters as well as to their fathers and brothers. Gilbert and Gubar take Freud's family model in "Female Sexuality" as their paradigm for the experience of the woman writer. Although this gives them three paths for the female artist - adoption of the father's tradition, claiming the mother's tradition, or a "frigid" rejection of both (and of aesthetic ambitions) - the Freudian model proves problematic, as Gilbert and Gubar admit, for his analysis of female sexuality is itself determined in part by sex antagonism. Moreover, the Freudian paradigm is limiting, as the woman artist's interaction with literary forebears is

more complicated than the model allows. Finally, by working from Freud, Gilbert and Gubar are at times placed in the position of claiming that women are guilty of their own silencing. In some cases this may be so, but the argument is more palatable when it also takes into consideration economic and social factors rather than just psychosexual ones.

One of the more thought-provoking areas of sexual warfare that Gilbert and Gubar discuss is the battleground of language. Wisely, they avoid passing judgment on whether biology or anatomy actually determine linguistic power; instead, they focus on the interesting issue of how both male and female writers work with fantasies of linguistic primacy. Whereas the language play of Joyce, Pound and Eliot simultaneously devalues women's words as hysterical or incoherent and excludes women from the "civilized" father speech (Walter Ong's *patrius sermo*, cited p. 243), linguistic experimentation by Djuna Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and other women writers is aimed at achieving a true "mother tongue," achieving linguistic autonomy from the male tradition. Women's drive for linguistic freedom is further considered in terms of the importance of "naming" for such writers as H.D., Rebecca West and Isak Dinesen. What clearly matters here is not that men and women write differently out of different bodies, but that both sexes feel the need to distinguish their language from the other. It is to be hoped that this "war of words" receives further attention in the succeeding volumes of *No Man's Land*.

Although it has some of the problems of an introductory volume, generally stemming from too much to cover in too little space, *The War of the Words* augurs well for the rest of *No Man's Land*. Gilbert and Gubar may at times frustrate the reader, but they are never dull, nor do they fail to challenge the reader's preconceptions of twentieth-century literary history. Their wit and fresh perceptions demand the reader's engagement with their text. Just as *The Madwoman in the Attic* necessitated a new reading of nineteenth-century literature, so *No Man's Land* will generate much debate over the next years, revising our understanding of literary modernism.

## TEACHING WRITING: PEDAGOGY, GENDER, AND EQUITY

Edited by Cynthia L. Caywood and Gillian R. Overing. Albany: State University of New York, 1987.

***Deborah F. Kennedy***

The subtitle registers the difference between this book and the many other writing books on the market. This group of essays by American academics (twenty women and two men) attempts to present a feminist approach to teaching composition. The editors and

many of the contributors assert the connection between theories of writing as process and feminism. While the book contains some excellent suggestions for a feminist to use in the classroom, I object strongly to the often explicit equation of the irrational aspects of writing with the female mode of being and the rational aspects with the male mode of being.

Drawing on Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, many of the authors identify a less hierarchical, pluralistic and relational mode of being as female. Thus they see the revisionist theory of writing, which makes use of pre-writing, free-writing, and journal writing, as representative of a female style because these forms of expression mirror those to which women have historically had access, such as letters, diaries, and oral narratives. As Wendy Goulston states, "Pre-writing is, after all, what women have been doing for centuries." But surely men also write letters and journals. The point is that women have been excluded from using other forms of discourse like scientific writing and journalism. We need to read the letters and hear the stories of women, but we should not deduce that these are the modes in which women best or "naturally" express themselves.

Olivia Frey follows Goulston's essentialist argument when she protests against the violence done to students by grading and competitiveness. Ironically, her ideas reinforce the patriarchal myth of the nice, unassertive female: in the new writing class, the "teacher no longer has the Truth about writing... [she] questions and suggests, but rarely mandates." Caywood and Overing similarly criticize colleagues for marking against an ideal text. Yet, neither paper addresses how to deal with grading or how to schedule student-teacher collaboration and peer editing. I would like to know how collaboration works when one has one hundred students who must each submit eight essays per term, as is often the case. Typically, a teacher of composition has little freedom to design a syllabus or choose a textbook, let alone time to read every draft of every essay. As well, composition teachers are often women without tenure and with no institutional power, hired as teaching assistants or part-time or sessional instructors to do the "housework or dirty work of English departments," as Elisabeth Datimer and Sandra Runzo describe it. Yet, in this collection, scant attention is given to this important feminist issue.

Caywood and Overing complain that "the expository essay is valued over the exploratory;... the impersonal, rational voice ranked more highly than the intimate, subjective one". Indeed, college J composition courses are not group therapy sessions; rather, they often have as their goal to provide students from a variety of fields with the skills to write adequate essays, reports, memos, and business letters. It seems to me that learning how to write a clear sentence or coherent paragraph is important for students. These are not evil, male things.

One can find in this book some useful ways to highlight feminist concerns. Susan Radner, Diana J. Fuss, and James D. Riemer discuss their use of themes of family, gender, race and class, which, for Radner, infuses "a feminist perspective into a rigid syllabus." As well, Alice F. Freed discusses one of the most important concerns for a teacher: sexist language in the classroom. She offers a number of ways to correct the gender biases in our speech and writing.

These practical suggestions help us to learn a new way of teaching, without demanding that we put the chairs in a circle and paint the walls pink.

## ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: Aboriginal Women Speak Out

Janet Silman (recorder). Toronto: Women's Press, 1987.

### *Julia Emberley*

On 28 June 1985, a piece of federal legislation known as Bill C-31 was passed by the Canadian government stipulating that those sections of the 1869 Enfranchisement Act and the 1876 Indian Act which discriminated against Native women in general, and prohibited Native women who married non-Natives from maintaining their native rights and associations, be removed. Academic writers and journalists have told this story. They tell an official story that records the historical and political events involving large organizations such as Indian Rights for Indian Women, the Native Women's Association for Canada and the National Action Committee for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, all of which brought significant pressure to bear on the federal government to change its policy. But as official stories go, they fail to tell of the personal struggle and resistance carried out by Native women - on a daily basis to change the conditions of their life. The success of this piece of legislative reform owes a great deal to Native women across Canada who worked hard on a grass roots level to politicize both the Canadian public and Native bands about the need for change. *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* is one book that tells the story of a group of Native women, the Tobique women on the East coast, who were instrumental in bringing about the legislative reform.

The Tobique Women's Group have "written" their personal stories of resistance - those "unofficial" histories of political transformation in our everyday lives - in a special way. I put "written" in quotation marks because the book is actually a collection of taped recordings that have been transcribed. Rather than providing the reader with a managed, written account which follows a well worn narrative logic, this book becomes an event in which a group of Native women tell you, the reader, about their daily lives, their political

commitment and their resistance to oppression, in their own way, in their own voice. You can hear the texture of the women's voices as they tell about the pain, anger, racism and classism they have suffered living in a country that has been taken from them by a historical imperialism and an on-going colonialism. You can hear their joy when they speak of their children, their humour, their frustration as well as their commitment and strength to struggle and resist oppression.

When we look at the cover of books, we are used to seeing below the title a name or names signifying the conventions of authorship or editorship. On the cover of *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* we find something very different: "As told to Janet Silman." Silman has written a good and brief introduction to the book, providing an outline of the history of Bill C-31 and generally contextualizing the stories that follow. For the most part, however, Silman has acted as a cultural mediator, using her education and skills in the service of the Tobique women and at their request. As Glenna Perley, a Tobique woman says:

*We have been thinking about a book we do ourselves, with you to help us. Journalists and others have come in to do stories and films about us, but they leave and we never see them again. A book really telling our story would offer different things to different people. Indian women who read it would see, "Why, if they could do that - accomplish that - then we can, too." To white women and others, it would be an education: they would see what life on a reserve is like for women. They would see what all our protesting has been about.*

A lot of careful thought has gone into the production of this book by the Tobique Women's Group and Janet Silman. They have organized the book along chronological lines and divided the larger story into six chapters. Thirteen women testify to their individual battles, their growing political and collective awareness and grassroots action that eventually culminates in a march from the Oka reserve outside Montreal to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, and their afterthoughts on achieving victory but with a steady eye on the work that must still be done.

It is important to tell our stories in our own way, with our own voice(s) and to read and listen to each other's stories. But telling our own stories "in our own way" is partially misleading and it represents a structure of oppression that actively contains those ways for Native women; I am referring here to the predominance of the use of the English language in shaping their voices. And the Tobique women are keenly aware of the limits of the English language as a vehicle for expressing certain aspects of their experience: as Bet-Te Paul says, "The culture is in the language so much." It is not difficult to hear the frustration in the voices of the women telling Janet Silman their stories when they want to say it in their Native language, Maliseet: "There is so much more I could tell you in my own language, but it's impossible to translate" (Eva Gookum Saulis); "I wish I could sit here and talk to you in Indian because the meaning comes out so much better, so much stronger" (Mavis Goeres); "They don't teach culture in the school here, only beading. They don't teach language and Maliseet should be the first language in that school" (Juanita Perley, 221); "We'd say in Indian - well, it's really hard to translate into English - 'Here we go, our heads bouncing off to Ottawa again!'" (Karen Perley). And if she had

said it, what would it have looked like on the printed page (if Maliseet has a script -? -) or sounded like to a non-Native, such as myself, illiterate in Native languages?

When we speak of literacy and illiteracy we immediately imply the existence of a model language that regulates the production of a standard to which other forms or uses are compared and placed in a hierarchical relation to it. But what is also suggested by this form of social regulation is the predominance of "one" language as the principle language of exchange authorized by the state and its educational institutions. Which is to say that the concept of literacy and illiteracy has an internal as well as external ideology; internally, in that a model form of a language is ideally constructed and externally, in that one particular language is chosen to represent the model. One has only to think of the struggle in Quebec to maintain the teaching and usage of the French language, as well as the recent struggle of Native people to preserve their languages, to realize the political and cultural power contained by the use of the English language in Canada - there are of course global implications particularly in the arena of commerce. Beth Cuthand, in her essay "Transmitting our Identity as Indian Writers" (*In the Feminine: Women and Words / Les Femmes et les Mots*, 1985: 53-54) recognizes this power; at the same time she sees a possibility for a strategic intervention in Native people making use of the English language. Cuthand has the following to say about the use of English as a vehicle for Native writers:

*I think it's crucial that we develop our skills in the English language because there are many Indian nations in Canada and many languages. Maybe one of the most valuable gifts the colonizers gave us was the English language so that we could communicate with each other. I fully believe that we can use English words to Indian advantage and that as Indian writers it's our responsibility to do so.*

While Cuthand's subversive underwriting of the colonizer's "gift" is strategically useful, particularly for Native people within the professional and educational institutions, it does not address a majority of Native people who are excluded or marginalized from this particular class. For those Native people dispossessed by the colonial system, the English language is an instrument of oppression: "I lived in Oxbow, Maine," writes Mavis Goeres, a Tobique woman,

*for seventeen years and then in Brockton, Massachusetts. You know, the man I married was white and he wouldn't let me speak my Native language or teach my children the Native language, so when I go away from him didn't I ever talk Maliseet. (laughs) My youngest daughter, Susan is the only one that can really speak Maliseet. The others know just little words, bits and pieces, but Susan can speak it when she wants to. It's a shame, though, she doesn't because the other kids don't speak it; we're losing our language.*



Another Tobique woman, Juanita Perley, writes with anger:

*When people went shopping, they never got money to buy the groceries; the Indian agent would write up a purchase order at his own store - McPhail's store. I can remember how they ridiculed the Indian people who came in there and even as a little kid I resented it. But you had to go in there with this little piece of paper that said you could have, say, \$10 worth of food, or whatever struck his fancy at the time. They'd be making fun of the Indian people that came in - they called us 'gimmies' - like 'gimme this,' 'gimme that.'*

*The way we talk, you never say, 'Please,' in our language because nobody was ever made to beg. So when Indian people said something in English they translate it literally from the way we speak and it sounded like a demand. I always resented the way the white people treated us and even today I resent it - I don't like them one bit, and I don't care if that is printed in the book, either!*

Teaching languages, teaching children the languages of the world, is perhaps one of the most estranged and unacknowledged aspects of women's work. For Native women, Native languages can not be separated from the preservation of a Native cultural identity. Women are producing their own spheres of exchange, their own terms of mediations and negotiations between men and women within their communities, between the Canadian State (the force of legal denominations) and the many forms of Native self-determination (the force of legal counterdenominations). In the past, Native women who married non-Natives were forced to assimilate to a non-Native culture. Divorced and cut off from their own culture, they bear the scars of dispossession; they could not acknowledge their cultural heritage and they remained unacknowledged persons, with a non-Native culture. In struggling to achieve a Native women self-determination, Native women are ensuring that any collective effort to achieve Native self-government will only succeed when the equality of Native women has also been acknowledged.

I have tried to show what is valuable about the way this book has been produced and what I have learned from it about the need to preserve Native language. The production of this book, however, raises an economic and political problem. Produced by a mainstream women's press, with the help of a non-Native, under the liberal mandate of cultural diversity, the process of decision making that controls who or what gets published ultimately lies with non-Native women. As non-Native women, we must remind ourselves of those Native presses such as Theytus Books, P.O. Box 218, Penticton, B.C. and Write-on Press, Box 86606, North Vancouver, B.C., which are struggling and succeeding in publishing work by, for and about Native people. While it is important for Native women's voices to be heard in mainstream presses, it is just as important, if not more, to support, to buy, to read books published by Native presses in order that they may continue to publish Native writings.

Glenna Perley anticipated that the readership of *Enough is Enough* would be doubly directed towards both Natives and non-Natives. And she envisioned that the experience of those readers might also be different. I can only speak as a non-Native woman, who has learned a great deal from this book and from writing this commentary. For the non-Native

reader, unfamiliar with the struggle of Native women in this country, this book is a place to begin listening to Native women or for the already initiated reader, familiar with Native women's writings, poetry, novels, essays and criticism, another book that will engage you in the struggle. To Native women readers, I look forward to listening to your commentary.

## WOMEN WRITERS OF THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

Edited by Katharina M. Wilson. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

### ***Joan Gibson***

Katharina Wilson is prolific in bringing the works of women writers from the early periods of European history to a wider audience. The author of two books on Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, a tenth-century Saxon canoness and dramatist, Wilson has previously edited *Medieval Women Writers* (Georgia, 1984) and plans to continue with a volume on seventeenth-century women writers. Even more ambitious is the massive forthcoming two volume reference work, *Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* (Garland Publishing, 1989). The edited volumes follow a format of introductory essays of biography and critical assessment, with bibliographies of primary and secondary works and lists of English translations. The period collections also include selections from the works of the women discussed.

The renaissance and reformation volume concentrates on women of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with a few examples of renaissance style and sensibility from the early seventeenth century. Organized geographically, the book includes twenty-five authors, five each from Italy, England and the German-speaking countries. France has seven representatives and Hungary, Spain and the Low countries one each. The volume is inclusive in other ways as well; a wide variety of social background is represented which Wilson fits into six broad categories of social/functional identity. She relates these to the women's audience, their choice of Latin or vernacular languages, subject matter and chosen genres. The *grand dame*, the woman scholar, the nun, the religious or political activist, the *cortigiana onesta* and the patrician all appear. A wide range of secular works is included. Examples of religious writing cover the spectrum from the radical reformation to mainstream Protestantism and the counter-reformation. The genres represented are quite diverse -- sonnet, chanson, epigram, ode, ballad, religious lyric, epithalamium, letter, chronicle, memoir, polemic history, polemic poetry, novella, novel, translation, mysticism, prose and poetic dialogue both secular and spiritual, homily and political oration. The selections clearly meet the editor's criteria that they show individual aesthetic

merit and form an abundant representative florilegium.

The familiarity of some authors chosen (Marguerite of Navarre, Theresa of Jesus and the Countess of Pembroke) should not obscure the importance of presenting many more authors who have not been easily accessible in English, among them Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Gambara, Catherine of Bologna, Pernette Du Guillet, Marie Dentière, Caritas Pirckheimer, and still others scarcely known even by name - Anna Owena Hoyers, Helene Kottanner, Anna Bijns and Lea Raskai. The contributions are substantial, ranging from 20-30 pages of combined essay and text. The introductions to individual authors are scholarly and almost all are quite helpful, while the well-ground axes of critical theory are refreshingly absent. Wilson's excellent 30 page general introduction and her editorial hand have achieved an overall consistency of tone which gives a strong coherence to the volume.

The collection is large (638 pp.), well edited, attractive and reasonably priced at \$40.00 (US) for the cloth edition, \$19.95 for paper. Well-written and organized, it is easy to read and use. A chronological table of literary and historical figures and major events helps to place the authors, while the bibliographies are invaluable for those wishing further information.

The book provides an excellent introduction to the women writers and women's literary issues of the period: it is a browser's delight and an important reference tool, although as an anthology it may not be satisfactory teaching material.

The very merits of this welcome volume, however, sharpen questions about the status and role of early women writers, many of which are related to issues of education and even of bare literacy. To take but three: How literate were women? What do we know of the audience for whom women wrote? What further study needs to be done on the conditions under which women wrote?

Women authors are clearly exceptional, but the current state of historical research on literacy simply cannot tell us much that we want to know about the degree of literacy among women or even about the correlation between reading and writing. All studies show women to have been less literate than men; David Cressy's impressive 1980 study documents the massive illiteracy among English women from 1580-1730. However, although acknowledging that upper-class and urban women are considerably more literate than their sisters, Cressy does not attempt much analysis of the literate 10 per cent. Further, Margaret Spofford and Mary Jo Manes, among others, point to interesting indications that routes to popular literacy were perhaps more widely varied than Cressy's methods might capture. These studies open the possibility that women, who may themselves have been unable to write, were nevertheless important teachers of reading, and point to ways in which girls could acquire fairly fluent reading skills without access to more formal schooling. Such considerations are closely related to the distinction between composition and writing. For at least two of the women in Wilson's collection, Catherine of Genoa and Helene Kottanner, questions about scribal practice overlap questions about

textual fidelity and the nature of authorship.

A better understanding of literacy is also needed to understand women authors' intended audience. There are interesting questions about reading in a culture of mixed literacy and illiteracy; author-reader relations may be quite different for those who read to and for themselves and those who are conduits of literacy or those who are read to. In turn, these relations may vary according to the type of literature considered. Again, unselfconscious address to a mixed audience of men and women is comparatively rare in these writings, though many writings assume an audience exclusively male or female.

Finally, problems of access to education and to different kinds of writing, together with special problems of authority and inclination to write, still require further study. In this context, Cressy's conclusion that literacy and practical utility are closely related may also need to be refined in the case of women writers. Wilson addresses the "mirror phenomenon," problems of canonization and the issue of women's silence; she notes the conspicuous absence of learned translation. The volume thus shows the circumscription of early women writers; it is no accident that they are treated primarily as writers. The forms of written expression urged on women of the renaissance and reformation period - imaginative literature in the vernacular, vernacular translations and devotional literature - are those most susceptible of literary analysis. Only seven of the twenty-four contributors come from outside the field of literature; their essays are among the shortest (only one over 20 pp.) and least successfully integrated.

Wilson takes the position that in spite of everything, women's voices do offer an important counterpoint to male acts of creation, believing that all participation in shaping language is a form of social power. This valuable collection illustrates her thesis and challenges us to advance the supporting research necessary to understand more fully the situation of women writers.

## THE LANGUAGE OF EXCLUSION: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti

Sharon Leder with Andrea Abbott. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987.

### *Janice Lavery*

Traditional literary criticism has often used stereotypical images of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to explain their work and lives, in what the authors call the "spinster/recluse model." The "abnormal" Dickinson trapped by her self-imposed isolation, and Rossetti by her mystical spirituality, have provided the major focus for many examinations of their poetry. Leder and Abbott, claiming that the poets have been wrongly detached from the political issues and reform movements of their day, have

aimed their study "beyond the current criticism by releasing the poets from the prison of their private selves and by demonstrating their poetic responses to public events in their age."

These responses, according to the authors, place the poets firmly within the historical development of the women's movement, particularly in the sense that women's writing - which embodied their voice - and their public actions were gathering critical power. Leder and Abbott explore the poets' lives and work to establish them as participants, through their work, in the events and great issues of their day. Dickinson, for example, was affected by the American Civil War, and Rossetti was active in social reform work during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

The poets' status as single women, in an age when "unmarried women of all classes were society's largest group of outsiders," is presented by the authors as among the most important keys to the poets' sense of exclusion and their resulting roles as clear-sighted observers of the society which had little room for them.

Rossetti's poetry was informed by the English women reformers and radicals who were focusing on marriage reform and women's exclusion from education, professional and economic opportunity. Dickinson commented critically on the American Civil War, religion and marriage. It has taken nearly one hundred years for Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to be assessed in terms of their work and their experiences, rather than the degree of their conformity to or divergence from traditionally acceptable feminine behaviour. While their writing style could be smoother, Leder and Abbott have assembled a convincing case, utilizing biographical data, critical evaluation of the language and writing of Dickinson and Rossetti, and a survey of existing literary criticism and feminist theory of language. Extensive notes, indexes and a selected bibliography all add to the usefulness of the study.

People in the literacy field may be interested in approaching this book as a model for analyzing women's writing within a societal and historical context. Much of the strength of current literacy practice comes from its respect for and encouragement of the learner, her life and her experience. It is interesting to see this acceptance and respect applied to women in another context, and the historical perspective is a constructive addition to the learner-centered approach.

The examination of the lives of these women, who were educated and middle class (both stunning examples of literate power), may seem at first to be of limited relevance to the literacy movement. It is, however, a useful reminder of the long struggle women have waged to find their own authentic voices and to have them heard. The move toward literacy is an important part of women's struggle to free themselves from involuntary exclusion and to enable all our voices to be heard.

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## PARADISE ON HOLD

Laura Bulger. Toronto: Bramble House, 1987.

### *Marie-France Silver*

This arresting collection of short stories by Toronto author Laura Bulger created a considerable sensation within the Canadian Portuguese community when it first appeared in its original language. Now that it has been translated, it should attract a good deal of attention from English Canada.

These are tales of loneliness, in adaptation, and alienation. Bulger's characters are misfits - people caught between conflicting views of life, torn between the illusory world of their imagination and the drab reality of daily life, disenchanted by the present while tormented by nostalgic memories of their long gone youth. Many of them have immigrated to Canada from Portugal or Italy. Torn between the old world and the new, they are as estranged - psychologically and spiritually - from the former as from the latter. They remain outsiders, forever pulled in opposing directions. "What a helluva life!" exclaims the narrator of "Vaivém," the last story in the collection. "Always coming and going, from here to there, there to here, um vaivem ..."

In a classically sober style, Laura Bulger succeeds in dramatizing the peculiar ambivalence of all those who have left one country to settle in another.

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## CIVIL TO STRANGERS AND OTHER WRITINGS

Barbara Pym. Edited by Hazel Holt. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988.

### *Anne Pilgrim*

Not long before her death in 1980, Barbara Pym gave some thought to the proper disposition of her remains - her literary remains, that is, which were then occupying a large cardboard box in her bedroom. Eventually she gave all of her manuscripts, notebooks and papers to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, a most suitable (her favorite adjective) choice given the importance of Oxford in her life and her fiction. It is from that treasure trove of manuscripts that the present collection of some of her earliest work is drawn.

The appearance of *Civil to Strangers* brings to thirteen the total number of Pym novels, in a thirty-eight-year publishing history which falls into three sharply defined phases. First came the six gently satirical comedies, peopled with "excellent women" much put upon by vicars or anthropologists (or both). This sort of novel went out of style in the early

1960s, leaving Pym in an enforced silence that ended only in 1977 when both Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin singled her out in a *TLS* survey as an "under-rated" author; at the end of the decade she was able to place three more novels with Macmillan in rapid succession, including the much-praised *Quartet in Autumn*. Since her death her sister Hilary, her literary executor Hazel Holt and other friends such as Larkin have been active in editing the manuscript material, a project which has yielded the invaluable 1984 autobiography, *A Very Private Eye*. and four posthumous novels: *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *Crampton Hodnet*, *An Academic Question*, and now *Civil to Strangers*. To make up what she describes as "a last sheaf" of Pym's unpublished writings, Hazel Holt has added to the full text of *Civil to Strangers* sizeable extracts from three other novels, four short stories, and the script of a talk Pym gave on BBC Radio in 1978 after her rediscovery by the press and public.

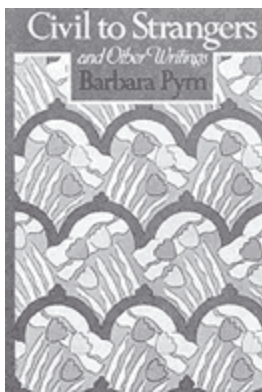
When Barbara Pym, barely twenty-one, came from Oxford in the summer of 1934, she had received a thorough grounding in English literature, but also in the experience of unrequited love, for a fellow undergraduate, an egotistical young man whom she romantically nick-named Lorenzo. In unromantic reality he was Henry Harvey-fickle, petulant and spoiled. Separated from this unworthy object of her affections, Pym turned to fiction-writing for solace, producing her hilarious *roman à clef*, *Some Tame Gazelle*. in which she imagined herself, her sister and their friends all thirty years in the future: Henry became the blissfully complacent Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve tyrannizing over a wife named Agatha, and patiently adored by his parishioner Barbara/Belinda who is now glad they 'never married'. While this novel made the rounds of publishers (ultimately it became her first published novel, but not until 1950), Pym launched into *Civil to Strangers*. a fresh re-imagining of her future, this time in the role of Henry's wife. Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon at twenty-eight has been married for five years to a Miltonically domineering mate named Adam, a writer who has laid aside his , novel and is "contemplating an epic poem." The marriage which seems threatened by his cool selfishness, separate vacations (Adam gives himself a week in the Bodleian for his) and the absence of children, is in the course of the novel , restored by Adam's reluctant discovery that he has a rival, by a "second honeymoon" in Budapest, and the news of a "little Adam" to come. Wish-fulfillment indeed!

Though this novel comes from Pym's apprenticeship in fiction and may be partly directed, as the editor admits, to Pym enthusiasts and specialists who have read everything else available, it includes ample evidence of the particular pleasures intrinsic to her work and may well serve to create new admirers. As in the later novels, she provides a cast of mildly dotty characters in an enclosed setting- this time the village of Up Callow - and a sharply observant consciousness in Cassandra that misses no foible in herself or in others. Literary allusions, more or less obscure, abound (the title is taken from Pomfret's 1700 poem *The Choice*) and so do scenes of high comedy such as that of the rector's sermon in which he unadvised attempts to introduce the metaphor of life as embroidery: "Some people



don't put in enough stitches, repeated the rector, in a slow, emphatic voice. 'Isn't that true of many of us?'"

*Civil to Strangers* is a complete and, so far as one can tell, even, polished text, which is not true of the next three works, all of which the editor found "in a fairly 'raw' state" and which she says she has "reduced... in Barbara's favorite culinary sense of the word" to their present forty of fifty page length. What this means in bibliographical terms, rather than culinary, is far from clear. The first of these, which Pym called "my Finnish novel" and is here titled *Gervase and Flora*, is of interest mainly as testimony to the sad continuance of her obsession with Henry Harvey in 1937 and 1938, even after he had gone to teach in Finland and married Else Godenhjelm there. Finally, it seems Pym steeled herself to write a closing scene of parting, complete with the escaping lover's protestation "We can always be friends." The other two fragments, or reductions, of novels both date from the early years of the war and echo many of her diary entries of the time, reflecting as they do such activities as practicing bandaging, coping with evacuee children, and placating house-maids who have begun "talking about munitions factories in a very sinister way."



The Pym papers include twenty-seven short stories, very few of which were ever published. Here we have a glimpse of two early ones which were rejected (one with characters plundered from the abandoned *Crampton Hodnet*), and two which, in the brief heyday of her rediscovery, were actually commissioned, by the *Church Times* and *The New Yorker*. What other fiction writer could possibly have been so honored by those two periodicals at once? The *New Yorker* story, "Across a Crowded Room," is heavily autobiographical, featuring an unnamed woman at an Oxford ceremonial dinner, sentimentally dreaming of an encounter with-yes, "Gervase" - but rational enough to dismiss the idea as "too much like a romantic novel" and to finish the thought with the tart observation that nowadays "fiction... tended to be rather more realistic than life." The story leads smoothly into Pym's all-too-short and modest radio talk surveying her own life in fiction, with its definition of "the kind of immortality most authors would want - to feel that their work would be immediately recognizable as having been written by them and by nobody else." This immortality she achieved long ago; *Civil to Strangers and Other Writings* should make many more readers aware of it.



# THE RADIANT WAY

Margaret Drabble. Toronto: A Douglas Gibson Book, McClelland and Stewart, 1987.  
Reissued in paper by Collins, 1988.

## *JanetE. Lewis*

Visiting in Toronto in 1986, Margaret Drabble told interviewer Ken Adachi: "I am interested in the state-of-England novel, in depicting where people stand in certain social moments. As I grow older, I've less sense of the uniqueness of the individual and more awareness of my characters as being part of a larger order or process." As evidence of her concern, Drabble's tenth novel, *The Radiant Way*, tells the story of three women in their mid forties caught up in the turmoil of Thatcher's England in the 1980s.

The novel begins on New Year's Eve, 1979: "the end of a decade. A portentous moment for those who pay attention to portents." Liz Headleand, successful Harley Street psychiatrist and wife of a well-to-do television producer, uses the few minutes before her guests arrive to stare into her mirror, contemplate past and future, and to avoid telephoning her mother, an elderly recluse in the distant industrial city of Northam. Among the guests at her party will be Alix Bowen and Esther Breuer, her close friends since their Cambridge days. The party will also serve as a farewell for her husband, Charles, soon to leave for an important position in New York. "She is glad he is going, she thinks. The strain of living up to the lofty concept of marriage that they have invented is tiring, at times, and she is a busy woman. A year off will not come amiss. It will give her peace, privacy." After twenty-one years of marriage, Liz, 45, feels that the party will celebrate their domestic and professional achievements, "proof that two disparate spirits can wrestle and diverge and mingle and separate and remain distinct." It will be "a sign that they had weathered so much, and were now entering a new phase? A phase of tranquility and knowledge, of acceptance and harmony, when jealousies and rivalries would drop from them like dead leaves? ... There is a symmetry about this, about their relationship with the clock of the century, that calls for celebration."

The question marks that seem to reflect Liz's confident self-assessment are among Drabble's ironic clues that this serene image is about to be shattered. During the party, Liz discovers that Charles plans to divorce her and marry a cold, vacuous and boring socialite. Liz's reactions, understandably, are those of rage and hurt, incredulity and self-pity. What will become of her own image, so painfully earned after her fatherless childhood, her youth spent studying for scholarships, her hectic married life juggling the demands of her career, of her daughters, of Charles's three sons from his first marriage, and her own escape and transformation from her mother's austere life into the comfort and graciousness of the upper-middle class?

As in her earlier novels, Drabble takes the stuff of soap operas and makes it into a profound, sensitive and often funny rendering of women's crises and their everyday coping, their fears, discouragements and perseverance. Liz and her friends, Alix, a part

time English instructor at a women's prison and Esther, a freelance lecturer on Renaissance art, are "among the *crème de la crème*" of their generation:

*opportunity was certainly offered to them, they had choices, at eighteen the world opened up to them and displayed its riches, the brave new world of Welfare State and County Scholarships, of equality for women, they were the elite, the chosen, the garlanded of the great social dream. Adventure and possibility lay before them, as they had not lain before Liz's sister Shirley, who married at nineteen and stayed on in Northam, or before Dora Sutcliffe who left school at fifteen and sold sweets in Woolworth's until she married Shirley's husband's brother Steve.*

These distinctions offer, in miniature, the scope and structure of the novel. The first impression suggests a slow-moving narrative. The reader seems to be expected to master not only Liz's back- ground and her family and in-laws, her patients and acquaintances, but all the connections and interests of Alix and Esther as well. The three women are held together by their sense of being outsiders, on the margins of English life "removed from the mainstream by a mad mother, by a deviant ideology, by refugee status" respectively. They also represent a carefully distinguishable set of goals. As an applicant to Cambridge, Liz wanted

*'to make sense of things. To understand.' By things, she meant herself. Or she thought she meant herself. 'I would like' said Alix, 'to change things.' By things, she did not mean herself. Or thought she did not mean herself. 'You reach too high,' said Esther. 'I wish to acquire interesting information. That is all.'*

The ironical comically-lofty tone, seems to inflate the three into almost choric figures but they are, simultaneously, caught in closely-documented time and space. Government cuts, the miners' strike, the Falklands war, all the griefs of the nation and the age reflect and intrude on the lives and families of the Central characters.

In her early books, Drabble concentrates on the choices facing educated : young women, career, marriage, child; bearing and rearing. Here, Drabble explores the dilemmas of middle-aged women, children grown, marriages dissolving or suffering from unexpected financial reverses, the worry and guilt about aging parents, the disappearance of time-honoured jobs and customs, the narrowing options and reduced aspirations of growing older. Alix worries about a vulnerable young woman released on parole, and about giving up her job if her husband, declared redundant, must find employment outside of London. Esther knows that she will never write an important monograph on Crivelli; instead, she fusses about her potted palm. Liz consoles herself with a tabby cat. A gruesome series of murders : preoccupies all three friends.



Margaret Atwood has compared *The Radiant Way* to *Middlemarch* in its scope and sympathy and, in many respects, the resemblance is powerful. On a second reading, the welter of information Drabble provides is more obviously unified and structured. Not only does Drabble interlace the stories of the three women, but she also roots them specifically in the political, moral and social setting. Drabble has praised George Eliot's ability to combine social situations with individual passion and here she attempts the same sort of vast integration.



The construction of the novel parallels its subject matter. Instead of being divided into conventional chapters, the book consists of two huge central portions, the second of them taking place three and a half years after the first. These two "mega-chapters" are bracketed by the introduction which describes the New Year's Eve events and by a short epilogue. Drabble has described her usual narrator as "slightly bewildered;" the self-conscious voice of this narrative does not claim omniscience, but appears to have a considerable access to her characters. Sometimes she curtails her insights firmly, if a bit whimsically. In the midst of providing background information about Alix's husband, the narrator interrupts herself and her reader:

*But that is another part of this story, and not to be pursued here, for Brian is not a woman and reflections on his prospects or lack of prospects in 1952 would at this juncture muddy the narrative tendency. Forget I mentioned him. Let us return to Liz, Alix and Esther.*

*The Radiant Way* ends in June 1985 on Esther's fiftieth birthday. The chain of horrible murders has ended with a psychopath's arrest. Liz, her mother dead at last, has uncovered the mystery of her father's disappearance. In the process she discovers her own childhood copy of *The Radiant Way*, the school primer which Charles used for the title of his challenging TV series, now long abandoned for less controversial work. On the book jacket are "a boy and a girl running gaily down (not up) a hill, against a background of radiant thirties sunburst." The same sunburst-behind-the-clouds illustration decorates the opening of each of the four movements of the novel. It also provides the tranquil, quite unsentimental atmosphere of the novel's conclusion. As Liz looks at the little book:

*the children aged, slowly. They skipped down hill for ever, along the radiant way, and behind them burned for ever that great dark dull sun. Liz shook her head, slowly, smiled to herself; slowly. It was beautiful, it was necessary, she said to herself. She touched her locket, she laid her fingers on the images in the book. She had been very near to knowledge. She would go no further, today she would nurse her strength, for the next encounter.*

## THE GROUNDING OF MODERN FEMINISM

Nancy F. Cott. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

***Deborah Jurdjevic***

Nancy Cott, in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, argues for a plurality of feminist causes, recognizes that feminism allows "a range of possible relations between belief and action, a range of possible denotations of ideology or movement." Cott's book is an important one, not only for the sake of historical accuracy and for the sense of perspective that it brings to women's causes, but also for its sensitivity to the truth-telling properties of language.

Her thesis is that the new language of feminism marked the end of the 'woman' movement (the nineteenth-century phenomena which resulted in women getting the vote), and marked specifically the emergence of a modern political idea of woman. Feminists of our century, recognizing individuality and heterogeneity among their members, affirm their collective identity by their opposition to sex-hierarchy, by their recognition that women's condition is socially constructed (neither God nor Nature is responsible), and by their shared sense of identity (gender grouping) which itself is the basis for social change. Cott's study focuses on the years 1910 to 1930 and intends national scope for the struggle to discover "language, organization, and goals adequate to the paradoxical situation of modern women."

With an historian's appreciation for detail, Cott refuses to generalize, believing that summary betrays the truth of things. But while the poet and the historian may be atone in this faith in synecdoche, the general reader is somewhat numbed by the variety of causes, movements, ideologies to which women paid allegiance in the early decades of this century. (The introduction thoughtfully carries an alphabetized list of no fewer than thirty-two acronyms.) While there is, in some cases, an overlap of interests among these distinct groups, there is more often an indication of conflict along class or racial lines. Cott's study recognizes and affirms 'difference.' When 'difference' threatens to overwhelm her study, Cott reverts to metaphor. Nineteenth-century feminists, for example, divided on the issues of individual rights and social responsibility, are credited with achieving a "stereographic or double-lensed view, bringing reality into three-dimensional focus."

Occasionally the metaphor itself threatens to overwhelm the thought. Noting the impact of advertising upon the homemaker of the 1930s, Cott writes, "advertisers drew arms and ammunition of scientific credibility from the stockpiles provided by the social sciences, and the conflicted definition of the modern woman provided ample terrain for psychological battle." Her sense, however, of the importance of fact, of telling detail, more than compensates for an overblown metaphor. Recognizing that young women were particularly pressured to define their own place in society at the beginning of this century, she hits upon a convincing statistic: "more than a quarter of all the American women born in the first decade of the twentieth century, those who came of age in the 1920s, never bore children, despite the waxing marriage rate." Writing of those women who did bear children, but who were not employed outside the home, Cott registers the truth of the situation by letting a variety of women speak, each in her own style. She includes the Irish wife of a carpenter who begins "don't you think I'm not a-wanting to do my share...;" she registers the protests of a middle-aged woman with a college education behind her, and the wife of a teacher, each of whom recognizes that the 'price' of being provided for is self-respect.

The integrity of Cott's study depends in large part on her holding to the terms of her thesis, on her respect for the individual voice, on her respect for difference in sameness. Summarizing twenty years of women's politics, Cott does not assert anything like solidarity, but rather affirms a "vital ambivalence." "Without coalescing into one movement, without mobilizing the mass, and often declining the label feminist, individual and group efforts nonetheless sparked again and again," Late twentieth-century feminists may do well to read by that flickering light.

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## BODY INVADERS: Panic Sex in America

Edited and introduced by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1987.

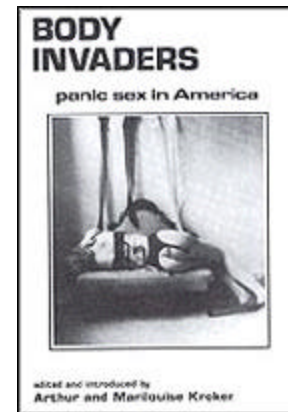
***Lisa Moore***

*Body Invaders* is a collection of loosely-linked essays that explores the reconstruction of the body in post-modern culture and/or the construction of the post-modern body. These latter terms are constantly renegotiated throughout the volume: the writers spar with easy definitions to produce an enriched, if uncomfortably bruised and bleeding, sense of what it is to live in a body in the post modern age. We live in a time when representations of the human body are more at active, more powerful than the human body itself. Indeed, with the advent of reproductive technology, the crusade for fetal rights, and the increased use of organ transplants from animals, it is often impossible to tell just what constitutes "humanity." We who live in post modern bodies are disconnected from our own flesh and from the communities that might help define it by the exigencies of mass reproduction.

We see too man: images of what we ought to be to be able to tell what we are.

Since the post-modern epoch is characterized by the domination of visual images produced by the media, the printed word is a somewhat anachronistic method of exploring it. The editors of *Body invaders* have attempted to account for this incongruity by including photo essays, stills from videos, and graphic designs throughout the volume, and by including essays that experiment with dream narratives and dialogues.

In the context of this postmodern multi-media play between fiction and fact, word and image, it is interesting that one of the most sophisticated and moving essays is Eileen Manion's "A Ms.-Managed Womb," a relatively straightforward analytic piece written in clear, vigorous : prose. Manion identifies a crucial contradiction in feminist responses to innovations in reproductive technology: that in rescuing women's individualism from coercive institutions like "the family," we distract attention from our efforts at community-building. The language of the abortion debate, with its emphasis on women's individual choice, is a good example of how feminist principles of community get muddled in discussions of reproductive issues. We have attempted to wrest control over our bodies from individual men and from the patriarchal church and state, but "this revolt against the notion of the body as male property has left us with the idea that the body is our property." This view, Manion claims, "leaves something to be desired - namely the element of the social." This fundamental contradiction has crippled feminist analysis of reproductive rights as a system, confining our politics to single-issue fights without an analytic context from which to establish priorities. Manion points out that feminists must become more involved with public policy-making on these issues because the rapid expansion of reproductive technologies could mean that we find our bodies spoken for before our politics can prevent it. Rather than either "perfecting" these technologies or outlawing them, Manion argues, "what we need is more creative thinking about social possibilities" they open up. Instead of using technology to produce the increasingly elusive fantasy TV family, we should use it as an occasion to ponder what kind of "families" feminists want, and whether we really need science to create them.



Another outstanding essay in this collection is also written from a feminist perspective. Kim Sawchuk's "A Tale of Inscription/Fashion Statements" is a beautifully-written and trenchant analysis of the contradictory possibilities the fashion industry poses for women. She rejects the prevailing view of feminist and Marxist cultural critics of fashion as "a reflection of the social onto the body, fashion as the repression of the natural body; fashion simply as a commodity to be resisted; fashion as substitute for the missing phallus." These claims rest on simple notions of a "natural" body that exists prior to its social construction, and that is deformed and rendered oppressed by that construction; if the oppressive social codes were removed, the "natural" body would be revealed and liberated. But Sawchuk argues that "an anti-fashion discourse cannot be assumed to be inherently feminist." Such discourses often depend upon misogynist views of women as too stupid to resist the blandishments of Madison Avenue, and/or have a hidden agenda in

which women's potentially subversive sexuality, insisted upon by fashionable clothing, is to be denied. Sawchuk wants to insist on the *pleasure* that women get from clothing:

*The acts of shopping, of wearing an article of clothing, of receiving clothing as a gift, can be expressions of recognition and love between women, or between women and men, which should not be ignored, though they may fail to transcend the dominant phallic economy of desire.*

Fashion, then, is neither inherently oppressive nor inherently liberating. It is "contradictory for women," and in that very contradiction lies the possibility of using it to push the boundaries of acceptable feminine sexuality.

Because these feminist essays are specifically concerned with the bodies of women, they avoid one of the major problems of this book and of any theoretical investigation of "the body." It seems to me that discussions of "the body" as an ungendered, neutral entity too easily slide into the assumption that it is male. For example, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's essay, "Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition," seeks to "emphasize the fact that the (natural) body in the post-modern condition has *already* disappeared." This statement assumes, with most contemporary feminist theory (including Kim Sawchuk above), that the body, like gender, is socially constructed rather than an unchangeable biological entity. Yet the authors devote one paragraph specifically to women's bodies, which they claim "have always been post-modern because they have always been targets of power." (There is, of course, no specific reference to men's bodies.) If women's bodies must be discussed separately, then "the body" must be male in its abstract form. (If a body can be something other than male or female, as Monique Wittig argues in "The Straight Mind," the possibility is not explored here.) Despite their theoretical disclaimers of naturalness, the Krokers have fallen back on the assumption that there is an unchangeable, or at least, abstractable, state of the body and that women's bodies are the occasional exception to this general condition. Many of the other essays work on the same assumption, and indeed, I think it is difficult to avoid for any theory which takes "the body" as its object of study. Post-modern theorists would do well to note Adrienne Rich's words, quoted by Elspeth Probyn in "The Anorexic Body:" "To say 'the body' lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective. To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions."

Grandiose assertions, of course, are what post-modern theory does best. Perhaps because it insists on our contemporary isolation from history, writing such as this often insists disturbingly on the significance of current dilemmas. Not since the seventeenth-century millenarians have we heard such doom saying as the editors' assertion that "what follows is body writing for the end of the world" or Baudrillard's notion of "the disappearance of history," in which "history can no longer surpass itself, it can no longer envisage its own finality, dream its own end." Because these claims seem inflated, even hysterical, I am tempted to dismiss them as insufficiently historical, mere navel-gazing. But a feminist writer not represented in *Body Invaders*, Christina Thurmer-Rohr, reminds us that "the patriarchal wish for omnipotence and total control has stepped out of the realm of mere fantasy, fiction and experiment into the realm of complete reliability."<sup>1</sup> What Thurmer-

Rohr calls "the worldwide escalation of nuclear, chemical and biological means of annihilation" set our era apart definitively from the past. Nonetheless, seeing this difference clearly and facing the inevitable, daily anxiety it engenders can distract us from the political action that post-modern theory, with its recognition of the power of the media and the complex functioning of ideology, can also make possible. Fortunately, many of the essays in *Body Invaders* (most notably those by feminists) manifest a specific political agenda that is all the more effective because it is grounded in a sophisticated theoretical understanding of the dilemmas, temptations and possibilities of this era of late capitalism, high patriarchy, and nuclear terrorism - in sum, the post-modern condition.

<sup>1</sup>Christina Thunner-Rohr, "From Deception to Un-Deception: On Complicity of Women," *Trivia* 12 (Spring 1988), [p.63](#).

## A WOMAN'S HISTORY OF SEX

Harriett Gilbert and Christine Roche. London: Pandora, 1988.

### *Carol Greene*

Harriett Gilbert and Christine Roche's *A Women's History of Sex* has what so few other feminist studies have - humor! The book is a tongue-in-cheek look at the ways women's sexuality has been controlled or has been the target of attempted control in history.

Gilbert's writing style and Roche's illustrations are perfect complements. Both are intelligently funny and discretely indiscreet. The text is wide in scope and succinctly written, yet there is no economy of laughs. Bold statements, titillating trivia and a personal voice give the reader a sense that she's sharing an uproarious laugh with a friend.



In the opening chronology, "Momentous Moments," Gilbert lists some milestones in our sexual past. We learn that Sappho of Lesbos wrote lyric poems in praise of love, lust and women in 6th century BC; that the bidet was invented to serve the growing popularity of oral sex in 17th-century France; and that in 1947 Dr. Helena Wright first challenged the 'efficacy of the penis-vagina combination' in producing orgasms for women. The text reveals the origins of misogyny and the hypocrisies of times past and present. Historically women's sexuality has been subjugated in the interests of patriarchal political expediency. With the discovery of agriculture, for example, hunters returned to the domicile. Ideas of land and livestock ownership and of inheritance were developed; men soon wanted to ensure the 'legitimacy' of the paternal line. The result was an array of vile laws that brought an end to the relative sexual independence women had experienced up to the 2nd millennium BC. Like land and livestock, women became 'legal property.'

Wherever there is an historical example of women being duped in power relationships, there is a contemporary parallel. Gilbert is quick to illuminate these. She maligns the idea



of a 1960s 'sexual revolution.' In the chapter "Brotherhood," dealing with the French Revolution, she writes:

*Revolutions for the rights of men do tend to be just what they say. In the more recent turmoils of the 1960s, women who gave their brains, hearts and bodies to Civil Rights, anti-Vietnam, anti-Gaullist and other revolutionary movements also realized that their 'radical' brothers valued them only as envelope-addressers; or sex objects.*

Roche's illustrations, commissioned for Gilbert's text, are equally, if not more responsible for the hilarity. Roche's line has a spontaneous, unruly quality that is void of sleekness, and it's in this that the appeal and beauty of her work lie.

As Gilbert admits, this is not a comprehensive history. More precisely, it is a Western women's history of sex; even at that, the study is cursory. We are allowed only glimpses of the various epochs. A short bibliography is provided in which all directly quoted sources are listed, but there are no footnotes. This omission leaves the reader unable to pursue some of the more daring assertions, but it also reminds the reader that the work is intended primarily for fun.

In her final estimation, Gilbert optimistically asserts that we are "coming through" what has been a sexual history of repression and waste.

*[We are] continuing to alter the social structures that cramp, hurt or do damage to us; continuing to assert our existence: our needs, our angers, our delights - it's things such as these that will determine whether the girls and women who follow us shrivel from the very mention of sex, or embrace it with mouths, breasts and thighs.*

## COMPETITION: A Feminist Taboo?

Edited by Valerie Miner and Helen Longino. New York: The Feminist Press, 1987.

### ***Teresa O'Brien***

In our capitalist, individualist society, competition is an integral part of our learning, of our day-to-day realities, of our fight for feminist identity and , achievement. For some, competition is a personal fight for grades, for a job, for love, for attention. For others, it

involves more than the merely self-serving: it is a competitive battle with the powerful in the struggle for women's political, economic and social rights. Yet this in itself entails an assumption of a morally superior type of competition, belying the fact that such an assumption is itself competitive (that is, my brand of competitiveness is more authentic than yours). We are born into a commutative society and competition is fostered throughout our lives, through an educational system that all too often focuses on grades rather than learning, an economic system that focuses on material gain as an indication of worth. Competition exists, but must it be relegated as a rather suspect topic to the confines of mainstream ideology?

The writers in this book demonstrate that competition need not always be construed as a destructive phenomenon, on based on internecine and structural rivalry. It may, they argue, be used to advantage since "competing brings experience and experience strengthens... Appropriate competition encourages the experience, strength and confidence that nourish the cooperation that feminists prize." The book moves from vivid accounts of the role of competition in everyday life - personal, political, economic - to the ways in which competition might be used to transform our world. Is competition healthy, or is it an act of bad faith in our quest for sisterhood? Indeed, is such a quest doomed to failure since many sisters, including Cinderella, do not exactly set a fine example of a cooperative spirit?

I initially felt very uneasy about the tone of many parts of this book - especially the more self-analytical chapters. My uneasiness rested not on the idea that competition is a taboo subject, but on my feminist belief that psychological analyses of mother-daughter relationships or petty rivalries amongst females for the attention of men or the title of best-dressed or whatever, are not relevant to the more wide-ranging issues of class and gender. Yet obviously we must have an understanding of how we live our lives before we can implement change in those lives. Indeed, many of the contributors underline this when they point out the moral and political significance of competition and of how competition between women is not so much based on individualism but is instead a reflection of our positions *vis-à-vis* our race, colour and class. That competition may be used as a of divide-and-conquer strategy is not a result of a patriarchal or a capitalist conspiracy, but is a reflection of those ideologie as they exist. One must, however, ask this a if a destructive form of competition is so endemic in our society, can we fight it from within and hope to sabotage its negative effects? Can we use it to build a more cooperative and stronger association for all women? The contributors to this book certainly think so.

One of the problems in tackling this subject is that the term 'competition' conjures up so many different ideas (as, indeed, papers in this book illustrate). The book runs the gamut of discussions on competition as a game of one-up woman-ship to competition as a fight for scarce market resources. For some competition is rivalry; it is individualistic.

*I happen to remember piano lessons. I was given them with a vengeance. Not to develop a love of music or a gratifying personal competence - but because you'll be so popular at*

*parties if you can play piano for everybody.'* (Read: and the other girls can't.)

Letty Cottin Pogrebin sarcastically tells us this in the opening chapters as she caustically describes the ways in which little girls are taught to compete with each other. For others, the term is a motivation to write about the struggle for economic and political independence. The reasons for competing or disliking competition are argued through: as a reflection of unresolved conflicts in mother/daughter relationships; as a result of an identity crisis due to the internalization of patronizing attitudes; as a rationalization of one's successes or lack of them.

Many of the contributions present a view of women as bent on self-flagellation - yes, I know I am a success in university/business life but what a shambles my personal life is! - but many also focus on the structures that are the background to any discussion on women and competition. These focus on the poor representation of women in universities and in business, of the correspondingly high representation in low status jobs such as domestic work, on the women in developing countries who are shunted into ghettoized, marginal and poorly funded development projects. They point to the fact that our society encourages individualistic competition in order to discourage cooperation to such a point that even the most well meaning females fall into the trap of competing to impose their views on others, and that beneath the slogan that sisterhood is powerful there lies a multitude of complexities.

Myrna Kostash's very fine piece is a case in point of the well meaning feminist falling afoul of her own ideals. She describes the feelings of little sister status that many Canadians have with regard to their metaphorically big sisters in the US. Canadian feminists have, she says, idealized their American counterparts while they, on the other hand, are barely aware of us. Resenting the ethnocentrism of so many Americans, Kostash describes her visit to Greece, and her gradually-developed relationship with Greek feminists and with their rationalization about certain concessions to men. Kostash tells us "After six months of this, I began to believe I really was a representative of an 'advanced' form of feminism." In short, she adds, she had become that American she had always resented. While she argues generally for the separation of women's struggle for liberation from nationalist and left wing struggles, she concedes that this is itself, in a global sense, an imposition of a view that developed within a certain political framework. To impose this view on others is to assume a "feminist authenticity" that is inherently in competition with other views and ultimately assumes its own superiority.

That the most committed and well meaning occasionally fall into the use of an inauthentic form of competition is a cautionary tale to the editors' note of optimism when they argue that we can learn to use competition wisely. There may be among some feminists a taboo against competition, but for most of us sisterhood does not mean a blind adherence to one doctrine of total unity. One can support the broad ideals of feminism but recognize the legitimacy of adopting different methods.

THE MUSICAL WOMAN:  
An International Perspective,  
Volume 11, 1984-1985

Edited by Judith Lang Zaimont (editor in chief), Catherine Overhauser and Jane Gottlieb (associate editors). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987.

**Roberta Lamb**

This second volume of *The Musical Woman*, a yearbook of women's musical achievement, both contemporary and historical, is impressive in its scope. The editors have retained the same format used in Volume I, facilitating use of the series as a reference. A substantially expanded Part I: Gazette features lists of performances, publications and so forth, documenting the activities of women musicians, 1983-1986. Part II: Essays include nineteen articles addressing such varied facets of music as musicology, music education, conferences on women in music, music criticism, orchestra management, concert promotion, conducting, and composition.

While *The Musical Woman* is a most welcome, needed, and useful resource for anyone interested in women in music, it is not without weaknesses. Perhaps one of its strengths, breadth of scope, is also its greatest weakness.

The subtitle indicates that an "international perspective" is represented in *The Musical Woman*, but that is clearly not the case. Only five of the nineteen articles are about women who are not Americans. The Gazette, though nearly twice the length of the same section in Volume I, clearly is dominated by American women. The editors acknowledge that "Even with all of these resources and the improved documentation of contemporary music in general, it is always impossible to be totally comprehensive;" but since only American sources are listed by name it is not possible to tell which worldwide sources were consulted. Hopefully, future volumes of *The Musical Woman* will be more international in perspective.

The quality of writing varies greatly throughout Part II: Essays. There are examples of fine feminist scholarship in music: "Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, Twentieth-Century Benefactress of Chamber Music" by Carol Neuls-Bates; "Arthur P. Schmidt, Music Publisher and Champion of American Women Composers" by Adrienne Fried Block; "Women Band Directors in American Higher Education" by Carol Ann Feather; "Gennaine Tailleferre: Before, During, and After Les Six" by Laura Mitgang; "Tarquinia Motza (1542-1617): A Case Study of Women, Music, and Society in the Renaissance" by Joanne Riley; and, "Gender and Genre in Ethyl Smyth's Opera's" by Elizabeth Wood. Written in an informal style, but equally informative and appropriate, are the articles on conferences and festivals by Edith Borroff and Katherine Hoover, respectively. However, only one-third of Doris Allen's "Women's Contributions to Modern Piano Pedagogy" actually addresses the - topic. The article meanders entirely too much and includes use of the male 'generic' pronoun when referring to women, e.g. "... pedagogy

is his craft, as teacher." The same criticism can be made regarding some of the interviews.

The problems here are twofold: one that may be unique to the discipline of music and one that is common in many areas of feminist scholarship.

The common problem is how to allow for a variety of expression to ensure that all voices are heard; how to avoid excluding important concepts and experiences under the guise of quality, and still maintain standards of scholarship. The editors have dealt with this issue by not limiting *The Musical Woman* to scholarly papers. It is important that women's lives in music be documented in a variety of ways, including reports from festivals and concerts, interviews, first person essays, and popular visual media. At the same time, additional editing might have been appropriate.

The problem in the discipline of music appears to be a lack of connection to, or awareness of, current feminist thought. It is this missing connection that allows several authors in *The Musical Woman* to use male 'generic' language. This lack of awareness is most apparent in those essays and interviews that discuss the various careers in which women participate. Three themes warranting further analysis recur throughout the interviews and career discussions: the individual super-woman who can do anything and everything; the concept of woman as civilizing agent in male-dominated situations; and, the rather limiting view of feminism as a movement to counteract overt discrimination against women. Perhaps other researchers could begin with *The Musical Woman* as a source and analyze these three themes from feminist perspectives.

In spite of these criticisms, much important information regarding women in music is provided throughout, thus alleviating another invisibility in women's culture. Family responsibilities and alternate career paths are frequently discussed. Sometimes general commentary on the arts in society is a part of this reporting, e.g. when Karen Monson tells us that "my experience indicates that opportunities for women in [music] criticism are quite as good as they are for men - which is to say, objectively, not good at all." This particular comment is echoed by other writers in their respective areas of music.

I cannot be too critical of the editors for not directly addressing the lack of connection to feminist thought and the question of experience versus quality scholarship within the context of *The Musical Woman*. I am not sure that such a yearbook is the place to address them. But I do believe that those of us in music/women's studies need to be aware of the questions and examine them at some point. If we do not, we, as musicians/feminists, leave ourselves open to the criticism of elitism.

The articles by Block, Feather, Neuls-Bates, Riley, and Wood deserve additional comment. Feather's descriptive analysis of women band directors is the only study in *The Musical Woman* based in the quantitative tradition of educational research. It is designed well and succinctly accomplishes its purpose of describing the status of women as post-secondary band directors. We need more such studies to document the status of women in the arts and identify the pertinent issues.

Block, Neuls-Bates, Riley, and Wood are musicologists and seasoned scholars who have written extensively on women in music. Their contributions are always welcome. Adrienne Fried Block chronicles the work of the turn-of-the-century American publisher, Arthur P. Schmidt, who recognized the compositions of "the leading women of the period, whose works he promoted as energetically as he did those by men." Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, Marion Bauer, Margaret Ruthven Lang, and Mabel Daniels were among the women composers published by Schmidt. Carol Neuls-Bates provides us with a brief but fascinating biography of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864-1953), focusing on her patronage of chamber music. Neuls-Bates points out that "Coolidge undertook musical philanthropy only at the age of 50" so that there is a "striking dichotomy between Coolidge's late career as a patron in the public eye and her earlier private life as a wife and mother."

Joanne Riley and Elizabeth Wood are to be admired for their thoroughness in utilizing gender as a central category of analysis within their respective studies of Tarquinia Molza and Ethyl Smyth. Riley questions the historical assumption that the "Ladies of Ferrara were imitative rather than creative musicians," and provides some evidence that "Molza was involved in developing a style of music that [was] . . . a synthesis of contrapuntal and solo song styles known as the 'luxuriant madrigal.' " Her article won Third Prize in the first Pauline Alderman Prize competition for scholarship on women in music (1986). In a fascinating article, Wood suggests that "opera was Smyth's chosen means - and perhaps the mask - through which she contrived to reveal and reshape her lifelong struggle with what she called the 'eternal sex problem between men and women.'" Wood acknowledges Smyth as "one of our most outstanding women composers." Wood presents concise analyses of four of Smyth's operas to demonstrate how Smyth solves the musical and dramatic problems of "deception and disguise, . the contradictions between what you play and what you are, ... sex and gender ambiguities."

*The Musical Woman* editors state in the introduction, "Women's presence in music is beginning to be felt in every specialty area. To increase women's visibility and clout, it is vital that we applaud every individual accomplishment, continue intensive efforts to research and present a more balanced view of music history, and above all, press against the battle of prejudice on every front." The editors have met this objective and should be applauded for their work. We will look forward to future volumes in *The Musical Woman* series.



Au niveau de l'approche utilisée, *Des femmes en politique* apporte des aspects innovateurs. Toute la première partie du livre traite de la question des images des femmes en politique et de l'influence de ces images dans le façonnement de l'univers de ces femmes. Pour l'auteur le regard des hommes politiques représente "une tentative d'enfermement" des femmes qui se voient perçues comme différentes et définies d'abord en fonction de leurs corps. Il serait intéressant de faire ce genre d'analyse ici pour voir si les images des femmes véhiculées par "les autres" imposent autant de contraintes que dans le cas français.

Selon l'argument de Sineau, les images sont donc très importantes car elles constituent "le premier élément autour duquel se construirait leur personnalité collective." En même temps l'auteur ne se limite pas à présenter l'influence des images véhiculées par les hommes, elle étudie aussi les images des femmes à l'égard des hommes politiques. Cette analyse est d'autant plus importante qu'elle permet de souligner que, tout en étant contraintes par leur environnement, ces femmes agissent également sur cet environnement. Elles condamnent, par exemple, le verbiage des hommes politiques - leur capacité de "parler pour ne rien dire." Selon ces femmes, leur propre langage est plus efficace - plus concret et plus près des électeurs. Elles se voient comme apportant des éléments nouveaux au système politique - une nouvelle façon de parler, un nouveau mode d'action plus orienté vers la résolution des problèmes et des nouveaux enjeux - des questions autrefois jugées de nature privée.

Mariette Sineau répond donc à la question de l'impact des femmes en politique. Selon elle, l'arrivée massive des femmes en politique, sans transformer le système politique, va nettement améliorer son fonctionnement. De plus, elle croit que le nombre de femmes va s'accroître.

Je recommande vivement *Des femmes en politique*. L'analyse est si fine et les paroles de femmes interviewées si intéressantes qu'on oublie presque que la présence des femmes dans le système politique français est tellement minime. A souhaiter que le changement prévu par l'auteur se produise.

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## A PROPOS D'EDUCATION

Recherches Féministes, 1988, Vol. 1, No. 1.

***Marie-France Silver***

Nous saluons avec enthousiasme la création de cette nouvelle revue scientifique féministe, conçue par des universitaires québécoises. *Recherches féministes* entend diffuser en français "les résultats des nombreuses recherches féministes, tant à l'extérieur qu'au sein des universités." C'est une revue interdisciplinaire, de très haut niveau, qui espère à long terme contribuer à la transformation des rapports sociaux. À ses débuts, tout

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Bernadette Bawin-Legros, *Familles, mariage. divorce*. Liège: Psychologie et Sciences Humaines, 1988.

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## DES FEMMES EN POLITIQUE

Mariette Sineau. Paris: Economica, 1988.

### *Caroline Andrew*

Il commence à exister un certain nombre d'études et de livres qui analyse des femmes en politique dans différents systèmes politiques à travers le monde. Il devient intéressant de comparer ces études, non pas seulement au niveau des similarités et différences nationales dans la situation et les comportements des femmes en politique mais également au niveau des approches utilisées.

*Des femmes en politique* fait l'analyse des femmes exerçant des fonctions politiques nationales en France, à partir d'une quarantaine d'entrevues menées en 1984-5 auprès des élus mais également des responsables nationales du parti. Certains des résultats soulignent des différences entre la France et nous entre autres, la plus faible représentation des femmes dans le système politique national en France. Seulement 6% des députés sont des femmes et, en fait, "la mise en perspective historique laisse apparaître, depuis la libération un lent déclin du nombre de femmes au Parlement." Deuxième constatation, et peut-être liée à la première, la solidarité entre femmes en politique semble être encore plus fragile en France qu'ici. Par contre, il y a des éléments d'analyse qui sont très semblables à la situation ici. Ce que Mariette Sineau appelle "les conduites d'échec et de surcompensation" - les complexes d'infériorité, l'éternelle administration de la preuve et la sur-adhésion aux normes masculines soit par l'identification aux hommes, soit par l'identification à l'image traditionnelle de la femme me semblent très près de phénomènes qu'on trouve ici.

au moins, elle sera diffusée à raison de deux numéros par année.

Le premier numéro est entièrement consacré à l'éducation. À titre d'information nous jugeons bon de mentionner les articles suivants:

- Savoir ou pouvoir confisqué? La formation des filles en technologie médicale, réhabilitation et diététique à l'Université de Montréal (1949-70).

*Nadia Fahmy-Eid et Aline Charles.*

Contexte de socialisation primaire et choix d'une carrière scientifique chez les femmes.

*Isabelle Lasvergnas.*

Sexisme dans l'enseignement primaire interactions verbales dans les classes en Catalogne.

*Marina Subirats et Christine Brullet.*

- Sexualisation des tâches dans les postes de direction du primaire.

*Claudine Baudoux.*

- Un guide pédagogique pour la création de nouveaux rapports femmes hommes et son évaluation.

*Catalina Ferrer et Simone LeBlanc- Rainville.*

- Le droit théorique des femmes à l'éducation a-t-il obtenu les effets désirés? Ces articles réexaminent l'étendue réelle de ce droit et l'utilisation qui en est faite. Quelle est la place des femmes à l'intérieur des universités, en tant qu'enseignantes, administratrices ou étudiantes? Autant de questions que ce premier volume pose et traite avec brio.

## ÂGE POÉTIQUE, ÂGE POLITIQUE

Claire Lejeune, l'Hexagone, Montréal, 187.

***Suzanne Legault***

Cette récipiendaire du Prix Canada communauté Française de Belgique en 1984 poursuit, dans ce livre, sa démarche exigeante vers la libération intérieure. Elle veut, en même temps, léguer un étament de poète féminin", geste qu' elle perçoit comme essentiel pour promouvoir une politique dynamique et spectateur du "nous". Son texte exige la participation intense du lecteur. Une méditation parallèle doit s'élaborer afin d'entrer dans son univers condense où poésie et politique ne s'affrontent plus mais gravitent en spirale pour se redéfinir. La poésie instaure une nouvelle politique : relations interpersonnelles.

Ce livre offre d'abord à Claire Lejeune l'occasion de manifester son talent d'écrivaine. Certaines de ses images ressemblent à ces vitraux devant lesquels on a envie de s'attarder, quitte à ne pas saisir l'ensemble de la cathédrale. La réponse à l'énigme du Sphinx semble contenue dans les aphorismes, ces cristaux qu' elle affectionne : "Nul n'entre dans l'ouvert s'il ne devient son propre devin". Sa mise en mots de l'image subjugue et son attachement à la photographie affine le processus. Chez elle vient d'abord ce que j'appellerais le réel imaginaire, puis l'image, et ensuite l'écriture, une sorte d'image sacrifiée, de représentation au deuxième degré. C'est cet éloignement du centre primitif qui désamorce la crainte de la perte de l'individualité: "Ici se cerne au plus près le noyau dur de la résistance à la connivence poétique: terreur et désir mêlés de perdre le tain qui protège la subjectivité de l'Un du contact immédiat de la subjectivité de l'Autre". De la poésie elle saisit profondément cet aspect de l'image fulgurante où les contradictions s'estompent. Elle la voit comme étant la toile de fond essentielle pour accéder à un monde où les différences existent et enrichissent. "La différence ne peut se figurer dans l'absence de ressemblance". L'auteur elle-même présente sa matière sous des formes abstraites sauf au début et à la fin où quelques touches personnelles viennent rassurer au sujet de son existence concrète. Ce rapport, voulu très conceptuel entre "je" et "l'autre", laisse tout de même percer un "tu": il est possible d'y voir un affectueux règlement de compte.

Cette importance qu'elle accorde à l'imaginaire provient des changements qu'entraîne un bouleversement des structures mentales. Une politique en découle forcément Claire Lejeune demeure donc dans l'esprit de ces surréalistes qui affirmaient que l'imaginaire tend à devenir réalité. A son avis, l'imaginaire a malheureusement pris racine dans le Patriarcat, valorisant la Raison, sans prêter attention à la dimension féminine toujours à réintégrer. Il s'agirait de recouvrer l'anima de Jung: un "soi" plutôt, selon son schéma.



L'imaginaire nourri par le centre poétique crée alors une ligne horizontale et non une ligne verticale de dominant dominé.

L'univers intérieur quitte le Père, la Mère pour aller vers la soeur, le frère: "Me détacher les écailles de patrie et de matrice qui me collent encore à la peau. M'engager effectivement dans la fratrie puisque j'y suis mentalement arrivée. Reconnaître mes compagnes et compagnons orphelins". L'univers interne se métamorphose: il n'est plus vers Dieu (vers l'Un) ni vers l'Autre. Il est maintenant à quatre dimensions (à l'instar des quatre éléments de Bachelard)... deux sujets et deux objets. Chacun est à la fois sujet et objet lors de toute rencontre. Le jeu n'est plus contrôlé par le Père ou la Mère, mais devient collectif: 'Être

soi, c'est élire domicile entre un sujet qui se reconnaît objet et un objet qui s'est révélé sujet. Lorsque la conscience se quadrature, l'être s'y donne lieu de s'engendrer soi-même: quatre murs, un plancher et un toit". Au fond, l'auteur rêve de la quadrature du cercle: la poésie se faisant cercle, la politique se muant en carré. Cette image m'apparaît comme libératrice sauf que ma méditation présente le zéro/le point comme un centre éternel et non comme un point de fuite qui irradie dans le temps...

La pensée de Claire Lejeune est séduisante. Généralement, lorsqu'on s'attarde tellement à la structure, c'est que le sens pâlit. Elle réussit ce tour de force: jouer avec la forme sans que le sens s'envole par toutes les ouvertures. Livre réussi... même si l'abstraction menace, même si les données de base se discutent, même si les solutions imaginaires créent leur propre béance. Son livre s'avère optimiste mais triste. Elle le dit « Être soi, c'est devenir le gestionnaire lucide de sa peine de vivre ».

## FILM REVIEW

### Toronto Festival of Festivals 1988

*by Randi Spires*

One of the most startling aspects of Margarethe von Trotta's first solo directorial effort, *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978), is its premise: to those who are unaware that the film is based on a real-life incident, the idea that someone would rob a bank to get funds for a cooperative daycare center does seem a bit far-fetched.

The focus of von Trotta's work was the psycho-political development of her protagonist from the time of the armed robbery until just after her arrest. Unlike the fictional Klages, the real-life bank robber, Margit Czenki, did not take a hostage, did not run off to an idyllic Portuguese hideaway, and did not get off scot-free. Czenki, in fact, spent several years behind bars, including time in solitary confinement. It's not surprising, then, that when it came time for Margit Czenki to tell her story, she focused not on the crime but on her incarceration. The result - *Accomplices* - is an amazingly accomplished first film.

With no hint of apology or self-justification, Czenki's cinematic alter-ego, Barbara, is portrayed as guilty as charged. The political nature of the heist is barely mentioned as Czenki delineates the cruelties of prison life.

For much of the film the camera is canted so that the viewer feels the disorientation a prisoner must experience. The camera moves almost continually, but the area revealed by each shot is usually narrow, with the larger picture only occasionally established. This fragmentation of vision reinforces the sense of disorientation. The result is an edgy

prisoner-eye-view of the proceedings that is at once involving and distancing.

For it is difficult to identify with many of these women, some of whom committed serious crimes. Besides the bank robber and the inevitable junkie, there is a woman who murdered her child to keep the girl from enduring the misery of a children's home; without agreeing with her "solution," one can feel a certain sympathy for her. It's unlikely she's a danger to anyone else; obviously she belongs in a mental hospital - not a jail.

Because few have a penchant for reading or writing, filling all those hours is a constant struggle. Solutions range from the conventional (gardening, needle-point) to the bizarre (one woman built a elaborate cockroach castle for what are normally the most unwelcome of cell-mates).

The condition that these women have been reduced to is that of closely-watched but deprived children. They are forbidden intimacy (denying children affection is called emotional abuse), permitted no privacy and kept from meaningful decisions about their lives. How penal authorities expect those incarcerated for any length of time to function upon release as emotionally mature, responsible citizens is a mystery. The women are often understandably angry or frustrated but, for the most part, they daren't lash out at their keepers. With no solutions to their problems and few ways of displacing their anger, it is almost inevitable that they occasionally erupt into childish tantrums, trashing their cells and often destroying those items they most value. Even the politicized Barbara succumbs at one point over-turning her bed, "tossing her food about and smashing the flowers she has so carefully cultivated.



Pola Kinski, Terese Affolter, Marianne Rosenberg in Margit Czenki's ACCOMPLICES



**Freda Dowie, Pete Positlthwaite, and Angela Walsh in Terence Davies' *DISTANT VOICES/STILL LIVES***

One of the highlights of the week appears to be the Sunday morning Church service. As they giggle and chatter under cover of the priestly chanting, and pass notes under the somewhat relaxed gaze of the guards, they are well aware that they are subverting a traditional ceremony. When they respond en masse with raised fists to another prisoner being led away for some minor infraction, this idea is reinforced.

For the most part these women are not particularly political; indeed, their social attitudes are rather traditional and their most enduring attachments are to their husbands and children. But they do demonstrate that they are capable of conscious mass political actions, such as when they go on a hunger strike to protest Barbara's two-year stint in solitary.

When Czenki went behind bars, political prisoners had the choice of living with other politicians or staying with ordinary criminals (whom Czenki calls "social prisoners"). This opportunity is not given to political prisoners today, perhaps because of the success of Czenki's organizing efforts.

*Distant Voices/ Still Lives*, British director Terence Davies' second film, deservedly won the International Critics Award at the 1988 Festival of Festivals. His first film, the spare and depressing Terence Davies Trilogy, took ten years to make. Its stark black-and-white footage and austere style suited its subject - gay oppression and Catholic repression in working-class England during the 1950s and '60s.

*Distant Voices/Still Lives* is as autobiographically-based as the trilogy, but it's a much jollier film. These hard working-class lives do have their sunnier moments, although ultimately the feelings we are left with are emotional dislocation and stifled potential. Structured around the death of the father, the film is basically a wake, an exploration of the love-hate relationship between the entire family and their brutal patriarch. *Still Lives* drifts slowly toward the wedding of the last child, an event that signals the disassembly of a once strong, though traumatized nuclear family. These siblings are now all on their own with nothing to lean on but their own strengths and the succour they find within social conventions. It is with sadness - and understanding - that one comes to realize how much of the worst aspects of their parents' lives these young people are already in the process of repeating.

In the repressed British working-class milieu, the men are allowed limited outlets for

emotional expression - mainly for sports, They may be patriarchs, but their place within the broader social hierarchy isn't very high: they can consistently dominate only "their" women and children. Even in this context, the father's violence seems excessive. He sends his schoolboy son away, forces one daughter into the basement with the rats, and throughout barely demonstrates a glimmer of affection. Only when he slaps two of the children for arriving late at the bomb shelter during an air raid, do we realize that, in his own way, he really does care for them. As he begrudgingly gives one of his daughters money to go dancing, we learn that this monster himself was once a "dance-mad" boy, who loved to dazzle the crowd on the dance floor. What happened, then, to turn him from a charmer to a curmudgeon?



**Jackie Burroughs (Mrs. Ambrose) and Emma Richier (Joanns) in Lore Spring's INSIDE OUT**

Women, on the other hand, are allowed more emotional latitude, although anger remains problematic. For both sexes one of the main releases from all this grimness is popular music. From the dance-crazy daughters of *Distant Voices* to the interminable rounds of pub singing in *Still Lives*, music is the balm which makes these tough lives bearable. The women seem to be the most enthusiastic singers. The men appear to be a little uncertain about whether or not this is a suitably masculine activity; they sing most comfortably in a military context

One by one, each of the three sisters gets married and moves away from her father's house. The eldest girl particularly seems doomed to repeat her mother's unhappy story. We wince as we hear her new husband declare "You're married now. I'm your husband. Your duty is to me now. Frig everybody else."

As his sisters depart, Tony begins to feel more and more isolated both physically and emotionally. He, unlike many other men, will not go happily into the masculine emotional night; at his own wedding he sobs profusely. As the youngest child and the last to be wed, the new responsibilities of family life burn in him like a wound. For Tony, as for many of the others, only the healing powers of art and song and memory remain.

*Distant Voices/Still Lives* is often as non-linear and illogical as memory and poetry. It contains images of astonishing beauty, which work through tone and rhythm in much the



same way as does the music the director and his characters so obviously love.

Among the films screened in this year's Perspectives Canada program was *Inside/ Out*, a half-hour drama by Toronto director Lori Spring. *Inside/Out* tells the tale of Joanna, a woman afflicted with an acute case of existential agoraphobia. Unlike the women in *Accomplices* and the people in *Distant Voices/Still Lives*, Joanna's isolation appears to be self-imposed.

We are not told how this alienation came about, only given indications of its existence. From the unnerving wail of a siren to the harried faces of pedestrians, everything Joanna notices confirms her present state of mind and reinforces her decision to retreat.

Joanna's decision to withdraw from the world may stem from impending panic, but her methods are calm and controlled, and her resources fairly bountiful. She lives in a spacious loft, has plenty of trendy furniture and the latest electronic and exercise equipment. She can afford to have her food delivered, has friends who are willing to run errands for her and can exercise her profession (she's a writer) at home. She is not Everywoman.

Joanna's coolness initially makes it difficult to like her, but Emma Richter's sympathetic performance gradually draws one in. Joanna eats healthful, exercises regularly and works steadily. For someone who complains of feeling disembodied she certainly takes good care of herself both physically and mentally, unlike many women whose isolation is due to depression, not philosophy. The only thing Joanna seems to lack is a personal life.

This overriding rationality both attracts and repels the viewer. The orderliness of her life is appealing. And most of us have, many times, felt overwhelmed by a world crowded with people and information, obligations and expectations. Anyone who has endured the frustration of trying to find a quiet public corner, restaurant or elevator will understand her complaint that "we have lost any contact with the wisdom of silence."

Yet all this reasonableness is disquieting.

Joanna explains her condition by saying "I must live carefully because I am not carefree." If she were ill or had family responsibilities, this statement would be more credible. "Beyond these walls," she continues, "I become a prisoner of circumstance," and so she circumscribes her own prison.

After a while one begins to suspect that underneath all that calmness swirls turbulence. Our suspicions are confirmed as we watch Joanna tattoo a butterfly on her arm. The desire for decoration is a longing for something beyond the purely functional, and the painful procedure is also an indication of her need to pierce the shell of her rationality and let a little chaos through. It is also a sign that certain events which she will not be able to control as easily as that tattooing needle will soon penetrate the skin of her isolation.

While Joanna may not physically leave her apartment she continues to interact with the

world through machines (telephone, computer, answering machine and a video camera). She also allows selected elements of the outside world to enter her domain: the grocery delivery boy, her mother, and friends for a dinner party. Of all these machines the pivotal one is the video camera, through which she initiates contact with the elderly woman across the street and through which she attempts to communicate her plight to her dinner guests.

We never see her watch television; we hear only the radio in the background. Television, because it has both pictorial and auditory elements, has a verisimilitude that radio does not. But a televised version of events is as mediated, constructed and false (and true) as that of any other medium. Joanna's reaction to her own feelings of unreality is to simulate contact with the world through her video camera. She wants contact with the old woman, but can only make a parodic connection by taping her. Occasionally, their eyes meet and they communicate in mute gestures like players in a silent film.

Mrs. Ambrose's situation is the reverse of Joanna's: as an elderly woman, her isolation is physical and unwilling, not conceptual and voluntary. Jackie Burroughs' performance in this small role is simply amazing; without saying a single word, she conveys a wealth of emotions.

Try as they will, neither individuals nor nations can completely control their boundaries. Joanna's dinner guests bring along a visiting American artist, Eric. He doesn't belong to their circle, he's a bit of a jerk, and his insistent questions (which border on rudeness) upset Joanna's complacency with her routine: "If you don't go out," he maintains, "you're not dealing with anything." In a scene just prior to this, we hear a radio news report about immigration.

Eric's words prove prophetic. Once again it becomes hard to sympathize with Joanna as she frets about what to do about the obviously deteriorating Mrs. Ambrose.

*Inside/Out*, which won the award for best film under 30 minutes and best music score at the 1988 Yorkton Film Festival, works both intellectually and emotionally, (with a few minor reservations on the emotional side). Lori Spring works well with actors and is a talented writer to boot. It all augurs well for her future films.

FICTION

## The Inheritance

*A Short Story by Susan Ioannou*

**G**randma died in early December. Winter lay heavy that year. The ground frozæ by the

5th, and the undertaker said no burial. Grandma must wait in a drawer until spring.

I was young. Later, Mother told me these things, after Father kept me home from the funeral. He said looking at Grandma's dead face would upset me. And whenever we waited for Mother at funeral parlours, the thick-sweet smell of carnations turned my stomach.

Besides, I wanted to imagine Grandma my own way: her smile wide as sunshine, a spray of forget-me-nots stuck in loose strands of bunbound hair, and, as she bent toward me, the barn and spring orchard spread out grey-green behind. No weeping, no crimson drapes, no carpet plush under-foot. No hushed whispers, or hands grasped, or downcast eyes. She ought to be dead softly, a soul hovering in sunlight; not some stranger rouged and powdered in the mortician's casket; not the emptiness, the finality, the sense of being robbed. With me, Grandma would be kept safe, despite having slipped into the upper air like a good spirit of the Golden Age.

On the day of the funeral Mother told everyone I was home, sick. I kissed her good-bye. She wore her mink cape and black dress. Her hair was neatly waved, and her lipstick leapt crimson beneath powdered cheeks... A distant look misted her eyes. "Have fun, Mum." I had to say that. Did she understand? She didn't hit me. Wordless, she turned her back, and fumbled for the train ticket in her purse.

At school I worked long division problems all day, right through my favourite paper-bag lunch.

When Mother got back she was quiet. She slumped in the dim living room still in her mink cape, sipping coffee till after midnight. When I crept in, she slid one arm round my waist. It was a good funeral, she nodded. They set the coffin on wooden chairs in the front room, the way Grandma wanted. No funeral parlour. Yes, lots of flowers; she was surprised how many flowers. No, more Chrysanthemums than carnations. And so many people. The front room hadn't bulged that full since the 80th birthday party. Everyone came: the Weitzels, the Leiskaus, the Merklinger boys, and cousins and farm neighbours she hadn't seen in ten years. Old Mrs. Wetlaufer died in September, and Aunt Leve moved into The Willows last June. Yes, the minister talked a long time, and told what a fine woman Grandma was: her help to the church in younger years, her Christian courage at the untimely losses of husband and son. He read some sonorous lines from the Bible, Mother forgot which ones, and said a prayer for Grandma to find joy with the Lord. Then the hearse took Grandma away, and Aunt Ruby stayed on to supervise until Thursday. Uncle Hubert grumbled she wanted first grabs at Grandma's belongings.

In April the ground thawed. Aunt Ruby, of course, took care of everything. Grandma looked well preserved in her drawer, she said, just a little rouge dusted off one cheek. Grandma had bought a steel case to enclose her coffin - waterproof, wormproof, just like her husband's. Two men from town were hired to sink her next to Grandpa and Uncle Arthur in the Lutheran family plot. Just outside the cemetery gates, Aunt Ruby said, three new houses were built that spring, and Johnny Merklinger had moved his mother,

Grandma's best friend, into one.



Afterwards, Ruby took Grandma's pearls, the blue and white pitcher and basin, her Bible and the lace tablecloth. She felt superstitious about opals - did Mother want the engagement ring? The silverware Grandma willed to little Mary (that was me). No, the headstone really did not look that small, and would be ready in May. Would Mother please check when the time came.

So Grandma died and was buried. And I thought that was the end. Just a memory now and again, or an old photograph. I got older. I finished school. No more Grandma, I thought. I married. Then the dream started...

The farm house went up for sale. I drove back by myself, with no money, but hoping to buy it. It stood like a ship on the land, the woodshed a prow pointing into the past. The yellow brick walls were so long, I walked and walked the length, but never reached the end. Begonias still bloomed in the windows, and the blue-grey shutters hung warm and rough in the sunlight. I ran my fingers over the slats, finding some loose and ready to fall.

As usual, the door from the orchard stood unlocked. The dining room hadn't changed, still weighed down with the massive black table, the chair backs carved with gargoyle faces. The china cabinet leaned heavily into the room. The mirror behind its shelves shot back everything clearly, but where I stood, the reflection blurred.

Up the narrow, boxed-in staircase, the upper rooms opened, unchanged. Uncle Hubert's fat alarm clock crouched on the dresser, minus its spidery hands, the small door at the end of the landing invited, treasury of my past - baby carriage, ruffled clothes, trunks, a bird cage, yellowed books - piles dust-thick with memories, perched on the narrow open floor, casting down to the woodshed below. But when I bent and pushed through the door, the attic was gone!

A vast, barren hall yawned before me, like a rotted country church, crossbeams hung grey with moss. Thin streaks of sunlight sifted through cracks in the board walls. I stepped forward slowly. The floor sagged with each step, like wood sponged by fungus in spring. I stopped, afraid. Grandma, where are you? No answer. I backed to the door, and down the

narrow steps.

Outside, a crowd of prospective buyers eddied and flowed, murmuring up from the plum trees, towards the old walls' trumpet vines. Nobody knew me. As I drew closer, face after face blurred.

Again and again I dreamed of the house. Always I climbed to the attic. When I tried to cross the floor, it sagged. Always I stopped and called out for Grandma, but could not see or hear her, although I felt she was near.

I found her on moving day. Finally Jay and I had bought our first home. With the unpacking mostly finished, we wanted to celebrate. I lifted Grandma's silver chest from a carton, wiped off the dust, and set it beside the sink. Sunlight filled the window above. In the distance spread a comforting blur of new green... I put my hand on the lower drawer. Then I remembered. Grandma was there. After she died, I tucked her into this chest, face upturned in the sunlight, smiling. But after so many years, what would I find?

The drawer stuck. I asked Jay to give it a tug. Up over the edge, showered a bright spray of yellow. "What the -!" Jay leapt back. "That's just Grandma," I laughed, unprying the drawer from his grasp. Not a bone, not a bit of flesh. Grandma had turned to pure light, light that danced from drain board and dishes, spilling into my hands.

I look at my mother now. Hips broadened by age, her legs grow heavy with fluid. Already her knuckles have stiffened. By the end of the day, her smile grows quiet, rouge a little smudged off. Although she still wears it short, sometimes I notice blue shadows, forget-me-nots blurred in her hair.

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## The Beanstalk, et al

### *A Short Story by Marvyne Jenoff*

**J**ack hacked down the beanstalk with such fierce and exuberant leaps that the remaining stump reached well above his head. He flung down the axe, kicked at the giant to make sure he was dead where he lay, and ran off to find a girlfriend to whom he could boast. When he found her he brought her back to the stump of the beanstalk. There in the shelter of the few remaining leaves Jack built them a simple house.

The giant's widow looked down through the hole in her cloud where the beanstalk had been, and she did not like what she saw. There, outside the little house were displayed the bag of gold, the hen that laid golden eggs, and the golden harp, all of which Jack had stolen from the giants' house. And there was Jack in front of his girlfriend and a few passersby, gesturing with his arms wide as if boasting about a fish he had caught.

Mrs. Giant could have killed them in one swoop. She could have simply let herself drop down through the hole in the cloud and landed on them and their house, doing away with herself in the process. But she didn't. For, by killing something so small, the principle went, she would become small herself, and that wouldn't do at all. By a similar principle, a giant-killer takes on giantly qualities, and Mrs. Giant decided she would wait until Jack became a worthy opponent. She was also curious to see which of her husband's qualities Jack would manifest, and what sort of man he would become. Jack was the only boy who had visited them three times, and she had grown fond of his courageous spirit and the irrepressible energy with which he moved. She remembered how they had giggled together before the giant appeared and Jack had to hide behind the stove and keep silent as she discreetly passed him the tastiest bits of their dinner. Finally, embarrassed at dwelling on Jack, Mrs. G. pulled herself together the only way she could, by remembering how Jack had robbed them and killed the giant, and she proceeded to grieve her husband and set the record straight about him.

People who know the story from the conventional point of view have no appreciation of what life on the cloud was like. People seem to have the idea that the giant was uncouth, but Mrs. G. had only to frown with disapproval, or be about to frown, and he would immediately remember his manners and shower attention on her. It is true that the giant had a taste for boys. Perhaps it was because of this that his enthusiasm is generally mistaken for crudeness. The giant is usually thought to have been greedy, and that is why he counted and recounted his golden coins, waking the world with wanton thunder. But that wasn't it at all. For she and her husband, with their giantly knowledge, had appreciated what the Chinese did with the abacus, and using those principles the giants created with patterns of coins their own flights of higher mathematics. The hen that laid the golden eggs was the result of the giants' patient and affectionate breeding, and when they had made their commercial success with such hens they were planning to refine their breeding techniques even further and produce hens with moral qualities. As for the golden harp, of course it had cried out Master when Jack was stealing it. The harp, which the giants had created together in their early love, had been their child, their companion, and when the three of them sang together they produced what came to be known as the music of the spheres. And on the cloud Mrs. G. had had her own personal mission, to take care of the boys who visited, and she was able to save almost every one of them. For she had only to pout, or be about to pout, and her husband, overcome with remorse for having neglected her for even a moment, would become solicitous and have eyes only for her. And so Mrs. G. always had as much attention as she asked for. In fact, the only person who had ever paid more attention to her, with no effort on her part, was Jack. And she remembered her fascination with Jack, and her anger.

With appropriately vengeful feelings Mrs. G. looked down once again from her shelf of cloud. And she was so gratified to see what was happening at Jack's house that she watched for a long time. The gold coins sounded flat as Jack counted them. Their talents unrealized, they were despondent as Jack spent them one by one. By the time the coins were gone, the gold standard had been replaced by the air and water standard. The golden eggs, beautiful as they were, became worthless in the conventional sense, and Jack and his girlfriend were reduced to using them for food. And the harp, so long away from expert

hands, lost its tune and began to quarrel with the hen.

Against the background of this cacophony Jack and his girlfriend walked out of step with each other. And that was just fine with Mrs. G.

As she continued to look down she noticed something that Jack and his girlfriend were not aware of. She saw the beanstalk beginning to grow again from the old stump, and she decided that was how she would descend for the kill. she would wait until the beanstalk reached her cloud, for as yet Jack had shown no sign of changing. She would wait, and then step down the leaves majestically, as befit a person of her stature. She began to plan what she might wear.

Now the beanstalk, having once been so brutally felled, was shy and determined to grow very cautiously. It was not about to repeat that impetuous one-night stand that heaved the earth and Jack with it. The beanstalk really wanted to be a tree, or at least to grow as sturdy as a tree, to withstand any weapon and any man. It understood what the world had come to. So the beanstalk took its time and did what it had to do. And with a giant's patience, Mrs. G. waited.

And she began to appreciate her new life on the cloud. With the abundance of air and water she was rich according to the current standard, and furthermore the air was much sweeter now that it was no longer fouled by her husband's pipe. Now that flesh-eating had gone out of fashion, Mrs. G. was no longer embarrassed by her husband's tastes. With the remaining gold coins she invented new games of solitaire, to enjoy the golden patterns and the musical sounds, for the coins were proud of where they belonged and clinked joyfully. To this counterpoint Mrs. G. would sing, songs reminiscent of those she used to sing with her husband and their harp, but with his gruffness gone she no longer needed the sweetness of the harp for balance, and the songs became hers alone. As she sat using her golden darning egg she contemplated these pleasures. For company there were the other hens who laid whatever colours they pleased. And even before the beanstalk had quite reached the cloud, the boys she had saved, who had heard of the giant's death, climbed up to visit her. They were men now. Some came with their girlfriends or families. Some came by themselves and took their time. No longer anxious for their welfare, Mrs. G. was able to relax with the boys and enjoy the results of her accomplished mission.

Her new mission was to keep the air and water fresh and justly circulating. Scientists and politicians came to learn her methods, and stayed to learn also from the aesthetes. Aesthetes came to experience at source their refined pleasures of breathing and slaking thirst, and stayed for the further pleasure of their hostess's company. And so Ms. G., as she now called herself, who had once mourned the golden age of her married life, bloomed differently in the heavenly age she was experiencing now. As for what she could do about Jack and his girlfriend, it was much more pleasant at the moment to enumerate the virtues of procrastination than to bother about them at all.

In fact, it wasn't until the visitors stopped coming that she was curious enough to look down from the cloud once more. When she saw the mass of leaves beneath her she understood what had happened. The beanstalk had turned itself into a new species that defied classification. It produced no beans, but that was of no concern, for it had another plan for immortality. The beanstalk had grown into the tallest free-standing organism in the world, a great, tree-like thing, so strong and spread out at the top that, rather than growing back through the hole, it had lifted the entire cloud higher than anyone could climb, and certainly past the point where Ms. G. would have been able to step down.

At first she was angry. She thought, No beanstalk is going to get the better of me, I can still fall on them. But she remembered the principle that if you go so far to kill something you can never, ever, return the same. And there was no way Ms. G. was going to change anything she had or anything she was. She looked around her, seeing her cloud anew, and she noticed the intricate carpet of beanstalk leaves making her cloud path firmer, supporting her at higher and higher altitudes, in the slow walk of her contentment, in the heaviness of her age.

Now when she looked down from her great height she could barely see the couple. But there seemed to be more animals in their yard, more people, perhaps children. The whole yard had a golden aura - were there that many eggs now? Jack and his girlfriend, going about their daily business, seemed to walk in step now, now lively, now peaceful, and Ms. G. thought she could hear the echo of their rhythms in the faint music of the golden harp. And that was fine. The beanstalk continued to lift the cloud, and the higher Ms. G. gets the less she sees and the more she seems to understand. She is much less interested in Jack now, though pleased with what he has become. He has not increased much in stature, and he does not bear much resemblance to the giant, but he has grown into a new breed of man, the kind who cook and know their folktales well.

As for his girlfriend - Ms. G. waxes eloquent here. For Jack's girlfriend has grown into the image of Ms. G. in her youth, a real beauty, though of course much less impressive in size. How purely she sings, how gracefully she bends, as she goes about her woman's work! And look - there she is now, beginning to write a woman's story.

## The Last Class

### *A Short Story by Cynthia Norris Graae*

**T**he final assignment for my creative writing class at the Fine Arts Center on the Randolph Estate was:

*Combine the techniques we have learned with your own natural spontaneity into an oral presentation, with a beginning, middle and end. Make notes to use in class, but plan to*



*use them only to refresh your recollection.*

But I was late again, and - as usual- unprepared. I flung open the classroom door and dashed toward the only empty seat, across the table from Moonbottom (the teacher) and Peter Canary.

He beamed a flicker of recognition, so precisely aimed that only someone in his direct line of vision could detect it. That someone was me. His crisp white shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, flattered his tan. He was the only one who wasn't sagged out by Washington's humidity.

Moonbottom frowned. "Could you shut the door?" he asked as I reached for the empty chair. His short-sleeved polyester shirt was shiny and graying. It was almost transparent, revealing his tom undershirt. he looked as if he had body odor, the sweet-putrid kind. Oh, why did my imagination conjure up such intimate details?

"Could we leave it open?" I inquired. "It's like a swamp in here, " said one of the graduate students. At least I had one supporter. I sat down and shoved my backpack under my chair.

"The air conditioner is working tonight," said Moonbottom. "It'll cool down faster with the door shut." "I'd really feel better with it open," I said.

A graduate student leaned toward Peter Canary. He didn't quite cover his mouth with his hand when he said to Peter Canary, "She's just nervous about having to tell a story. I hope the teacher doesn't let her get out of this one,"

"You'll feel better after you've had your turn," reassured a woman with frizzy yellow hair.

"Why don't you go first?" Moonbottom asked me.

Peter Canary, having perfected the art of silent communication, winked in my direction without moving even an eyelash. The air conditioner was not working. it was circulating hot air, I felt flushed. I asked about the door again.

The graduate student sitting next to Peter Canary said to me. "You're just procrastinating. Mr. Jenks, you should tell her to get with the program or let someone else have a turn." Apparently he lacked the authority to call his teachers - even Moonbottom - anything but "Mr. ,"

I said, "The thing is, I haven't done the assignment. I mean I really thought it was terrific, but-" I was in a hole. Peter Canary caught my eye again, Elaborate a little, he was telling me, imperceptibly to anyone else, and I began talking.

"I put the instructions in my notebook during class last week. Driving home, when I approached the traffic light on Wisconsin Avenue, I reached into my backpack to have another look at the instructions. I wanted to think about my presentation while I drove. I discovered that my notebook was missing

"At first I didn't think anything about it, but by the time I reached the second light, I remembered that a very personal essay I wrote about my husband was in my notebook, in which I'd carefully printed my name, address, and telephone number." I pulled my backpack from under my chair, unzipped it, and turned it inside out. Three ball point pens, a felt-tipped marker, two dimes, and a quarter rolled out, but no notebook.

Keep going, said Peter Canary's eyes. You're on the right track.

"Typical," complained the graduate student sitting next to Peter Canary. The graduate student grabbed the quarter as it traveled toward the edge of the table, and put it in his pocket. I don't think he thought anyone saw him. Peter Canary signalled to me again, Keep going.

"Anyway," I said, "I didn't want anyone to be able to trace me, so I made an illegal U-turn and drove back here as fast as I could. The parking lot was deserted. The floodlights were off. There was no moon. It was really dark. I began to realize, dimly, that trying to find my notebook was a stupid idea, but I was so disturbed at the possibility of someone finding it that I ran down the hill toward our classroom. The spires, turrets, and gargoyles on the main house looked spooky. I went past what I figured was the carriage house. You know, the place the actors practice voice projection. I finally reached our classroom. At least I think it was our classroom. It was very dark. Of course the door was locked. I don't know why I imagined that it would be open. I tried pushing on the window."

The graduate student whispered to Peter Canary, "Is she stalling? Why doesn't she ever do her assignment?" Peter Canary seemed to suppress a smile. What a story! he beamed on the wavelength that only I was receiving. I continued, "I heard a voice from the carriage house behind me, 'Helloooo, helloooo, helloooo.' At first I thought it was the actors, but after the third 'helloooo' I panicked. I ran behind the carriage house through an open door, up some steps, and onto what turned out to be a stage. Did you know there is a theater here at the Center?"

"I became aware of more voices, hushed, an audience waiting for a performance perhaps. Suddenly, a spotlight focused on me. There was clapping, cheering, stomping, and then hissing from a crowd in seats in front of me. I turned and ran as fast as possible from the theater the way I came in. The audience followed me, up and over the stage, down the steps, and out the door.

"I am a jogger. I can run six miles in under 45 minutes, but the group behind me was fast, too. Some of them came so close that I could feel spray on my neck and arms from their hoarse breathing. They followed me past the gardener's cottage, the guest house, the gazebo, and through a door in the stone wall at the edge of the orchard. The door leads to

a tunnel that goes all the way to the C & O Canal. The tunnel ended in the woods near the 4-mile marker on the towpath. the group was still following me. I decided to head toward Washington. Even though I was tired, I thought maybe I could run that far. But within minutes it occurred to me that maybe the herd behind me could run that far, too.

"Then I remember the assertiveness training class I took last summer. I turned around and held up my hand like a traffic officer. For the first time I saw my followers. They were short, hairy, and wrinkled. Maybe self-confidence would work. 'Stop,' I ordered. 'I am bothered by your behavior. I do not like being followed. Tell me what you want.

"Sing, sing, sing,' they chanted. 'We want you to sing.' "Sing? I am not musical. I do not know any lyrics. I cannot carry a tune. Instead, I tried to change the subject 'Where are you from,' I asked.

"We live under the Randolph Estate,' said an especially wrinkled fellow. 'We paid for a concert there. We want you to sing or we will have to take you with us.' They looked serious. One of them had chains, hammers, nails, and a welding torch. I thought I might be running out of time."

I wondered if anyone in the class still thought I was stalling. No one was whispering. Peter Canary looked impressed. I continued, "'Stories?' I asked the bizarre crowd that was following me. 'Do you like stories?'"

"Do we like stories?' they replied. Like obedient children, they sat down and crossed their legs in the middle of the towpath.

"I almost panicked again. I hadn't expected to tell stories right then. 'Wait,' I told them. 'not just yet.' I needed to delay their expectations but keep them reassured or I might never get home alive. 'Next week, ' I told them, 'I know where you can hear lots of stories. I'm taking a creative writing class at the Fine Arts Center on the Randolph Estate. It meets in the gardener's cottage every Wednesday. The teacher assigned us to tell stories out loud next week. There are twelve of us. Some of the students have brilliant imaginations. I'm sure the stories will be good.'

"The smallest one spoke up. 'The gardener's cottage? That's right over our bedroom. It would be wonderful.' the rest of them looked at him, dubious. But clearly they were excited. They conferred among themselves."

I hadn't expected that I could keep my fiction going this long. I guess I figured that someone would unmask me and it would be over. I had no idea how to end this monologue. I looked at Peter Canary . Was he looking at the door? The door? Okay - I continued as fast as I could think, "The tallest one, probably a good 18 inches shorter than I, spoke. 'How will we hear? We don't want anyone to see us.'

“‘Easy, I said. ‘I’ll be the last one to come to class. I’ll leave the door open so you can hear.’ Twelve stories all at once. Probably more stories than they had heard in 50 years. I could see that the prospect thrilled them. They conferred again, for a long time. I was nervous. I had nothing more to offer. If twelve stories wouldn’t buy my freedom, nothing would. I waited. The spokesman came back to me. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘On one condition. Remember to leave the door open. Now don’t forget. If you do ’ ”The whole group spoke together to finish his sentence, ‘...we’re going to get you after your class,’ and they scampered back up the towpath. The one with the gear turned and shook his chains at me. ‘Don’t forget,’ he warned repeatedly, ‘Don’t forget,’ until they were so far away that I couldn’t see them any more.”

The obnoxious graduate student opened the door. The others got up, too, and looked outside. Moonbottom kept saying, “Terrific action.” Peter Canary didn’t say a word, but by then I knew I’d see him after class.

## Ajax la bas     *A Short Story by Yesim Ternar*

Saliha Samson sits on one of the empty washing machines in the basement and lights a cigarette. There are three loads of wash in the machines. The wash cycle takes 35 minutes; the drying cycle another 25. The French couple who employ her are very nice people. They leave for work early in the morning, as soon as she arrives at 8:30. They trust her with everything. They know she is a conscientious worker, that she doesn’t slack off like some of the other cleaning women.

Madame Rivest tells Saliha to eat whatever she wants from the refrigerator. She always leaves some change in the ceramic vase on the telephone table just in case Saliba needs to get extra detergent, cigarettes, or whatever. Madame Rivest knows she likes to snack on strawberry and blueberry yoghurt, so she always makes sure there is some in the refrigerator for her. This morning she has told her she hasn’t done her weekly shopping yet, so she is leaving some money for Saliba especially to buy fruit yoghurt.

Now that’s a nice gesture! I wish everyone were like that, thinks Saliba as she takes a deep puff from her cigarette. The Rivests live a long ways off from where she lives. She has to take the 80 bus from Park Extension, then the metro at Place des Arts to Berri, and then change metros at Berri to go to Longueuil; afterwards she has to take yet another bus to come here. But the trip is worth it because some of the people she works for close to home treat her so badly that she’d rather lose an hour on the way and work for Madame and Monsieur Rivest. That’s a lot easier than working for the two old spinsters on upper Querbes.

Saliha notices the unbalanced load signal flash on one of the washers, and gets off the washing machine she is sitting on to straighten things out. As she untangles the heavy

blue cotton velour bedspread from the black rotor blades of the washing machine, she thinks it was lucky she decided to take this cigarette break in the basement because if she had gone straight up stairs to continue her vacuuming, she would have lost an extra 25 minutes by having to wait for this load after all the others were completed. That would have thrown her schedule off perhaps by an hour because she would have had to take the elevator up and down twice more and delay other tasks in the meantime. That's how cleaning jobs are. You have to plan what you're going to do and how, and in what order. Otherwise... Well, the machine starts churning again and she jumps back on the machine she was sitting on before to finish her cigarette.

She has her period again. It's crazy, she thinks. Madame Rivest calls her every two weeks. And every other time she has to work for Madame Rivest, she gets her period. It's either the first day of the second day of her period when she has to make that long trip to come here. I've never had any luck with periods, thinks Saliha as she massages her back with her left hand. Saliba's dream is to be able to lie in bed the whole day when she gets her period. But it never works that way.

The first time she had her period when she was eleven, she was in Istanbul then, she ran up to her mom to announce it. Her mother slapped her. "Why did you do that?" Saliha asked. "So that you won't lose your wits." Saliha went to her room and cried less for the mess of blood than for the fact that she was getting too old to play hopscotch. That was fifteen years ago. Saliba cannot remember when she stopped playing hopscotch, but it was at least a year after she got her first period.

Some things in life are like that. First they come to you like big worries, and you spend days and nights worrying about them, but they have the life span and personality of a soap bubble. They grow and grow like a wart in one's heart and just when you're sure they are big and strong and will never go away, they pop out of your life not even leaving a rind, not even a speck of dust, but the dry flake of a single detergent grain.

Canadians are funny, thinks Saliha. They have detergents and lotions and soaps for everything. Everything has its own cleanser here. And every cleanser has its own name. Like Mr. Clean. But Mr. Clean is also M. Net. Wisk! What a strange way to call your laundry detergent. And Ajax. Particularly Ajax. George, the Greek depanneur at Park Ex, told her Ajax was a Greek hero. Old heroes live on as detergents in Canada. Saliha smiles at her own joke. She thinks she should write this to her mom.

The wash is done in one of the machines. She opens a dryer and transfers the load there. Just as she starts the dryer, the other two machines go off. So she puts those loads in the dryers too, and feeds quarters to the machines. It's time to go up and vacuum the Rivest's bedroom, she decides.

She goes up on the elevator, happy that no one else is on it. She hates to be seen in her work clothes. She is wearing a pink I cotton jumper, a navy blue shirt with the sleeves rolled up underneath that, and knee socks and her red moccasins. She had tied a Turkish scarf on her head with a knot in the back to keep her hair away from her face. Madame

Rivest says she looks like a school girl like that. But Saliha feels uneasy in her work clothes. After all, it is hard to resign herself to being a cleaning woman on the sly in Canada.

As she is vacuuming the Rivest's bedroom, she remembers her friend Frederiki's warning. Frederiki told her to be careful most when she is vacuuming because when you have the vacuum on full blast, you can't hear if someone is approaching from the back. Frederiki said she knows a couple of cases of rape that happened when the cleaning woman was vacuuming and the old geezer tip toed and caught the cleaning woman and forced her on the bed... Saliha shivers at the thought. She drops the vacuum cleaner and goes to check if she locked both locks on the door. Not that. Rivest would do anything like that. He has two married daughters, but you never know who might have keys to the apartment.

On her way back from the door, walking through the living room, Saliba checks the time on the mantel clock that she guesses comes from Spain. The clock is set in a gold and black lacework metal fan that reminds one of the Spanish flamenco dancers. The Rivests appear to be well traveled people. Scattered about the apartment there are several photographs of Madame and M. Rivest, in silver rimmed frames, from various countries. The one on the side table next to the love-seat in the living room looks like it was taken in Spain. Madame Rivest, looking several years younger, is smiling in front of a white washed Mediterranean-type house with red gardenias blooming in clay pots along the window sill. She is slightly tanned. It is a sunny photograph, making Madame Rivest whose face carries many wrinkles from cold Canadian winters look out of place in the country where Saliha assumes the true residents greet the sunshine with less suspicion and distress.

Nevertheless, Madame Rivest smiles in that photograph as all middle aged tourists do on well deserved holidays. A straw handbag hangs from her left shoulder, and in her right hand, she holds something like a camera lens cover.

Saliha notes that the dryers must have completed their cycle, so she goes back to the bedroom and quickly finishes off the corners of the room with the special attachment Madame Rivest has taught her to use.

She takes along the yellow plastic laundry basket to carry the wash. She gets unlucky going down. A young housewife and her son step into the elevator on the second floor and ride with her to the main floor. Saliba tries to act oblivious to the woman's presence, but she winks surreptitiously at the little boy. The boy responds with a blank face.

Saliha is relieved when they get out. In the basement she quickly piles all the wash together in the laundry basket and after turning the drums around and feeling around the ridges for a stray sock or handkerchief, she goes up to the Rivest's apartment to sort the clothes. She is folding the towels and the sheets neatly and mechanically when she looks up at the ceiling of the Rivest's bedroom for an instant and starts remembering. She is back in fourth grade at her elementary school on the Asian side of Istanbul. It was late September, several weeks into the fall term when the school principal had given the all

important Monday morning speech to the whole elementary school population: rows of fidgety kids lined up in twos behind over-weight maternal teachers.

They had all finished pledging allegiance to the Turkish nation and Turkish morality. In unison, they had proclaimed the following verses with pride:

"I am Turkish, I am honest, I am industrious. My motto is: to love my inferiors, to respect my superiors, to love my country and my people more than my own life. May my existence be a gift to the existence of the Turkish people."

It was after the whole school-yard had fallen silent that the old principal had cleared his throat, adjusted his glasses with a nervous push of the index finger of his right hand, and straightened the arms of his worn navy blue jacket by pulling at the sleeves. He had then solemnly said, more like a poet than the disciplinarian that the Ministry of Education demanded him to be:

"My dear children, today I would like to tell you about your counterparts in America. Little boys and girls your age in America are very different from you in some very important respects. For one, they are often more industrious, and they are better behaved. I felt it was my duty to remind you of this after the very grave accidents your wild running about in the school-yard during recesses last week has caused. Several of your friends are not at school today because they gashed their heads or sprained their ankles from all the savage games they have been playing. The weather has been very nice. The school year has just begun. Your teachers and I understand that you are all happy to join your friends after the summer holidays, but school is not a place where you come to play unruly games of tag and hide-and-seek. School is a place where you come to learn about the vital skills that you will need for all your lives and where you receive the benefits of civilization. Your counterparts in America understand what school is all about. At recess, they don't run around like you, but I make use of their time to practice the knowledge that they learn in the classroom. For example, when they go out into the school-yard - and let me remind you that not all of them are blessed with a school-yard such as ours - they examine their surroundings. Look at all the leaves on the ground about you. You have perhaps not noticed them during all your frenzied horseplay. An American child, however, would pick up a leaf, examine it, do research to identify it, and record his observations in his notebook. An American child would do the same for an ant, a worm, or a spider instead of madly crushing it. If you, as young Turks, the adults of the future, learn to do the same, you will help to build a better nation and honor this country that our great Ataturk had offered to you as your most cherished gift."

With this, the principal ended his speech. Saliba felt she was one of the few who had heard the true message of the principal's words. She looked about and saw, for the first time, the mounds of leaves in the school-yard and the shady corners teeming with insects. After that day, every dry copper colored leaf, every quiet ant bespoke of her new task to pay attention to the world.

Saliha went on to finish her primary school education with distinctions despite some

uncomfortable failures in the science class of her fifth year. Then she went to teacher's college to become a primary school teacher. After teaching in remote Anatolian villages where she gained the awe and respect of the peasants, she came to Canada to join her brother who is an auto mechanic in Montreal. She is presently enrolled at Plato College on Park Avenue to learn English and French.

Saliha folds all the towels and linen neatly. She separates Madame Rivest's lingerie from M. Rivest's underwear and pairs up his socks. She puts away all of the clean laundry on the appropriate shelves in the closet and the dresser. She does not neglect to arrange what was already there before she puts away the newly washed clothes. Everything looks fresh and clean! Only some light dusting remains to be done. Then she will clean the bathroom. First she'll throwaway the dirty water in the pail from mopping the floors, then she'll rinse out the cleaning rags and put away all the cleaning materials. Afterwards she'll take her shower and scrub the bathtub clean.

But before she finishes up the remaining tasks, Saliha decides to take a cigarette break on the blue floral patterned armchair in the living room. She makes some fresh coffee in the kitchen, brings her cup over to the living room and lights a cigarette. She unties her scarf and lets her wavy black hair down. As she sips her coffee in between puffs, Saliha goes over her cleaning appointments for the next two weeks. To remember the exact dates, she visualizes the Chrysler calendar in her kitchen with pictures of different kimono-clad Japanese geishas for each month.

She has to clean the two spinster sisters on Thursday. She certainly doesn't look forward to that one. They are very messy people. They are also very careful with their money.

Contrary to the Rivests, they always follow her around and check how much detergent and soap she uses. They never offer her much at lunchtime. Not that she would eat what they eat. They always eat some strange food that she is unaccustomed to, things like blood sausage and sauerkraut; topping it off with stale May West cakes they buy at Steinberg or Provigo. Saliba prefers to keep to herself when she works there.

On Friday afternoon, she will clean for the old Czech at Côte des Neiges. He is a kind and quiet man who doesn't demand much from Saliba. He is glad to have a woman clean up once every few weeks. When she is there, Saliha cooks a couple of light dishes for him. He is always grateful for that and gives her an extra two dollars.

Saliha hopes that Eleni will call her on the weekend to confirm a cleaning job next week. Eleni lives close to where Saliha lives in Park Extension. But the best part of working for Eleni is that at the end of the work day when she is done at her hair dressing salon downstairs, Eleni comes upstairs to have coffee with Saliha and trims her hair and manicures her nails as a gesture of appreciation. Eleni's house is large and demands all of Saliha's energy but the extra reward makes the effort worth it Eleni expects the cleaning to be done well, but always offers refreshments like Koolaid and Tang. Last time Saliha worked there, Eleni gave her some of her daughter's old clothes. Saliba hopes she might receive a reasonable sweater next time because she badly needs something a little



fashionable for the end of the term party at Plato College.

Sipping the last of her coffee, Saliha rises from the armchair and looks around the living room to plan her dusting strategy. She will do just the outside panels of the display cabinet this time, leaving the silver goblets and British china for the next time. Then she will dust the buffet and the little figurines on top of it, taking care to dust off the folds of the Chinese jade Buddha. She decides not to waste too much time polishing the wood this time as all the wooden surfacers are still sparkling from the last time she did it. The Rivests don't seem to have invited anyone over for dinner in the meantime because the guest sets remain as she last arranged them.

Saliha has just finished drying her hair and changing into her street clothes after her shower when Madame Rivest comes back from work. She greets Saliba in French, glances around the house and shows her approval with many "Ooh"s and "Wonderful, stretching her words to make Saliba understand her heart-felt appreciation. Then she says in French that she will call Saliha again next week to confirm their next cleaning date. As she says, this Madame Rivest gestures as if she were dialing and holding on to the receiver of an imaginary telephone.

Of course Saliha can understand everything Madame Rivest is saying without the added gestures, but Madame Rivest is being so kind and helpful that Saliba decides not to use a couple of appropriate French phrases she has recently learned at Plato College.

Madame Rivest goes into her bedroom and comes back out with a sealed white envelope containing Saliba's thirty-five dollars. The Rivests are the only people that put Saliha's earnings in an envelope. They are considerate people.

As Saliha takes the envelope, she says, "Merci beaucoup, Madame Rivest." Stepping out the door she switches the plastic bag containing her work clothes from her right hand to her left hand and extends her right hand to Madame Rivest and says, "Bonjour, Madame Rivest," and smiles. These are the first real words she has uttered since she woke up that morning.

In the elevator, going down, Saliha is alone. She checks the contents of the envelope and smiles with satisfaction. Before the elevator reaches the ground floor, Saliha has time to reflect on her day. She has earned enough for the week's food and cigarettes. Last week, she paid the last installment for her tuition at Plato College. She is tired but life is under control. Her only regret is that she hasn't answered Madame Rivest in longer sentences. But she chases away her regrets with a light shrug and admits the reality.

We come here to speak like them, she thinks; but it will be a long time before they let us practice.



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## Mains de sueurs, soeurs d'encre

### *Une nouvelle d'Hélène Biais*

**A** Amsterdam, en 1354, une femme prend dans sa main la plume d'une oie que l'on a dépecée en des noces barbares. Elle s'envole avec son trésor sur les berges de l'Amstel.

Partir, voguer, naviguer sur les canaux houleux de la Mer du Nord ou quitter à pied les habitations longilignes pour la rondeur exaltante des bras des moulins à vent?

La femme à plume hésite, cherche son chemin. Plume en main, elle taille des diamants éclaboussants. Ecrins dans l'industrielle ville. Courbée sur son manuscrit, le drapé élégant de son travail minutieux enveloppe sensuellement le texte. Jouissances, battements très forts du dedans.

Avec autant de lumière au coeur, elle monte la garde à la proue du vaisseau d'un temps

immémorial. Avec l'exigence des vraies contraintes, des quêtes nocturnes des cauchemars, les mots qu'elle grave témoignent des hasards qui détestent et dégainent les règles.

Des boustrophédons cousent paisiblement leurs traces sur les voiles gonflées du bateau, gorgées du lait d'encre de la scribe en plein travail. La scribe, cette femme, choisit de flotter sur les eaux, de fuir le confort des litières de paille de la ville. Son âme chavire.

La femme entaille sa plume, écrit. Soudain son corps pensif cesse de se tapir. Une lueur s'incline sur sa vie, sur sa voie.

Longuement, pendant un long moment, sur le papier opaque, elle trace sans fin des courbes, des bâtonnets. Elle confectionne des boucles, des volutes avec sa plume. Elle travaillera longuement à tracer ce qui vient des forêts habitées de sa mémoire, de la transparence des êtres, des choses imaginées. La transparence, cette lumière magique, presque liquide, se love comme une aura fébrile. Elle lubrifie des corps de papier. Un temps long dévale des montagnes rocailleuses où se niche et respire sa patience colossale. La scribe longe de sa main les sens d'une flamme maintenue précieusement en vie. Pendant toute la durée, pendant tout le temps que dure l'espace d'une seconde, d'une minute, d'une heure, d'une semaine, d'un mois, d'un an, d'un lustre, d'une vie de femme, des arbres courbent l'échine, appuyés sur les odeurs ailées, roses, accueillies d'aurore, des parois de son cœur. Au plus profond des lettres de la femme, des dés jetés, des désirs désespérés, des nids déshabillés. L'incertitude dans leurs mots. Bruyant désordre des fruits de l'abandon.

Une main quelque part en la scribe n'écrit pas, n'écrit plus. N'a jamais tenu tout au creux style, calepin, crayon, silex, craie. Cette main est d'encre, cache calleuse des trésors en relief, sans papiers, pourtant palpables. N'a jamais tenu d'écritures en son sein. Cette main a pourtant donné la vie, caressé des corps, bâti maisons, cueilli raisins, apposé des briques, lavé des planchers, cousu des édredons, chauffé des marrons, cloué des boîtes à musique, calmé les pleurs d'une poupée, sculpté des bateaux, béni sa famille, allumé des poêles à bois, serré des mains en détresse, consolé, soigné des malades, bercé un enfant, pioché au pic à la pelle, attendri des haines, touché au plus profond des souffrances, balayé des au revoir, mendié une tendresse, salué pour la beauté du geste, agi gratuitement, gravi, gravé dans sa mémoire le temps, des espaces, signes fuyants du mouvement.

Dans une clinique d'alphabet\*, quelqu'une quelque part en elle expose, explose ses mains. Dévotes, hurlantes, coincées, aplaties, écrasées, ahuries, déwattées, inéligibles, dévoyées, inexaucées, passagères. Elle y survit, l'aime en communion. Elle parlera, écrira. Sa main en son nom, en sa trace, ramifiée, calmée, retrempera dans ses sueurs.

Plus de six siècles plus tard, les corps, les têtes, les mains des femmes s'inscrivent, s'écrivent dans toutes les femmes alphabétisées ou en voie de l'être. De belles écritures plurielles habitent aujourd'hui pleinement, fièrement leurs magnifiques cahiers de femmes.

\* Voir l'article intitulé "Les éclopés de l'alphabet" paru dans la revue *Châteline* de juin

1988 (pp. 60-71), où le texte de Dominique Demers et les illustrations de Philippe Béhas prennent le parti d'une description étroite, dépréciative et sensationnaliste des adultes analphabètes. Ils les représentent comme des malades dangereux qui "pourraient empoisonner leur enfant parce qu'ils ne comprennent pas les instructions sur une boîte de médicaments." Il est vrai que la situation de l'analphabétisme au Québec et ailleurs au Canada et dans le monde est alarmante, qu'elle nécessite de solides politiques de "redressement." Pourtant, cette façon de diagnostiquer les affres des analphabètes en les stigmatisant et en les emmurant comme des pièces de scrabble dans un échiquier socio-politique, renvoie l'opinion publique à des discours thérapeutiques qui ne tiennent pas compte de toute la complexité du phénomène de l'analphabétisme et qui font fi d'une autre compréhension des analphabètes qui ne focaliserait plus unilatéralement sur LEUR "CARENCE." Pour de plus amples détails concernant cette question cruciale, consulter, entre autres, Hélène Blais "Des mots et des maux: discours qui soignent," dans Recherche-action sur le développement de l'alphabétisation au Québec, Évaluations. Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, Direction Générale de l'Éducation des Adultes, 1988, pp. 89-139.

Hélène Blais rédige présentement une thèse de doctorat en sémiologie à l'UQAM sur les aspects socio-sémiotiques de l'analphabétisme et de l'alphabétisation. En 1986-87, elle est coordonnatrice provinciale d'une recherche-action sur le développement de l'alphabétisation au Québec. Elle est présentement chercheure pour le Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec.

## POETRY

### DELIA TURLEY The Best Thing Was

The best thing was  
two weeks before I hit eighteen  
I ran away from home. I lived with  
my married sister  
for a while.  
Not too long though.

I went to this place.  
I worked in a factory.  
I was on a machine  
doing calendars for the holidays.  
You press your foot down  
you staple, you go  
dum dum dum.

Plus my father died young  
and my step-father didn't do so good.  
"You'll be signed away," he'd tell  
me.  
"Sent to a home. All they'll feed you  
will be bread and butter."

And my mother  
used to keep me back from school  
and I had to do all the cleaning.  
You couldn't use a mop  
you had to do it on your hands and  
knees.  
You used the wash-board.  
You leaned over the sink  
and scrubbed and scrubbed.  
If she was washing too  
and I needed water,  
"Go in the toilet bowl," she'd say.  
"And get water out of there -"

Six months and then I got laid off.

So then my sister said,  
"You can go to school -"  
It was a class there,  
grown-ups, adults -  
and they all knew how to read  
already,  
so I wasn't getting no place.  
And I was afraid of getting raped  
you know,  
because it was a bad neighborhood.

After a while  
Karen was working late sometimes  
and my brother-in-law  
he was a sick bird.  
He started showing me picture cards  
you know.  
All naked women.  
He had them all lined up  
along the bed.  
He was looking for you know what.  
Well, I told him off  
and I told him forget about it.  
So he started pressuring me to leave.  
I came home from work.  
My clothes were outside in a bag.

But I got sick of being used.  
Even now, because I'm trying to read  
it bothers me.  
My brothers and my sisters  
they all went to school.  
But my mother  
her mother died, and her aunt raised  
her.  
She used to feed her in a cellar.  
So then I grew up and I looked like  
that aunt.

It was a shame she got away with it.

My sister's friends  
They had skates and riding bikes.  
And my mother and step-father  
they used to both get drunk.  
So I got them more drunker.  
That's the only way I got out.  
I never went to a party.  
But I caught on fast.  
I never had no clothes to go  
so my older sister,  
I took her clothes and a pair of heels.  
I got them drunk and I slid down  
(It's crazy, I was very crazy,  
I was desperate to get out -)  
I slid down the water-pipe  
and through the yard  
climbed up the wire-pole.

The third time I got caught.  
My step-father hid out and caught  
me.  
I got the strap and a stick over my  
head.  
But you know what I said to myself?  
I still enjoyed it  
because I never went to a party  
before.

If someone in the place  
they talk about their childhood  
I'll walk away. "Oh," I'll say,  
"wonderful, very nice -"  
but I say to myself under my breath,  
*Thank God.*  
I never say I wish I was a kid again.

SUSAN GLICKMAN

## Sending a Postcard to Julie in Iceland From San Miguel de Allende

It's not something I take for granted  
though the ballpoint skates easily  
enough on the slick surface of the  
card and the stamp, a Mexican  
Strawberry, 100 pesos, promises  
quick and efficient passage.

I jot down a few phrases about the  
clarity of the air in these mountains,  
so pure "light-headed" takes on a  
new meaning - a luminosity that  
keeps us drunk - and think of the  
lengthening nights you inhabit What  
little-used knowledge does constant  
dark elicit? Or, more likely, it's not  
constant. but a palette of varying  
greys, an old-master drawing lit by a  
few strokes of white.

Is the world new to you? Or is it just  
a species of memory, this landscape,  
as all landscapes are, and what's new  
is yourself? As though the skin, that  
tough but flexible membrane, were  
merely a convention, an arbitrary  
boundary to keep the soul from  
dispersal.

*I will stop here*, you decide, but the  
*here*, is always changing.

In grade five we made papier-mâché  
planets, a yellow sun and silvery  
moon, imagined intergalactic  
conquest as we hurled them around  
the room.

The next year our horizons narrowed  
to a topographical model of the earth  
- I liked the mountains of gritty  
plaster; painted oceans were never  
convincing. Later still, pages of

Twenty years later those memories  
are what  
connects us, 7,000 miles apart  
as the crow flies  
if crows flew across the Atlantic. I  
ransacked three atlases looking for  
other links; found only volcanoes,  
earthquakes, the occasional hot-  
spring. Like Canada, Mexico and  
Iceland are mostly uninhabited -  
people live on the edges, the coasts  
valleys and plains - everything else  
is rock.

So I send you this card, a picture of  
where I am and you send me yours  
and in this way we annotate memory,  
bring our landscapes up to date.  
As I write, the late afternoon sun  
sends long shadows  
across the room and lights the flares  
of bougainvillea outside my window.  
The buds are orange, open blossoms  
a gentler rose; sunset flowers. Now  
the grackles fly down to roost in the  
*jardin*; purposeful birds whose harsh  
voices echo the commills no longer  
grinding at this hour, the only thing  
lovely about them their extravagant  
tails.

And now the church-bells ring.  
Wind sifts the jacarandas,  
clouds stormy with oncoming night  
wash closer  
to the horizon and the bougainvillea  
goes out.

How quickly day's heat disperses  
once darkness  
comes down! Now I can imagine

maps detailed rainfall, crop rotation,  
statistics in coloured markers: a flat  
and abstract world.

I remember none of the numbers, can  
barely dredge up capital cities  
memorized as a school-yard game.  
Anyhow, many of the names have  
changed. But I remember those  
planets whizzing by, the earth the  
size of an orange, the sun a  
grapefruit, the delicate moon a plum;  
their orbits fixed in my head forever.

Iceland. Write soon.  
Tell me what you see, fill in our  
map.

*This poem originally appeared in  
Susan Glickman. The Power to Move  
(Montreal: Signal Editions. 1986).*

## LYNN CROSBIE

### Love Letters

I would give my husband drawings for  
grocery lists, with smiling faces on the  
eggs, and spider feet dangling  
everywhere. I could draw letters too. Fat  
senseless alphabets, lexical landscapes of  
pointed trees and bloated clouds. That is  
how I wished words were, with changing  
colours and feathers in their spines. On  
road signs in my dreams, they shimmied,  
their Rockette heels a variegated sunburst  
unlike the stiff black knots and stakes that  
glared at me from envelopes and books.  
An unchanging and cruel exotica, like  
smelling Cuban cigars wherever you go  
or the same screaming opera. He said that  
I did not need to learn with him there,  
reading slowly aloud, but sometimes in  
silence. That drove me insane, he would  
laugh or frown at something on the page,  
and look as if he were a creeping vine on

## KATHRYN DANIELS

### The Survivor

Because the teacher  
beat her in school  
for being a Jew  
Because the Poles  
broke down the  
door with heavy  
boots Because the  
camps taught  
cruelty not books  
she never learned to  
read

Because her hand is  
deformed from  
some torture  
performed upon her  
Because she fears  
errors can be fatal  
Because her  
thoughts are dark

a tombstone, a coffee stain on a piece of clean manilla. I practice learning on a stack of mail he kept in his sock drawer, and I finally learned dear. Dear Hank, it felt like having a perfume sample fall from a magazine in a sweet sudden breath. It make me think of velvet antlers, of his rumpled cardigan sweater and my love for him, a word which slayed me, with its clean lines and quick exhalation, the swelling heart in its middle. I began to scream things all day long, and I felt the first affection for poetry through the ringing sounds of advertisements, soapbox labels and advice to the lovelorn columns. Words were heroic, huge killing things, and they beat in my head and bled from my eyes and fingers. I would be ironing, and a giant phrase or comma would barrel into the room, its veins bulging, its arms around my waist. Dear Hank, I miss you especially your sexy hands, mine clenched when I got that far and then some. Then I know for sure that reading was magic, it conjured up these long eyelashes and white Harlow hair, and the guilty bald spot and shaking dewlap of my faithless husband, adrift on the libretto of his private life. He would still read to me in his annoying way while I squirmed on my novels and texts, that lay under the couch cushions like misplaced scissors. I drew him an elaborate list one day, of pink champagne bottles and support girdles, and wrote my first words. I left them with his letters, on the back of our marriage certificate, I think that they were my finest, I said, Dear Hank, the end. And right away began working on a longer book.

animals who bite  
she never learned to  
write

This life has left  
bitterness in her  
mouth the way  
orange rind does  
when a small piece  
stubbornly clings to  
the sweet fruit flesh  
and you eat it not  
meaning to

Finally, at sixty,  
she's learning to  
read the words  
proceed across the  
page like a parade  
she wants to follow  
In her twisted hand  
she holds a pen and  
in small, shaky  
scrawl writes her  
own name.

---

## ERRATA

On pp. 104 and 105 of our "Nordic Women" issue (Vol. 9, No.2), we published two poems written by Tove Ditlevsen, and translated by Cynthia Norris Graae, entitled "Divorce 3" and "Divorce 4." We apologize for having mistakenly attributed the authorship of these poems and for having incorrectly spelled Ms. Graae's name.



THREE POEMS BY  
KATHLEEN  
McCRACKEN

Note to Chris

The skeleton in my closet  
jostles her bones together,  
offers her sister-skin  
for your night-light.

A rictus floats  
in the kitchen mirror.  
Framed in a wimple  
of discontent  
I recognize the familiar  
violet irises.

Like Kafka's  
hunger artist  
I am insatiable, rapacious  
but simply cannot  
find the right food,  
saint like keep waiting  
for a voice to say  
'you have fasted  
long enough and are  
forgiven'

It is dark here.  
Cloistered with the  
abandoned  
nests of night-birds  
I write to you  
letters from the damp

pit of a well  
whose waters will not  
sluice,  
an earth-worked  
stone turret  
where ropes and buckets  
drop but never  
return.

Still there are days  
when light  
surfaces like a blue  
sail on blue water,  
a fin or a scythe  
sweeping shoreward it

promises to bind and tie  
the disfiguring  
fingers of time.

Merseyside

The women of Mersey  
are fleshly sweet with  
scents  
of streetsmoke  
caught in the moving net  
of half past four  
blue morning

Their men have eyes  
that rattle dark as agates  
in a jar

Their children  
glint like codfish  
in a basket

The widows of Merseyside  
sit by windows,  
beating on a skin drum  
watching for ships  
on a paper sea

White

On the table  
a red geranium.  
Smell of earth and mildew  
the strange leaf-scent  
of old houses.

She sits by the window  
watching this last snowfall  
in April.  
Her hands tat a landscape  
of white lace,  
habit of knotting things  
firmly together.

The hardy geranium  
impresses  
itself  
on another day.  
The silver shuttle  
sings and goes still.

Outside the snow falls  
into its own light

---

## HEATHER SPEARS

### Sauna\*

So warm in here I lie low;  
one arm at rest up the  
grainy wood  
reaches into deliberate, real  
heat where my fingers  
smoke like candles. Tough,  
you're grinning, up in the  
thick  
of it,  
legs swinging off the  
platform, blurred demon.  
From your body  
sweat leaks, runs down in  
big, loose  
drops  
that spread along my sides  
Wand as let wounds.

Infernal surgeon, you're  
untouchable in the cowl of  
sulphurous heat-

and I want to slide  
somehow out of  
myself romantically rise  
to you through its  
intensifying, into imagined  
cruelty,  
your eyeballs burning and  
surely burning lungs  
and visceral, where we  
could be  
fire swallows, my mouth  
finally  
blistered to your mouth,  
where you might even  
begin to peel off sections of  
your basted skin, and lay  
them sizzling across me.

Arm, belly, breast, why  
you'd be my armour then,  
your tactile  
harm  
closing around me, I can  
smell incisions,  
flesh going up in steam, in  
sweetness, like god food,  
prophesying -

no good. You'll have to  
comedown.

Close-up, your eyes lose  
focus, the lines around your  
mouth define some region I  
have not yet traveled on;  
you're soaking, as if you  
were turned inside out.  
Nothing deified here. This  
kind of light is only found  
internally, its scope is the  
scarred heart's wet, moving  
chambers,  
looked at not with proper  
wonder but pryingly, by the  
wrong eyes.

---

**\* Editor's Note:** When we  
first published this poem in  
our "Nordic Women" issue  
(Vol. 9, No.2), p. 110, we  
omitted the last 8 lines. The  
poem appears here in its  
entirety. Our apologies to  
the author.

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This will not be a patronizing reinterpretation of the refugee woman's experience by North-Americans, but rather a forum for her own voice - her experiences, her concerns. REFUGEE WOMEN is a community-based project emanating from the refugee community. All our guest editors are either refugees or involved in the refugee community. Editors include: **Eva Allmen, Helene Moussa, Isabel Caprellan, Olga Cass and Haragua Getu.** Articles will look at the difference between the refugee and immigrant woman's experience; the difficulties connected to assimilation versus integration into the host country; the problems of cultural survival, isolation, and trying to have one's professional status recognized. There will be personal accounts, articles by individuals involved with relevant government agencies or community groups, a detailed reference section of resource material, poetry, fiction, art and book reviews.

- NATIVE WOMEN (Summer 1989)

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A special issue on Aboriginal women in Canada, with a guest editorial board comprised of Native women. Articles in this issue will reflect the reality of Native

women's experience, recounted in their own words/ voices. Photographs, fiction and poetry by Native Women will also be featured. Subjects to be covered include Native culture and tradition; arts and crafts (including music and quilt-making); projects aimed at the renewal of Native languages; retraining programs for Native women; questions of self-government and aboriginal rights; the importance of mothers and grandmothers. A book review section devoted entirely to publications by and/or about Native women will also be included. The range of contributions will extend from the east coast to the north to the west coast.

- **WOMEN ARTISTS** (Fall 1989)

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This issue will be devoted to the experience of contemporary Canadian women artists and a rich representation of their work. It will explore the impact that feminism is having on their work and lives. Women's practice as art makers, art educators, curators and critics is the focus around which questions of aesthetic concern will arise. The issue will offer a significant overview of the situation of women working in the visual arts, as well as demonstrate through text and visual reproductions the strong, diverse nature of women's productivity. Particular attention is being paid to material from minority group women, such as women of colour, disabled women, lesbians, working class women, Native and immigrant women. Our Guest Editors **Janice Andreae** and **Marilyn Burgess** are both graduates of the Fine Arts Program at York University; both are practicing, exhibited artists with a strong commitment to feminism. Janice is based in Toronto, where she teaches Art in the Women's Studies Program at York University. Marilyn, a francophone, lives in Montreal, where she is actively involved in the art community.

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Buseje Bailly  
*Third World Madonnas*, 1985  
acrylic and newspaper on canvas  
2x3 feet