In This Issue

Sexism in the workplace? “It’s ugly out there,” says E. J. Graff, who reviews Necessary Dreams and Women Don’t Ask, studies exploring the political and socio-psychological reasons why women still make only 77 percent of what men do. p. 4

Fasten your seatbelts—it’s philosophy time, as our reviewers discuss thought-provoking new books by Michèle Le Doeuff (p. 7), Judith Butler (p. 9), and Julia Kristeva (p. 23).

We have compressed our poetry selections for all of 2004-2005 into two special sections, this month and next. This month, we present for your intensified inspiration works by Betty Buchsbaum, Theresa Burns, Marea Gordett, Judy Katz, Maurya Simon, L. B. Thompson, and Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon. pp. 10-13

Austrian novelist Elfriede Jelinek wins the Nobel Prize for Literature. Five women are nominated for the National Book Award in fiction. But as Paula Caplan and Mary Ann Palko document, in prestigious publications like The New York Times Book Review, you still have to look hard to find women writers, as either the reviewers or the reviewed. (Not true in our pages, of course.) p. 16

and more...

A letter from the editor

Dear Friends,

I’m writing to tell you the disheartening news that The Women’s Review of Books will be suspending publication after we put out our December 2004 issue.

Like many feminist and progressive publications, the Women’s Review has been struggling with rising costs and falling subscription and advertising revenues—our main sources of income—since the mid-1990s. There are many reasons for our problems—the faltering economy, the conservative political climate, the rise of the Internet, the demise of independent bookstores, cutbacks in library subscription budgets, paper and postage price increases. As a result, we have been operating at a deficit for many years—which may sound impossible, but we’ve been able to continue publishing during this time because our “host” organization, the Wellesley Centers for Women (WCW), has stepped in on several occasions and made up the difference. At this point, though, our debt to WCW has grown again and is now over $200,000, which we cannot repay, and they can no longer carry.

Or at least, WCW can no longer carry us alone. Together, we are exploring the possibility of finding an additional institution—or long-term donor—to join WCW and the Women’s Review to reconceive and relaunch the publication.

Many people have asked us why we are not making an emergency fundraising appeal. We have made such appeals in the past, and you, our readers, have contributed generously. But our problem is clearly chronic, and such an appeal would at best buy us a couple of months. To solve our problems, we must instead think in terms of years. It doesn’t seem right to ask you for your money—and then to suspend publication anyway.

As we look back on the history of the Women’s Review, we feel very proud. Since 1983, the Women’s Review has provided a unique forum for serious, informed discussion of new writing by and about women. Just about every important feminist scholar in the country has appeared in our pages. Our readers have always known that they could turn to us for insight into our movement’s issues and controversies. We know we will be missed.

I write this letter before the presidential election. Whatever the outcome, feminists will need to get creative, to open our minds to new possibilities, to listen to every voice, to embrace unfamiliar ideas and strategies. We are trying every day to approach the difficult changes here at the Women’s Review in this spirit.

If you have ideas for the Women’s Review, send them to me by e-mail. I can’t promise I’ll respond to each one individually, but please watch the Women’s Review website, www.wellesley.edu/womensreview, for updates on our progress.

In sisterhood,

Amy Hoffman
Editor in Chief
ahoffman@wellesley.edu
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The Women’s Review of Books

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Against interpretation
by Jan Clausen


Although Cynthia Ozick is commonly known as a novelist, her reputation as a writer of imaginative prose really rests on her achievements in short fiction. Ozick’s finest tales are sparsely plotted, exquisitely shaped, almost fanatical in their devotion to unity of effect—all qualities that serve both her fabulist side and her historical-realism impulse. While The Messiah of Stockholm and The Pomegranate Pipers masquerade as full-length fiction works, the former reads like a novella, while the latter comprises linked short narratives, several of which were published separately before being compiled. Like these books, Ozick’s cruelly beautiful tale “The Pagan Rabbi” and her famous The Shawl (an indelible eight-page vision of motherhood in a concentration camp paired with a tragicomic novella featuring the camp survivor in her later life as a half-cracked Florida retiree) rely on sharply etched images and highly charged language. Such lapidary prose works imagine reality via entirely different means from those favored by the novel, what Henry James called the “loose, baggy monster,” which typically goes perfection of form in its effort to capture something of the world’s complexity.

Now, with Heir to the Glimmering World, Ozick beards the monster in its lair with mixed results. This uncharacteristically hefty volume revisits prior themes—tensions between faith and heresy; the irreducible individual impact of the Holocaust on each of its victims; textuality as a way of life; the Jewish intellectual woman as hero—in the startling form of neo-Victorian realist pastiche.

The novel begins in the engaging voice of Rosie Meadows, who looks back from some unspecified but plainly mature vantage point upon her youthful expatriations during the Great Depression. Motherless and reared in upstate New York by her supremely inattentive father, a secular Jew who teaches math for a living while giving up reading while forbearing to think? And is Rudolf’s fascination with the Karaites’ dizzying contradictions ultimately more a matter of scholastic ambition, spiritual intoxication, or temperamental affinity with their rejectionist posture? Rosie herself seems undecided, although a wonderful passage evoking the “polyphonic thunder” of “exegetical voices calling to one another across the centuries...Talmud, the fugue-like music of the rabbis conferring over the sense of a syllable out of Genesis” is almost worth the frustration of being left in the dark as to what the would-be silencers of that counterpoint proposed to substitute for it.

While serving as handmaiden to Rudolf’s obsession, sober-minded Rosie gets to observe a lush assortment of derangements afflicting the other characters. The memory of their desperate, final week in Berlin haunts both Elsa and the teenage Annellese with the image of a terror that they class privilege barely shielded them against. Desperate to elude the Nazis, the family spent days riding around Berlin in a classified car.

Papa hired it. It had smoked-glass windows, no one could see inside. Only important people would ride in an auto like that...Fritz brought us food to eat in the auto, and when we needed to use the toilet we would hold our heads up and walk into any fine hotel. It made us nervous to do that, even though we were wearing our best clothes on purpose.

Then there is cousin Bertram’s girlfriend, a heartless Communist “zealot” who changes her given name (Miriam) to Ninel, an anagram of
Gloria Anzaldúa. As a writer, Gloria was inspired and emboldened me and the market. This courage and commitment to her writing. She stunned me several times.

Bearing Boy seems less like a legitimate character than a deus ex machina imported to...
On owning land

by Trish Crapo


I n these first two sentences of her memoir, Above the Clearwater: Living On Stolen Land, BETTE LYNCH HUSTED loses everything. The log house her grandfather built burns to the ground, and she tells of hearing the murrm of voices as she made her way through the woods and meadows. She longed to know what these “Old Ones” had to say. “What does it mean to be alive on this earth?” she asks. “I didn’t think I could ever really know unless they spoke to me.”

A nd now we come to the dirty-lit- tle-secret portion of this essay. I don’t know about you, but some- times I just want to know what to do. Alternately outrage and depressed by all this, I have over-estimated, internalized sexism, I picked up a skinny book that had an obviously self- help subtitle: Why Women Earn Less How To Make What You’re Really Worth. Mikellal Valterra is a financial counselor who testifies about her own recovery from depression and suicide. She has absolutely no social consciousness, no feminist analysis, and no research behind it. It’s a purely personal look at self- help through a different lens. She says she’s learned that her mother’s mother, Emily, had killed herself. “That’s my family,” she says. “I had to learn to see it. We’ll have to learn to look at the world and each other with a different vision, until every place is a home-place.”

Surely this commitment to reality- looking is what makes Husted’s simple scenes kindle suddenly into more ambigu- ous, more psychological, and more important, build a social movement. Fels believes that many women are at war and that men have lost their sense of themselves as individuals. She testifies about her own recovery from depression and suicide. “The feminine of the 1970s and 1980s, unfortunately, only got women put part of the way, and major obstacles must still be overcome before women receive fair treatment at home,” she writes. We’ve got to work together to finish the job, re-educating men and changing government and corporate policies.

We have found ourselves trapped in a bind, according to Fels. “If I don’t know what these “Old Ones” had to say. “What does it mean to be alive on this earth?” she asks. “I didn’t think I could ever really know unless they spoke to me.”

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"It's a matter of finding a way back to that beginning place, five hundred years too late, and learning to begin again," she suggests, diffusing the nostalgic of that sentence with the next: "What matters, I know, is what we do now."

And Brox's new book, Clearing Land, takes us back to that "beginning place," weaving historical accounts of the first European settlers in America with personal memories of her family's farm near Lowell, Massachusetts. Clearing Land, too, begins with loss—Brox lists seven deaths on the first page: "my father, both his sisters, four of his six brothers."

These deaths mark the end of a generation of farmers and the beginning of a new, tenuous era for the farm. In clear, detailed prose, Brox writes of her family's long connection to the farm purchased by her immigrant grandparents—Lebanese on her father's side, Italian on her mother's—and the struggle to keep it economical and viable as younger family members moved away and neighboring lands began to revert to woods or be devoured by suburban housing.

I can't help feeling the farm may be swallowed up soon, and a whole world will go with it... As if understanding can alleviate loss, I am trying to place our own time within the larger story of cultivation. I hope constraint amplifies, that by giving shape to the stories, to the persistent half-lives of the vanished who roam even on ristoring winter days, I can see more clearly where we belong in the accumulation of beliefs, ideas, violence, necessities, and desires that have determined this country. (pp. 20-21)

Once again, the emphasis is on the healing power of stories, and on understanding how history reverberates through our lives. In Above the Clearwater, Husted quotes William Bradford's description of the Pilgrims' impression of America: "What could they see," he asks, 'but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men?" and Husted asks, "If 'nature' is something other, something 'out there' to be feared and subdued and reshaped in our own image, what else could have happened?"

Brox elaborates on this idea. The first European settlers in New England, she points out, were too trapped in their perceptions of what agriculture should look like that they failed to see that the native peoples were already practicing it. Seeing no evidence that native peoples "possessed" the land, they took possession of it for themselves. As American agriculture involved the cultivation of light soils and seasonal rotation of crops. In contrast, the Europeans, faced with what seemed to be a boundless amount of land, abandoned fields when soil fertility declined and plowed new ground rather than work to improve or maintain the soil. This difference in attitude, both writers would agree, is at the root of the alarming abuse of American land and resources.

Throughout Clearing Land, Brox weaves primary source materials—the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Jefferson; journals kept by women who left the farm to work in the mills; lists of the contents of the ships that first came to the New World—creating "voice-overs" to the narrative. Some of these interlocking passages have the rich feel of a well-produced film documentary, allowing various elements to reverberate together. Each type of that intimate memoir, historical narrative, quoted source material—enhances the others, and Brox is wise not to explain her juxtapositions. But though the historical information was of interest to me and grounded the memoir in the passage of time, I found Clearing Land most compelling when Brox wrote of her own life—her journeys home. Her description of the way farm work overwhels a family, increasing tensions, was stark:

"Necessity made a world of its own," she writes, running on at its certain pace. There was always so much to do, and time, time, time, you were always working against time, and the heat, and the rain. My mother would be as quiet as she'd always been, setting down a platter of ham, dishes of steaming corn or baked tomatoes, olives, cheese, bread. One day I was helping to clear the dishes—I'm sure I was abstracted, already thinking ahead to the work of the afternoon—and as I set them in the sink and began to head on my way, she turned to me and said: 'It's always about the farm, isn't it?" (p. 66)

Unlike many modern jobs, farming is all-consuming—you don't leave it behind at the end of the day. But Brox and her family and the neighbors she reconnects with through the grange are devoted to it despite its difficulties. Coming across a list of cattle breeds in one of her father's annual farm inventories, Brox writes:

You can't always explain how or why an apture opens, how you fall into larger seeing, but reading those names, in his hand, after he had gone, was the first time I believe I truly understood how far he'd traveled in his life, and how much I had taken everything for granted. I felt a little shame: all of a sudden I saw the deep hard work it, the aspiration to be gotten bit by bit. (p. 47)

The "deep hard work" of farming lies as much in the investment of spirit in the land as in any of the physical chores. And to farm a piece of land changes forever one's relationship to wilderness. "There are some inheritances I know I'll never be able to shake," Brox writes in the book's last pages. "Some dream of order that won't stand for death in life. Deadwood, which can look fine and deceased in the wild, ruins the idea when it's within bounds. Cultivation is a possession." And yet, in a beautiful final passage that I won't spoil for the reader, she doubts ownership. Both she and Husted, in examining their relationships to "homeland," learn that we both belong and don't belong. Or, to put it another way: The land is ours only as long as we realize that it's not ours.
The original media icon

by Phyllis Eckhans

Inez: The Life and Times of Inez Milholland
by Linda J. Lumsden. Bloomington, IN:
Indiana University Press, 2004,
280 pp, $29.95 hardcover.

S he who speaks truth to power is most likely to be heard if she is
gorgeous and flattering. Decades before Gloria Steinem subverted the
stereotype of the “sindent feminist” with glamour and wit, Inez Milholland
seduced America into paying attention to women’s rights. Revered by the press
and the public as “one of the most bea-
tiful women in all the land,” the young
activist’s Gibson Girl good looks gar-
cerred columnists and front-page headlines.

Milholland toured the western states
by rail in the fall of 1916, as the star
speaker in a grueling publicity campaign
for women’s suffrage. Athletic and bold,
she had always been portrayed as an
Amazon. So when she collapsed in the
middle of a speech to a packed suffrage
rally in Los Angeles, America was
shocked. And when the beloved 30-year-
old lawyer and activist died weeks later
from a long-neglected illness, the whole
nation mourned.

The radical wing of the suffrage
movement immediately claimed
Milholland as a martyr. Alice Dulé’s
Congressional Union confronted then-
President Woodrow Wilson, demanding that
“such waste of human life and effort” by finally supporting
women’s suffrage. Athletic and bold,
she knew better, and elsewhere
she expected to live a life replete with
success. She sought a splendid career,
one that would allow her to change the
world while simultaneously paying her
great sums of money necessary to
underwrite the lavish lifestyle to which
she had become accustomed as a rich
man’s daughter. Nominally a socialist,
she had become accustomed as a rich
woman and relished the media. Following her
graduation from college, she determined
to enter law school and petitioned all-
male Harvard to admit her. She urged
the school to recognize that men and
women must work together: “Why
should not Harvard help to inculcate
this new spirit of ‘camaraderie’ in the
younger generation, instead of follow-
ing, as it must sooner or later, where oth-
ers point the way?” After Milholland
presented the faculty with a bouquet
in the suffrage colors of purple, white, and
green, they voted her in. The trustees
swiftly overruled the faculty. But of
course, she got press coverage. “Harvard
Rejects Suffragette Plea” reported The

Milholland was physically fearless.
Perhaps her most heroic moment came
in 1913 when she led a huge suffrage
demonstration in Washington, DC, on
the eve of Wilson’s first inauguration.
Garbed in a white Joan of Arc-style con-
tume of her own design, mounted on a
white horse, she charged into the drunken,
violent horde of men who sought to block the march, yelling at the
top of her lungs. “ought to be ashamed” of themselves
and that if they had “a particle of back
bone” they would help the marchers
fend off the spitting, vicious mob.
Belatedly, the US cavalry cleared the
way. Newspapers universally con-
demned the parade violence and praised
Milholland’s courage.

But the icon was also a diva, who kept
her own interests paramount. She
refused to testify at the congressional hearing
on the riot, willfully mischarac-
terizing the mob as “eager and unman-
ageable and out for a good time.” In
fact, she knew better, and elsewhere
condemned the conduct of the crowd
and the police’s failure to protect the
marchers—but the hearing was incon-
venient and perhaps a threat to her
modus operandi, which was to flatter
rather than confront authority. Her
blithe solipsism routinely triumphed
over principle. Arrested in 1910 along
with striking shirtwaist workers,

Milholland, out on bail, got the hearing
delayed till the morning for her conven-
ience—for the 14 picketers whose
cause she ostensibly championed to
spend a night in the Tombs jail. To add
insult to injury, the newspapers once
again made her out to be a heroine, with
a banner headline along with her photo
on the front page of The New York Times
the next day.

L ike other groundbreaking pio-
nears, Milholland had grand—
and arguably grandiose—dreams of
success. She sought a splendid career,
one that would allow her to change the
world while simultaneously paying her
the great sums of money necessary to
underwrite the lavish lifestyle to which
she had become accustomed as a rich
man’s daughter. Nominally a socialist,
she expected to live a life replete with
high-fashion gowns, maids, transatlantic
luxury line cruises, and three-month
summer vacations.

Lumsden attributes Inez Milholland’s
failure to establish that implausibly splen-
did career to entrenched institutional sex-
ism. But one of the many fascinations of
her richly documented biography is the
evidence that Milholland was exception-
ally fortunate; just as the rich are different
from you and me, so too are the famous-
ly beautiful. One marvels that the white-
shirt law firm, Osborne, Lamb and
Garvan, which employed her following
her 1912 graduation from New York
University Law School, didn’t fire her.
While working as a clerk she continued
her headline-generating activism in and
around Greenwich Village, speaking out
For suffrage, for underpaid retail clerks,
for free speech. She invited prominent
suffragists Alva Belmont and Carrie
Chapman Catt to a screening of a con-
troversial movie on prostitution, The
Inside of White Slave Traffic, then persuad-
ed them to vouch for its social relevance.
Unbeknownst to Belmont and Catt,
Milholland worked for the film’s produc-
ers; when the producers refused to pay
her, she sued them, claiming that her
services included enlisting the suffrage
leaders and writing letters to editors. The
Times blasted the judgment-impaired
young lawyer for confusing law with
Beyond Slash, Burn, and Poison: Transforming Breast Cancer Stories into Action  
Mary Jane Kopeck-Hawman  

NATURA S BODY  Gender in the Making of Modern Science  
Linda Schiebinger  

The 21st-century family  
by Carol Anshaw  

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Julie D. Shayne  

Making the world better—one book at a time.
Nothing about her life has had any of the flavor of her mother, then witnessed her father’s way like a brakeless freight train? (p. 105)

And then Carnegie’s overbearing mother, Mama Wong (it is she who nicknamed Blondie), a self-made real-estate magnate, dies. In her will she requests that the Wong family bring the aforementioned distant cousin over from China, to help Carnegie and the aforementioned family member into their home. Now in her 40s, Lan has never married and was raised by her mother, then witnessed her father’s murder at the hands of the Red Guard—into their home. Now in her 40s, Lan has never married and was raised by her mother, then witnessed her father’s murder at the hands of the Red Guard—into their home. Now in her 40s, Lan has never married and was raised by her mother, then witnessed her father’s murder at the hands of the Red Guard—and that baby die. (p. 276)

Carnegie, for his part, begins to have guarded fantasies about Lan. Even Blondie, who has the most to lose by the introduction of Lan into the household, gives the new setup her tentative blessing. Carnegie enjoys her and Lan cooking together.

Blondie seemed bent on normalizing her relationship with Lan through foodstuffs. Her enthusiasm was real—Blondie was never one to desire what she seemed to have turned herself up, as if on a cooking show. You half expected subtitles for the hearing-impaired to begin scrolling across the lower reaches of her sweater...She asked the item was yin or yang. If it was smoked or pickled, she asked what it was like fresh. She asked where it came from, and how you knew best-quality from second-best. (p. 240)

Over time, though, Lan’s presence leaves Blondie feeling challenged in all the areas where she was previously secure. She admits her exasperation to Carnegie: “Only your mother, I said, would send us, from her grave, the wife you should have married.”

Once the trouble starts, it’s on a roll. A narrative that has been idling comfortably for nearly 300 pages suddenly surges forward through a collision course of events. Blondie quits her job; Carnegie changes his. Blondie foists on Lan a guy named Shang, a wealthy Chinese-American from Blondie’s feng shui class. Lan first gets pregnant, then gets tired of being roughed up by the jerky Shang. The clincher is a bad incident that doesn’t end well for the lovable goat. Then follows a reign of affection as Lan takes off for Maine with Shang’s limousine driver. This leads to a dumping shop venture, then a wrangle with some Mainers that ends worse than the goat incident. At this point, we’re still not done with major plot turns.

This back-loaded narrative, reminiscent of those old joke-signs that read, “Plan Ahead,” with the last letters squished against and finally falling off the edge, is not the novel’s only flaw. There is also a lack of balance. The smallest things are examined microscopically, while huge events are dispatched in a page or two.

But even with its flaws, The Last Wife is never a book that is often good. One patch, it even attains a modest greatness, if only Wendy observes Shang in the back yard killing goat with a pitchfork. Lan is wailing, but Wendy sees through this, and is proven right when Lan kicks the goat. She kicks the goat again, and I’m surprised at the look on her face, it’s not like any look I ever saw. She looks like she could be one of the Red Guards. She told us about, or like one of the guys outside the car when I was just adopted in China. Lizzy said they looked like they were never ever going to get what they wanted their whole entire lives and had to watch on TV while other people did. (p. 314)

There is weight to the way Jen deals with cultural clashes, with the identity issues inherent in race and affiliation, abandonment and adoption, and with the currently unfashionable idea of a woman challenging within the demands of gender and motherhood. With its generous spirit, the book pulls for the notion of family as a mechanism inclusive and tolerant of differences within itself. And in its most brilliant dimension, the novel’s construction itself reflects the loose, baggy, lost-sneaker-whats-for-dinner-the-water-heater’s-broken-again chaos of family. What comes through is an endeavor greater than the sum of its fragile human parts.
She'll Wait

For the grayest day in September.
Until she remembers the word for rhododendron, it disappears from her mind, truant, sometimes months at a time.

For newer words. For a bill from the cleaning service, the women who vacuum around her and don't back away when she jolts awake in the antique bed.

For music, for the rough work-songs, the granting caesura that separates daytime from evening, this time from that, for him to finish rubbing the silk between his finger and his thumb, for the fabric to nap. If he wants to dry her on a white stone in the sun like a plum, to make something clean and useful of her body, to make nothing of it, she'll wait until she remembers what cannot keep her. Rhododendron, just yesterday, she did not know the word for this. Until what's flowing stops itself.

The Orchard
York Springs, PA

In the orchard fruit still on the tree, dark, bruise-red, undropped.
Fruit not waiting to drop.
The apples look suspended as if they might hold there forever, not one meant for tasting.
For miles, the trees, craggy skeletons of a winter, the apples like painted antique ornaments, the backdrop you want to insult, say gray drop-cloth of a state.
You would not keep still in this place any more than you would place wooden fruit in a bowl in your living room.

Despite the hills, despite the road's roll past the old white house you thought of purchasing, for a month wistful over its tall windows, its high porches, the prospect of seasons told in summer fruit stand, smell of fresh pear, crisp fall, despite the apples refusing to fall, you can't resist leaving here. You look forward to the apples. You drive back just to leave.

—Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon

Skating Lessons of the Fifties

Passing the round pond near the weeds I say to my son, There it is.
Where he taught me to skate.
You remember. Your Grandpa.
He smoothed the argyle socks over toes.
Laced the glove-white leather.
First the eyes, then doubling over the silver hooks with light tags of his hands and pulling them tight, knifeblade against his leg, probably crimson underneath as we sat frozen on the stone wall in the middle of the century.
We flew next to him like sparrows as he ran pushing our shoulders into emptiness. It was fitful in those days, especially handed over to death like that.
We raced chained to a whip, my father a speck in charcoal slacks and cleft boots miles away on a bench, unearthing binoculars and watching the natural history of his daughters skate the land turn into women.

Fires burned on the ice. Hockey pucks stormed off the sticks of erie high school boys who, even today, loom dangerous hanging onto gears on highways. From the weeds the boys beckoned until I saw wild hands passing a silver flask.
Caught the eyes of the left wing watching me as he slid by the trashcan goal post, slamming all the peer fury of nineteen years in that shotout into one ash stick, puck flying past my face with the pure hustle of check, hook and shot I knew nothing about but wanted to rush to— as one craves the smell of gasoline— instead spotting the high brown weed of my father's glove waving us home to the immaculate calm years.

First Recital

The wristletted girls skidding onto the stage before us seemed slim divas coaxing arabesques and pliés from pencil legs, pain and humor traveling the dark audience like a wave as we watched from the wings, bald lights whitening our faces, in the pit the elephantine piano lady zoned into another sphere of fame and light swaying her bulk left to right in two large ripe motions like the Galloping Gertie Bridge listing in the wind blowing down the river gorge before it fell to its imbecilic harmonic death—

That is why vertigo seized me at eight years old, a shy girl stopped in time, marking my parents in the blind front row, my father's nervous hat on his lap, my mother in her white blouse and suit caught on every beat pushing forward my frozen slippers, seizing my still mind that went blank as a March lake open only to shadow; my sister bending beside me, mouthing the steps, the kind dance teacher inside a curtain miming the relentless bends and turns of this European torture— all four wills pushing against weight and time and toprop until memory came to me like a film rolled backwards restoring bridge, suspension wires, and plunging cars to order.

—Marea Gordett
Poetry

War Horse

I remember her crying twice, my war horse mother.
The first time, my brothers Dan and Gene
were playing football one morning in the living room
and crashed into the brown sectional sofa,
the piece that curls into the corner, split it open like a baked potato.
It was one week old exactly. We heard the pine frame crack
upstairs, right through the cartoon voices on TV.
A minute later, there were seven or eight of us standing around
in foot pajamas, pajamas with trap doors, stretched out at the knees,
sunned into silence like skinny troubadours waiting for our cue,
the peculiar side show of her losing it. She just cried.
The broken sofa stayed for weeks, white stuff spilling from its sides.

The second time I was maybe nine. Toward the end of dinner,
when the others had gone, we sat staring at the greasy wreckage,
the puffs of dirty napkins. I mistook this for a good moment
and asked her which of us she loved best.
All the same, she answered. I pressed: You must love
one of us more, no one is that fair. No, all the same, she said,
and began scraping a turquoise-flowered plate with a fork. I made it
easier: which between Dan and Gene, you must love one more?
No, really the same, now stop it. She was pushing the chair back,
but I went on. Isn’t there one thing you like about the other
a little more? And finally, I suppose Danny is quieter, I like
quiet children. And I said, Does that mean you love Adele more?

That’s when she started crying the second time—
—or, that’s when I cried. She said,
Don’t be so stupid. Clear this stuff off the table before Pop gets home.

Postcard

After the birth, we sent you
out to the world—
nine shrieking pounds
on the hospital bed, a broom
of black hair sprung from your head.

On your wrist: a bracelet with a number
that matched the one on mine.
They came each hour,
it seemed, for the little milk
and the heel prick.

You were no bigger than my forearm,
but already fierce, arms
flung up by your ears, chest curled out,
as you bowed your backbone
to the room.

Fever, the nurses said.

Other pictures of you that day:
asleep in the plastic bassinet
or swallowed in the pink bunny suit
we’d brought to take you home in,
but this one seemed truer
to the animal you were:
female, indiscriminate, nocturnal,
one black eye trained on me as you fed.

—Theresa Burns

Variation on a Theme by King David

Praise you with bongos and fine fancy tea; praise you
with rhumba, tango & marmalade; praise you
with your knickers at your knees!

I praise you on Flag Day, & on whichever equinox
allows for the balancing of eggs;
I praise you with eggs!

Brown ones & jumbo & Faberge Tiffany blue!

On the white of your wrist I praise you;
on the vaccuumed throw rug; I praise you full-page on Sunday! With faxes
& foxgloves & brushed cotton sheets;
with sky-write & timbrel & wink! Let every soul
in the Battery Tunnel honk
her horn to praise you! Praise you
with rope limes & wrestling mats;
praise you tax-free with agates and tin foil
& all sparkly thing!

Praise you with foggy spectacles and Wisconsin green cheese!
Praise you to the afternoon of orthopedic sneakers;
praise you from poisnetta to piccolo!

My love, from Brooklyn to blasphemy I praise you!

—L. B. Thompson

The American Poem

—what came into my hands
as change, I didn’t discover
until later. We were home
when I showed Paula

the marvelous ordinary 5
dollar bill with those few
handwritten lines on its
pilledar building side, in the top
right under the circled numeral
5, plain

and quickly scribbled with the kind
of pen you might find chained
to the counter at the bank—

blue letters, two of them
almost hidden in the green bushes
at the base of the Lincoln Memorial:

Small
Jerk Chicken
Sweet
White rice

Just like that.
We couldn’t stop staring at it—
Little food order on a 5 dollar bill
—Something pretty and narrative

Small
Jerk Chicken
Sweet
White rice

Maybe it’s the journey from earning to eating—
we even
 talked about keeping
the money; not spending it;
maybe framing it double-sided for the living
room mantle, but we’ll probably
end up tipping with it—

—L. B. Thompson
Michiko's Plan

I look for faults in Michiko's plan to drive far North when she decides it's time, turn off the engine, curl up into cold. Michiko is not sick. She is my age, 72. We are sipping green tea in her living room, her face as lined as 45 years ago when I met her, young wife and mother come to this country from Nagasaki. 

'The had a good life, she says, maybe long enough. Never want to live merely to breathe.'

We talk about hoarding pills, how to get the right kind. Her brother, a doctor in Japan, would send a supply, but foreign drugs may be stopped or expire before our chosen times. We rule out a plastic bag over the head. 

Go back to her plan to drive North into snow. The more I'm drawn to her solution of a final journey North, the more I want to show us both its flaws.

You may be too ill to drive. She gentles her treacup in one palm, 'I'll ask one of my children. Uki, he'd do it, he's not fragile. I think of my three. Do I have any children I don't consider fragile? I'll just open the car door, her calm voice continues, roll out into snow, won't leave a smell, maybe remain whole. 

Now we're both silent. I see her lying in snow-covered woods, just off the road, Uki, her first-born, driving away. I can't tell if he looks back through the mirror or only straight ahead, can't know if her lips form the word Uki or live on scared or not—

I shiver at such aloneness. But as snow falls impartially on rocks and trees, on her slim body, it is August, summers ago, Mt. Desert island: Michiko and I on a trail up a round, fir-pated mountain, it is August, summers ago, on rocks and trees, on her slim body, 

it is August, summers ago, Mr. Desert island: Michiko and I on a trail up a round, fir-pated mountain, our children struggling behind. Hot, mosquito bitten, still a way to go I say, let's turn around, but she in 2-inch heels, skirt to her ankles, says softly, as if I've missed a simple fact, how can we not finish what we set out to do?

Manhattan Skyscraper WWII

1939

The closet-like elevator in our skyscraper creaks as it descends. I'm alone with Emil the elevator operator, a short balding man who has come from Germany, speaks with an accent, wears white gloves and bows his head slightly even to me when he says hello. After he says it's nice out or rainy we're silent. I never know what to say: Riding the elevator, tenants rarely talk to each other or to Emil. Except for my father.

If he were beside me, he might tell Emil a Jack Benny joke, relive a Babe Ruth homer. I wish I could speak in his easy-as-breathing way: I never ask Emil where he lives, or whether he has a family, never ask him about Germany, or Hitler, born April 20th like my mother. 

But late at night, waking from nightmare, I look out my window at the moonlit waters of the Hudson flowing, my atlas shows, to the Atlantic—that dear, enormous ocean that can drown those terrible men should they try, ever dare try to snatch Jewish children asleep in their beds.

1942

An air-raid siren split open the night, shrilly warns everyone in skyscrapers go to windows halls on middle floors. How lucky we are to live on the 11th floor of a 20 story building—layers above and below like sandbags, Jews who don't stick out. We set our folding chairs in our 4x10 hallway. I hope Joe DiMaggio and his wife in the terraced penthouse will come to our floor. I'm not a big fan, but I'm glad the rules apply to everyone—go to the middle. Unlike the day of the building strike—Emil and the doorman wearing signs outside, all of us forced to climb stairs, but I saw Mrs. Joe, in full-length red fox, come out of the elevator, the super running it just for her. Now, sitting in our hall packed with neighbors, the air stale and hot, I close my eyes and imagine bombs slicing through upper floors, shattering lower floors—the glorious middle an airborne Ark, lifting.

—Betty Buchsbaum

Urban Renewal

That little Spanish-Chinese place on 81st & Amsterdam where you asked me to marry you is gone— its row of glazed ducks in the window. Where you asked me to marry you, I don't remember what we ate; its row of glazed ducks in the window our witnesses. 

I don't remember what we ate the night we first met at Man Ray in Chelsea, our witness a mutual friend, in town by chance. The night we first met at Man Ray, also gone, a mutual friend in town, by chance suggested you pick me up outside the Zig-Zag Bar & Grill, also gone, and give me a ride in your beat-up car. You pick me up outside the Zig-Zag Bar & Grill. You lean across to open my door

and give me a ride in your beat-up car, that later becomes our beat-up car. You lean across to open my door, and the rest, my love, is history.

Our beat-up car, also gone. The rest, my love, is history. That little Spanish-Chinese place on 81st & Amsterdam.

On Passing the Museum of Natural History

This evening, from the back seat of a shoddy cab, as we bump along the pitted street where construction for months reduced this city block to rubble and its neighbors to nervous conjecture, where a yellow crane was last spotted hanging its head in the dirt, we now look under the swaying skirts of the elm trees and behold, just at our sight line, the planets themselves— Saturn with its amber ring, Pluto small and cold, our own Earth fixed in its watery beauty—all nine accounted for, lit and suspended in their new pellucid universe, as if late one night, in some Herculean effort, the long necked crane shook off its slumber, reached into the Heavens and pulled them down.

—Judy Katz

Poetry

© Lisa Wolfe

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The Yea Sayer

(Cairo, en route to Palestine, 385-386 CE)

I repair sere codices and tattered bodices:
I seem to have an affinity for mediating
between the sacred and the profane.

I accept my lot, trudging from marketplace
and wheelbarrow to stylus—
mending our clothes, tending the soul's fuel.

Today, the road's gravel is dimpled here
and there with mint, thumbnail bracts of dill.

Some spit behind me as I turn to leave,
or fling pebbles at my back—hard enough
to pepper my skin with stinging welts.

As usual, I take the least trod path back
to our austere hermitage, the longest way
emptied of travelers, but for misled goats,
or bony stray dogs keeping my company,
escorting me past the steadfast cypress,
lying wordlessly at my feet where I rest.

Today, two of them mate crookedly under
a cashurina tree, the female's wry face
a cameo of pain and heat, the male's penis
jamming into her like a fiery red pestle,
a froth oozing from where they're joined,
his fangs bared, his grunts almost rapturous.

I've vowed to leave the flesh's savors far
behind me, have salved my cravings with denial
and prayers, a fervid pledge of abstinence.

I grow old in my solitude, my thick hair
cropped, my ampullae emptied of perfume.

In the market, the women close their faces
to me: I'm served last, after the lepers, given
shrunken loaves, wormy dates, rancid oil.

Paula's Circle

(Rome, 381-382 CE)

Evenings, we gather at Marcella's Aventine mansion.
Our hostess softly greets each of us: pigeon-voiced Principia,
Asella with her lopsided wigs, mild-mannered Furia—
(or irony inherent in her name)—lithe Lea, whose beauty
rivals Athena's, green-eyed Titiana with her guttural stutter,
and finally, large-boned Thea, whose Greek is meretricious.

We've eschewed the decadence of the feasting table,
renounced our lavish *tibia*, our gold-embroidered *pallium*
used for enclosing ourselves like peacocks in silken veils;
we've removed diadem, earrings, bracelets, rings,
and put aside forever our lanolin creams, earthen rouges,
antimony mascara, our eyes' glittering hematite shades.

Among these barefaced ladies, I'm richly clothed in faith;
my shy-lipped daughters shimmer as my brightest rubies.

We pray together, sing Hebrew songs that Hieronymus
intones in his deep baritone, his beard's sable tip dipping
to punctuate the verses in a way that my Eustochium and
Blesilla find humorous—though they stifle their grins.

Beyond our circle, our friends revel in gluttony, strain
to appease the sexual greed consuming their bodies
with the speed of a straw fire, or drink themselves into
impotence and cruelty, mistreating their own children.
I, too, sailed those turbulent seas and nearly drowned.
But for this priest, I would have severed my life—
O how to describe the delicacy of my newborn love?
How to express this tumult of yearning, calmed only
by brushing my lips against a prayer's silent splendor?

Chastity becomes my refuge, my shelter: I enter its
shining white room—windows flung open to heaven—
and a shock of electric pulse blasts into my heart,
my life dissolving into milk-cloud, atoms, dust—

—Maurya Simon
Waiting for Lady Reason
by Meryl Altman


Michèle Le Doeuff's third brilliant book brings her characteristic erudition and razor-edged wit to the question, both historically and timely, of whether women have a problematic relation to science, knowledge, and education as both institution and ideal. Her take on Western civilization: "It would be a very good idea." As Le Doeuff said in her first book, The Philosophical Imaginary, "I have never had anything against philosophical rationality. As for its irrationality, that's a different matter."

The Sex of Knowing addresses some knotty theoretical impasses in a lucid, deceptively informal way. Its methods range from close readings of canonical texts to archival investigations of little-known figures to what Colin Gordon has called "superbly gritty vignettes of academic life." Even in translation, one wonders to what Le Doeuff's voice is applicable for anyone else. She is no respecter of traditional academic categories—she has been accused of "slippery gait," in other words, of a freewheeling interdisciplinarity—yet her method is deeply scholarly in its insistence on real, textual evidence for every claim. She's sometimes ruthless in uncovering the "hyperbolic gaffer" of other commentators, feminist or not. I prefer the contentious bite of her writing, which tells you exactly who and what she is against, to the elliptical, even slippery style we in the US have come to (perhaps unfairly) think of as "French"; she is un-French also in her explicit concern to inform and instruct rather than simply impress, and in her refusal to pedagogy and the next generation. Her work shows that it is possible to be immensely sophisticated and(S)still write like a human being.

Le Doeuff, who works at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Center for Scientific Research) in Paris, is a veteran of feminist scholarship (whether traditional or feminist) and of the feminist of her time rather than vice versa; and to rethink the textuality of the feminists of their time rather than vice versa; and to rethink the textual personal relationship between John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor in a way that notes the centrality of Taylor's thinking to their collaborative work as well as the value of Taylor's independent writing. But alongside a history of ideas, Le Doeuff is writing "a history of ideas that are never examined because they are considered too... " She deals with an epistemology of ignorance: not "how do we know what we know?" or "how do we get away with not knowing?"—and how is it possible after all these centuries of clever argumentation that he still doesn't know it? If philosophy were the detached, monolithic reasoning machine it sometimes pretends to be, outright indeed decide to read it in no further, but as Le Doeuff shows, it is fascinatingly weirder than textbook accounts (whether traditional or feminist) suggest.

L e Doeuff wishes especially to investigate the way current conditions of mind and will exclude and discourage women. She's right on the mark in seeing this as a basic matter of feminist justice: Functionalist arguments that the US needs more women in the science pipeline to beat the reds or the Japanese or whoever the enemy is this week may help feminists get funding from the National Science Foundation. But, such arguments fail to meet Kant's basic test of seeing other humans as ends in themselves, not just means to an end. Science to Le Doeuff has its broad, European meaning of research, scholarship, learning; there is no reason to pick on the hard sciences especially (as she shows with some embarrassing examples of sexist discrimination from my own field, literary study). Still, women's access to science matters, even to those who are happiest plowing other fields. Bacon's and Diderot's wider sense of the term persists, and until we have full, acknowledged competence and parity in the scientific institutions and centers, the various developments in African-American Studies curricula. The candidate should also have a strong desire to assume and exercise program leadership to ensure a model best suited for this campus.

The successful candidate will have a Ph.D in a field in the social sciences, arts and humanities, or in African-American Studies. The candidate should have a strong interest in teaching on the undergraduate level, a record of research and scholarship, and a commitment to plowing other fields. Bacon's and Diderot's wider sense of the term persist, and until we have full, acknowledged competence and parity in the scientific institutions and centers, the various developments in African-American Studies curricula. The candidate should also have a strong desire to assume and exercise program leadership to ensure a model best suited for this campus.

The candidate will join a number of colleagues in teaching and research about the black experience in the context of an established liberal arts curriculum. A range of courses is regularly offered in the social sciences and arts and humanities. The program is augmented by endowed special lectures and visiting professorships including the annual Allston Davis Lecture, Gaius Bolin post-graduate appointments, the Sterling Brown Visiting Professorship, and active dance and music ensembles. See http://www.williams.edu/american-studies/ for detailed information on the program.

The normal teaching load at Williams consists of four semester courses per year and a four-week Winter Study term every other year. The candidate will teach one introductory course and a senior level capstone course. Other courses offered will normally draw on the specialty of the candidate.

Candidates should submit cover letter, c.v., and dossier, including at least three letters of reference. Review of applications will begin on November 30, 2004. Applications must be submitted to: William J. Lenhart, Dean of the Faculty, Williams College, P.O. Box 141, Williamstown, MA 01267.

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U.S. LATIN@/O STUDIES
Williams College

Williams College invites applications for a tenure-track position as an Assistant Professor in U.S. Latin@o Studies. Candidates’ interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching should be on Latin@o/literatures and cultural studies. Candidates whose work is comparative and/or transnational are particularly encouraged to apply. In exceptional cases, hiring at a more advanced level may be possible.

U.S. Latin@o Studies is a new academic program at Williams. The College has made a multi-year commitment to curricular development in this area, through the staffing of four tenured or tenure-track positions in recent years. This fifth position will further strengthen the program and create opportunities for complimentary course offerings. The program offers a unique opportunity to develop the field of Latin@o Studies.

Candidates are expected to have the Ph.D in hand by time of appointment. While primary responsibilities are with the Latin@o Studies program, collaborative appointments with American Studies, Comparative Literature, English, Romance Languages, and/or Women and Gender Studies are possible.

Send a letter detailing current research interests and teaching areas, curriculum vitae, three letters of recommendation, a writing sample, and three sample course syllabi including one for an introductory level course in Latin@o literatures and cultural studies.

Application deadline is November 15, 2004, and should be sent to: Roger Kittleson Chair, Latin@o Studies Search Committee Williams College Stetson Hall Williamsport, MA 01267

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES
Williams College

Williams College invites applications for a tenure-track position in African-American Studies to begin in the fall of 2005. Candidates at all levels are invited to apply, but preference will be given to associate or senior level.

The successful candidate will have a Ph.D in a field in the social sciences, arts and humanities, or in African-American Studies. The candidate should have a strong interest in teaching on the undergraduate level, a record of research and scholarship, and a commitment to plowing other fields. Bacon's and Diderot's wider sense of the term persist, and until we have full, acknowledged competence and parity in the scientific institutions and centers, the various developments in African-American Studies curricula. The candidate should also have a strong desire to assume and exercise program leadership to ensure a model best suited for this campus.

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As an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer, Williams College especially welcomes and encourages applications from women and minorities.
women’s friends, philosophy and science—in short reason—sometimes have been the only way to do it.

There’s lots of work to do first, though. “Historical excellence is exceedingly long when debates never change and the same questions are asked again and again,” David Le Doeuff says. It is not difficult for a contemporary woman to place herself in the position of Christine de Pisan at the beginning of the 15th century. We may glance at a book by Mathesis (other-wise unmentioned) and find such a hypostasized view of her, and wonder about the foist of voice that it shook her faith: She said it “made me wonder why on earth it was that so many men, both clerks and others, who were able to write such awful, damning things about women…” It was unlikely that so many leant men could possibly have lived on so many different occasions.” Fortunately for Pisan, Lady Reason then appears to her in a burst of light, accompanied by Lady Rectitude and Lady Justice. She reminded her to trust her own intelligence and judge theories about women by her own experience and observations. She and all women must defend themselves against slander, not with tears, pity, or emotional appeals to women’s “different nature” but with rational argument, principled debate, and historical and practical example.

Maybe the three ladies need to come to her.

I mean, haven’t you ever felt that sud- den sharp kick in your stomach when you’re least expecting it, reading along pleasantly and taking notes in the shade, sipping iced tea—and then Kant says “A woman who has a head full of Greek—or carries on fundamental contro-versies about mechanics…might as well even have a beard”; or Hegel says, “Women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling”; or Nietzsche says, “Good and bad women want a stick”, or Derrida says, “Woman has been excluded from philosophy by the unde- cidual neutrality of the subject elaborated there…” perhaps metaphysical death is essentially virile, even in what is called woman.” And if you turn to feminist writers for solace, you may find, as Le Doeuff reminds us, Luce Irigaray saying, “If a woman engages with theory she will lose her capacity for pleasure”; and “If a woman engages with theory she will lose her capacity for pleasure.”

B ut Le Doeuff also objects to what has been called “the feminist crit-ique of science”—the idea that women “do science differently,” more emotionally, intuitively, or that they should. Her dispute with writers like Evelyn Fox Keller and Carolyn Merchant is that they slip from describ- ing a sexist view of science to one that is apparently agreeing with that view, thus repeating the exclusion of women from science that they set out to protest. As women’s studies scholars try to figure out how they can support their sisters in science, not in just the obvious ways (hire more women, put them appropri-ately, encourage majors) but in intellec-tually deeper ones, a bigger barrier is how angry actual practicing women scientists are often made to feel that seems to question their motivation and erase their hard-won presence in the field.

Her close reading of Fox Keller’s classic attack on Sir Francis Bacon shows that working from modern trans-lations results in attributing to him ideas he did not hold. “He merits being called a sexist,” says Le Doeuff, “but not for the reason [Keller] says.” The problem isn’t her scientific method, but his attachment of it to a set of exclusionary social practices that violated its own principles. From being hostile to women, scientific method where under- stood properly is self-correcting and espe-cially conducive to women’s use, since as Le Doeuff points out, “even a little girl gets to repeat experiments on her own and criticize the adults.” It was Bacon himself who said, “Truth is no daughter of authority.” Suppose we non-dualistic ones took him at his word?

In any case, to ask in some global way whether reason is “masculine” and intuition “feminine” makes little sense, since these terms are themselves unsta- ble. “Women’s intuition” has been seen by some as a lesser resource and by others as an unaided one. It turns out that when it was seen as a positive value (such as by Descartes, Plato, and Rousseau), it was taken to be a male-quality—even what distinct-ed divine from human thought. Schopenhauer valued it so much that he denigrated reason as reason, as a male trait. This is one example of what Le Doeuff labels “deberceries,” which the excellent translators render as cast-offs. “Women are relucquous on this score,” she says, “but the ‘natural history,’ says Le Doeuff. “When, desire was felt to be a problem—sin— it was not any more to sexwomen as it was to Eve—but when Freud and moderni- ty rediscovered it, it became men’s property, and some wondered whether

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D ecades ago, research showed that children assumed only men could be doctors, because that was what they saw in books. How wonder-
dful it would be if this important dis-
covery informed the decisions made by the editor of arguably the most powerful book review publication in North America, The New York Times Book Review (NYTBR). Alex Beam noted in a recent Boston Globe column that the NYTBR has “canonical influence in the literary com-
munity; for a writer, getting a Times review is like getting a college degree.” A good review there can boost sales of a book both to individual readers and to now ubiquitous book groups.

We had the impression that the NYTBR included reviews of books written by men than by women and used many more male than female review-
ers, but because feminists are often accused of being paranoid when they point out instances of sexism, we thought we had better check it out. We tallied 53 consecutive weeks of the NYTBR during 2002 and 2003 and found that more than twice as many book authors and almost twice as many reviewers were male as female. Specifically, out of 807 books reviewed, only 227, or 28 percent, were authored by women. Of the 775 reviews, only 265, or 34 percent, were by women reviewers. This was troubling news, for women who want to write or review a book may be less likely to make the attempt once they make the conscious or unconscious observation that those realms remain primarily male. As feminist author and organizer Gloria Steinem com-
mented to us, this is “an imbalance of influence which is all the more bizarre, since women purchase the majority of books. It’s one more instance in which women are treated as consumers but don’t decide or profit from what is consumed.”

As long as three decades ago this pat-
ttern was evident on the pages of the NYTBR. In the early 1970s, when a group of feminist authors including Susan Brownmiller and Nora Ephron appealed to Max Frankel, then the editor of the Sunday New York Times, to increase the representation of women. In the 1980s, after Marilyn French and approximately 100 other women writ-
ers protested the three-to-one, male-to-
female ratio for authors and reviewers, the ratio dropped to two-to-one, where it remains today, 20 years later. Responding to news about the disparities revealed in the current study, Brownmiller warned, “I remain vigilant knowing how necessary it is that things start to slip” in its absence.

Last December, we e-mailed the NYTBR editor Charles McGrath and New York Times ombudsman Daniel Okrent to report our findings. Their reactions revealed a pattern of sexist thought. McGrath replied that he would await McGrath’s response before becoming involved, but ultimately, he did nothing. McGrath said, “I’m not convinced that we have seen a fair degree of excellence, even unconsciously, on our staff.” (On the editorial staff here, by the way, women outnumber men.) He said he would look at our num-
ers “with interest, and if I’m persuaded that we are seriously out of whack I will certainly look into ways of redressing the balance.” However, he wrote that he had “no plans at the moment for changing how we assign books” and wanted to “resist the idea that a book review’s main task is to keep us looking at books.”

With those remarks, he implied that sex equity and the quality of his publica-
tions were mutually exclusive, and that the Times’ response to achieving sex representation was to make it the NYTBR’s primary aim. He said that they had been “making a con-
scious effort to use more women reviewers, and, more important, to use more women in the more prominent, attention-
gathering books.” However, it is not true that in the Times’ women review promi-
nent books as often as men. McGrath cannot have it both ways, claiming lack of concern about “the numbers,” while also claiming that the rise in the proportion of female reviewers and implying that greater sex equity would be a sign of progress.

McGrath offered three explanations for the unbalanced ratio for book authors: that “more books are written by men than women”; that he chooses books for review based on whether they are “worthy of review”; and that he chooses for review books that are “of interest to our readers.” We told McGrath we had tried in vain to determine whether the books by men were read more than by women are published, and we asked him to tell us where he had found that documentation and he did not reply. After numerous inquiries, including to the Library of Congress, the International Publishers Association, Books in Print, Publishers Weekly, the Association of American Publication Industry Statistics, Bowker Annual, Bookwire, Random House, Simon and Schuster, Book Publishing, and www.bookreporter failed to produce any of this information. According to Book Wire (www.book-
wire.com/books/reducing_de-
gendebookproduction.html) more than 140,000 new books are published each year. From that enormous number (even if only 20 percent of all books are textbooks which no one would think it shouldn’t be possible to find as many important books by women as by men!) Even if it is true that far more books by men than by women are published, it doesn’t necessarily follow that twice as many of those written by men are good and important as those written by women. (For instance, even if 100,000 books publi-
ished last year were written by men and 20,000 by women, it is plausible that, by some reasonable standard, 10,000 in each category are good and important.) McGrath’s assertion that he chooses books based on whether they are “worthy” merely rationalizes his biases. Finally, it is an editorial and marketing deci-
dision whether to tailor the NYTBR’s book review publication (present company excluded) is correct: The women are missing.

NYTBR’s Times is not a-changin’ by Paula J. Caplan and Mary Ann Falco

Your impression of the New York Times and other prestigious book review publications (present company excluded) is correct: The women are missing. You’re not imagining it, nor are you ill. The Times is not a-changin’. As long as three decades ago this pat-
ttern was evident on the pages of the NYTBR. In the early 1970s, when a group of feminist authors including Susan Brownmiller and Nora Ephron appealed to Max Frankel, then the editor of the Sunday New York Times, to increase the representation of women. In the 1980s, after Marilyn French and approximately 100 other women writ-
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dision whether to tailor the NYTBR’s
The mother-daughter puzzle

by Helen Fremont

In My Mother's House by Margaret McMullan.


M other-daughter relationships were made for literature. Publishers. They have its own special blend of passion, conflict, and drama, all packed into two overlapping generations. Margaret McMullan's intelligent and beautifully written novel, In My Mother's House, explores a particularly complicated relationship between a stubborn Viennese immigrant and her equally strong-willed American daughter as they come to grips with the aftermath of war, religious persecution, and the shifting American family and social order. As a child, Elizabeth finds her mother's silences mysterious and tantalizing. The more tenaciously Genevieve guards her history from her daughter, the more Elizabeth is determined to uncover her mother's secrets. The resulting struggle between the daughter in search of connection, the mother in search of privacy and relief from psychic pain—is the central drama of the book.

Children are inevitably drawn to knots of tension in the family. Elizabeth is not particularly curious about her father's background, having grown up among his congenial relatives in Mississippi. Instead, it is her mother's brooding silences and partially expressed resentments that spark Elizabeth's curiosity. She senses that her mother occupies a world in which Elizabeth is not welcome, and the more she feels excluded, the more she tries to gain access. "You wanted my memories," Genevieve tells her daughter at the beginning of the book. "I often thought that if I told you everything, I would somehow lose it all over again. These scars of memory are really all I have left of a place that is now gone. They are my inheritance and they are my mother's brooding silences and partially expressed resentments that spark Elizabeth's curiosity. She senses that her mother occupies a world in which Elizabeth is not welcome, and the more she feels excluded, the more she tries to gain access. "You wanted my memories," Genevieve tells her daughter at the beginning of the book. "I often thought that if I told you everything, I would somehow lose it all over again. These scars of memory are really all I have left of a place that is now gone. They are my inheritance and they are my mother's brooding silences and partially expressed resentments that spark Elizabeth's curiosity. She senses that her mother occupies a world in which Elizabeth is not welcome, and the more she feels excluded, the more she tries to gain access. "You wanted my memories," Genevieve tells her daughter at the beginning of the book. "I often thought that if I told you everything, I would somehow lose it all over again. These scars of memory are really all I have left of a place that is now gone. They are my inheritance and they are my mother's brooding silences and partially expressed resentments that spark Elizabeth's curiosity. She senses that her mother occupies a world in which Elizabeth is not welcome, and the more she feels excluded, the more she tries to gain access.

In Genevieve's narrative, she confesses to having been told little of her own family's heritage; she, in turn, says little to her own daughter Elizabeth, whom she raises Catholic in America. Elizabeth, left to puzzle out the incomplete pieces of her mother's past, resorts to recreating portions of that past in her own life. As a young teenager, she stops eating in order to "be ready for the Nazis when they came the second time." Later she confides to the reader, "I had never lived during catastrophe—not even near the war."—and despises all of her efform, despite her hunger strike, I would always be the spectator, not a victim. This made me sad and a bit resentful.

The psychological complexity of the family emerges gradually over the course of the book, as we witness the mother and grandfa ther's broken-off communications and interactions with each other. We begin to see, however, not only the historical reality of the war, but also the emotion al history of the family, as the members negotiate their way through exile, loss, and renewal. The combination of fear and betrayal make for an stormy brew that Elizabeth has absorbed since child hood. She is at once a part of the past and closed off from it. Elizabeth's mother and grandfather both off her her curiosity and her tire less questions about their life in Vienna. They resent not only her igno rance but also her inquisitiveness. It is only her Jewish great-grandmother who, on her deathbed in Washington, DC, admonishes Elizabeth to "remem ber." Elizabeth takes the advice to heart, and resolves to discover her her itage "so that I could remember it and restore it." She becomes drawn to Judaism and begins studying and prac ticing the religion that her grandfather long ago abandoned, despite the fact that she is now enrolled in a Catholic school. Stung by the realization that her grandfather—absorbed in his own studies—does not really care about her, and that her mother—bitter and unavailable—has shut herself off from her, Elizabeth vows to "do what I had to do get back what my mother seemed hell-bent on getting rid of—her father, her family, her Europeanness, her Jewishness."

She begins by telling one of the nuns at her Catholic school that her grandfa ther was Jewish. Her mother's reaction is swift. "How dare you," Genevieve says to her daughter. "How dare you sabotage everything we've worked for."

The more desperately Genevieve needs to distance herself from the past, the more passionately Elizabeth pursues the restoration of that past, insist ing that it is not only her mother's but also her own heritage. Observing her own history, as the members negotiate their way through exile, loss, and renewal. The combination of fear and betrayal make for a stormy brew that Elizabeth has absorbed since childhood. She is at once a part of the past and closed off from it. Elizabeth's mother and grandfather both off her her curiosity and her tireless questions about their life in Vienna. They resent not only her ignorance but also her inquisitiveness. It is only her Jewish great-grandmother who, on her deathbed in Washington, DC, admonishes Elizabeth to "remember." Elizabeth takes the advice to heart, and resolves to discover her heritage "so that I could remember it and restore it." She becomes drawn to Judaism and begins studying and practicing the religion that her grandfather long ago abandoned, despite the fact that she is now enrolled in a Catholic school. Stung by the realization that her grandfather—absorbed in his own studies—does not really care about her, and that her mother—bitter and unavailable—has shut herself off from her, Elizabeth vows to "do what I had to do get back what my mother seemed hell-bent on getting rid of—her father, her family, her Europeanness, her Jewishness."

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The more desperately Genevieve needs to distance herself from the past, the more passionately Elizabeth pursues the restoration of that past, insisting that it is not only her mother's but also her own heritage. Observing her

Chair, Department of Black Studies
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mother and grandfather argue, Elizabeth says, “It was as though she and her father had some silent code. They both only told so much or maybe there wasn’t any more to tell. All I knew was that it was up to me to fill in the blanks.” By the end of the book, we come to understand that Elizabeth’s search to fill the blanks is not only a role that she must fulfill for herself but also, despite Cather’s claim, something she must do in order to restore a part of Genevieve that had been torn away years earlier. Mother and daughter need each other in order to heal from the wounds of the past and move forward into the future.

The book is organized into alternating mother-daughter narratives, enabling us to eavesdrop on a difficult and delicate conversation between mother and daughter over a period of decades. We are thus given a privileged position of intimacy with both characters that arouses our compassion and sympathy for each. The writing is clear, confident, and fluid, and McMullan is in full command of her story and characters. It is easy to forget that this is a work of fiction rather than a record of fact. When Elizabeth’s grandfather dies in his home town, she decides to make a trip to Vienna. Only then does her mother join in the project, finally coming to realize that her daughter is right. “You have a right to know… about my other world.” Genevieve says, “because now I know that what had to do with me has something to do with you.” It is a poignant moment for mother and daughter and a comforting resolution after so much conflict and loss. The reconciliation could be considered a bit facile, turning on Elizabeth’s retrieval of Genevieve’s childhood in Vienna. But it is, finally, love that is the agent of change for this family, before it is too late, that facing and sharing her traumatic memories are necessary in order to open a pathway between mother and daughter. The past is lost forever, but the present and future lie before us.

When Elizabeth’s father dies in his home town, she decides to make a trip to Vienna. Only then does her mother, now in failing eyesight, give her the key to the Hofzeile, the home she lost, but whose key she saved for half a century. The house had been destroyed by bombs during the war, and in its place, Elizabeth finds a concrete building occupied by Turkish immigrants. It is in Vienna that Elizabeth finally gets a sense of herself in relation to her family and her past. She remembers that my mother had once said to me almost accurately, “Look, you’re not a survivor. You’re not even a survivor’s child.” But just then I felt I was a survivor, and in a way, I was. I was intended to exist. I thought: I am the ghost of all those who have died. (p. 232)

With her return to the States, Elizabeth completes the task of reuniting her mother with her past. She has circled back in history to pick up the missed stitch, to complete the weave, to connect the fabric of family over the generations. And in the end, her mother joins in the project, finally coming to realize that her daughter is right. “You have a right to know… about my other world.” Genevieve says, “because now I know that what had to do with me has something to do with you.” It is a poignant moment for mother and daughter and a comforting resolution after so much conflict and loss. The reconciliation could be considered a bit facile, turning on Elizabeth’s retrieval of Genevieve’s childhood in Vienna. But it is, finally, love that is the agent of change for this family, before it is too late, that facing and sharing her traumatic memories are necessary in order to open a pathway between mother and daughter. The past is lost forever, but the present and future lie before us.

I n her new collection Undoing Gender, Butler offers a cri- tique of the concept of intersub- jective in the work of feminist psy- chologist Jean Berndt. In response to Benjamin's hopeful model of mutual recognition in love, Butler offers a wry rejoinder “from the ranks of ambivalence which for too long con- tinue to dwell.” Butler has some distin- guished company, for it is not just dis- appointed lovers whom ambivalence is the keynote of the philosophical traditions with which Butler has engaged most deeply over the last couple of decades. In the pref- ace to a 1999 reissue of her first book, Subjects of Desire (1987), Butler writes, “In a sense, all of my work remains within the orbit of a certain set of Hegelian questions: What is the relation between desire and recognition, and how is it that the constitution of the subject entails a radical and consti- tutive relation to alterity?”

The scene of desire and recognition that Butler keeps revisiting is the mas- ter-slave relation as portrayed in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit—hardly the stuff of high romance. These two guys very nearly kill each other before making it up; the fact that the selfhood of each depends on seeing himself reflected in the other is more a sign of fundamental human alienation than of them being “right for each other.” Along with Hegel, some famously pes- simistic philosophers (including Butler) have critiqued the phalliccentric baseline of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis, she has taken up his tragic view of desire, perhaps best summed up in his statement that “there is no sexual relation.” Butler’s understanding of the intersection between desire and social forces is largely taken from her reading of French philosophers Michel Foucault, who argued in The History of Sexuality that the “liberation” of sexuality was not the key to freedom but rather a form of power, a means of managing and regulating modern subjects. Butler has consistently described the difficulties of subjects who live in a world that precedes them and that is not of their own making. In contrast to talk about the autonomy of the individual, Butler’s argument is that we do not make up our identities from our exis- tence and that we are objects for oth- ers before we are ever subjects “for ourselves.” We are not the independ- ent authors of our actions; instead, if we are to be recognized at all, we will be forced to cite or repeat pre-existing norms and conventions. However the easiest way to grasp this concept in Butler’s work is to think of it in terms of language; it is clear that if we are to interact adequately with others, we have to obey grammatical and syntactical rules that to a certain extent predetermine the kinds of things that are possible to say. Butler presents this situation as the paradox of subjection: In order to become a subject, one first has to sub- ject oneself to the rules that govern social existence.

Butler first made this point in Gender Trouble (1990). She argues that when we “act like” men and women, we are not expressing some inner gen- der essence or core identity; rather, we are citing pre-existing norms. It is not just what we say but what we do—how we dress, how we talk—but that sustains us into a recogniz- able form of gendered behavior. Such small acts, repeated again and again, produce the illusion of a natural ground for gender identity, but in fact there is no such ground exists. Furthermore, Butler argues that only by subjecting ourselves to the grammar of gender— by answering the question, “Are you a man or a woman?” —we become subjects at all. While she does hold out hope for the possibility of subversive performances around the edges of the gender system (drag performance and butch/femme are her central exam- ples), her theory of “gender performa- tivity” does not call for radical depar- tures from such norms. She reminds us that while we continue to try to change the world, we remain deeply tied by desire and the need for recog- nition to the world as it is.

What is ultimately so strange about Gender Trouble is not what it says, but rather the fact that it has become a popular sensation. Butler herself has expressed surprise that the book has found such a large audience. Its suc- cess is odd given the highly abstract and dense style in which it is written and its total failure to deliver a “feel- good” message. In a 1999 New Republic review of Butler’s work, the feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum offered a some- what paranormal and phobic account of the reasons for Butler’s popularity. Casting Butler as a postmodern Svengali, Nussbaum describes her audience as a “group of young femi- nist philosophers” who are “remark- able...docile” and “subservient to the oracular voice of Butler’s text.” Nussbaum takes Butler down for her obscure syntax; she finds a lack of...
philosophical rigor in her argumentation; and she attacks her politics as too stylized and too sure of its “empirical validation” to be taken seriously by many contemporary critics. Butler’s work seems to some to be “stereotypically” Marxist or Marxist-feminist, but it is often dismissed by others for its lack of political engagement. While Butler’s work has been praised by many, it has also been criticized for its apparent lack of engagement with contemporary political issues.

Butler’s writing style is characterized by a sense of the temporality of philosophy, as she explores the ways in which ethical ideas and norms are constantly being challenged and transformed. She has written extensively on the importance of “theater of the absurd,” which she defines as a form of political protest that challenges the status quo. Butler’s work has been influential in a variety of fields, including philosophy, politics, and literature, and she has been recognized with numerous awards and honors.

In conclusion, Judith Butler is a significant figure in contemporary thought, and her work continues to be read and debated by scholars and activists around the world. Her writing challenges us to think critically about the nature of power and the ways in which it is exercised, and her ideas have the potential to inspire change in a variety of contexts.
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Headed for dystopia


B ryher, who died in 1980, was a prolific writer of more than 100 books. Born in 1894, daughter of one of England’s wealthiest men, she was well known in her own day as the author of historical novels. Today she is best known as the longtime companion of the poet H.D. and as a supporter of writers, artists, and intellectuals, who from a base in Switzerland used her family's wealth to help over a hundred Jews—among Jews, Christians, and Muslims for worldwide rise of fundamentalism today

In one of Britain’s oldest legends, the “nobody who landed there ever returned.”

Bryher’s poem, “Avalon” is one of the best known as the legendary home of King Arthur, a place where he is healed and from which he will one day return. In some versions Avalon is a female sexuality. Many black women sympathetic to feminism chose to remain in black liber-

Trelawney and whose home is about to be bulldozed for new factories and a highway. Lilian’s practicality enables her to pull up roots briskly when she must, and her relationships explicitly strengthen the strangers on whose kindness she depends. Next most appealing is Robinson, an apolitical retired businesswoman whom the deregulation of the self is an abomination. The same may be true of the mind no other centuries

In short, Roth establishes that black feminism struck me as the most important into the movement. Others created inde-
Like black feminism, Chicana feminism was created by women active in the Chicano movement. As a result, Chicana feminism originated as a cooperative unit of resistance. One of the first Chicana feminist organizations was Las Hijas de Guadalupe (Daughters of Guadalupe), which began in California's Long Beach State University in 1969. Linked by name to the Mexican Revolution, Las Hijas de Guadalupe provided services to on-campus Chicanas, published a newspaper, and participated in student strikes. In 1970, Chicana organizers from Las Hijas de Guadalupe and El Comité (a student group) formed Las Hijas de Cuauhtemoc (daughters of Cuauhtemoc). The group emphasized nationhood more than race and cultural otherness. Women's liberationists were not constrained by the prospect of altering the oppressive community in which they and their forebears had grown up and for whose liberation they were fighting. This, more than the construction of gender universalist ideology, explains their ability to move to autonomous feminist organizing. Another explanatory factor of which Roth could have made more is the disintegration of the left by the early 1970s.

Second, Roth neglects the role of sociocultural and ideological factors. A higher proportion of women of color have made more is the disintegration of the left by the early 1970s. Specifically, radical Chicana organizing emerged in the 1960s, many labor feminists shifted their energies in its direction.* Roth is not alone in discounting liberal feminism's ability to remain almost wholly unalloyed, although in fact it was an important activist presence at the time, addressing issues of race and class differences. With gender universalism as their ideology, white women's liberationists could depart the mainstream of feminism and develop new agendas. Radical white feminism disregards the deep emotional grip of sexism. Also, Roth’s discussions of black and Chicana feminisms is the third "separate path" Roth insisted (as I remember doing) to be too radical to pay attention, liberal feminism was in the air. It predates women's liberation, its campaigns received widespread media attention; and it probably included a higher proportion of women of color and working-class women's liberationists. In many places, moreover, the line between women's liberation and liberal feminism was porous.

Third, socialist feminism and what has been termed “labor feminism” also emerged directly from the new left.** It predates women's liberation, its campaigns received widespread media attention; and it probably included a higher proportion of women of color and working-class women's liberationists. In many places, moreover, the line between women's liberation and liberal feminism was porous.

The emergence of the "white women's liberation movement" to that of early black and Chicana feminisms. Just as they developed from within their respective oppositional racial/ethnic communities, so women's liberation is said to have gestated in the (presumably white) new left community. But the left, let alone women's liberationists, no longer constitute a community in the same way. It lacked the historical rootedness and relative coherence of a group shaped by severe structural inequality set by racial and cultural otherness. Women's liberationists were not constrained by the prospect of altering the oppressive community in which they and their forebears had grown up and for whose liberation they were fighting. This, more than the construction of gender universalist ideology, explains their ability to move to autonomous feminist organizing. Another explanatory factor of which Roth could have made more is the disintegration of the left by the early 1970s.

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I have to admit I approached Ruth Frankenberg’s new book, Living Spirit, Living Practice cautiously at first. Reading to her description of the book as a “study of the practice of religious and spiritual lives, and of the ways in which that practice is key to the making and remaking of everyday life,” I wondered if an academic using epistemological tools to name something many consider unnamable was the right person for the job. Academics, most particularly Western, secular academics, have been applying theory to examine the faithful for some time. Unfortunately, many treat their subjects with condescension, while all the while claiming to be objective. The author is a self-identified white Jewish lesbian sociologist, who is best known for scholarship that challenges whites to own up to the way in which their race privilege influences their ability to be objective about racism. I was therefore interested to see how she would negotiate “that line between… knowledge and belief,” as she put it, and if she would apply the same level of sensitivity she brings to her discussion of racism to the stories of faith covered here. I am happy to say that she has.

To accomplish her objectives, Frankenberg talked to 50 people from an impressive array of walks of life and faiths, including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Wicca. The interviewees were also diverse in terms of their race, gender, sexuality, age, class, and physical ability. She asked them a series of open-ended questions ranging from how they communicate with God, the role that the body (as opposed or in addition to the mind) plays in their respective spiritual practices, and how they put faith into practice at work, to how the structural and dogmatic underpinnings of religious institutions encourage or hinder sexual identity and expression. The resulting narratives of belief and practice are the book’s chief strength.

In “Talking to God, and God Talking Back,” Nancy McKay, the white former minister of a San Francisco Bay Area Church of Christ, says that for her, transcendence involves “going inside, paying attention to whatever is present. Not denial of it, not trying to change it or fix it, but a trust that… if you really are in the truth of the moment, then the spirit comes in and works.” It was in such a state of openness right after she was diagnosed with cancer that McKay heard a voice that said, “Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” This she took to be the voice of Jesus, with whom she engaged, during the course of her illness, in a series of comforting yet challenging conversations.

Frankenberg says that for most of her interviewees, spirituality means something “spontaneous and direct in the process of communing with divine and/or energetic forms—processes that might equally well take place with or without relationship to specific religious institutions”; whereas religion “signal[ed] specific form, history, and institution, and often a sense of belonging to a particular identity group.” Paying close attention to the interplay and tension between the two, she listens carefully to the ways in which her subjects ground spontaneous eruptions of the spirit within their particular institutional frameworks. Thus, just as she notes how McKay made sense of the voice she heard by placing it within the context of Christianity, she highlights how Avram Davis, the 46-year-old founder of the Center for the Study and Practice of Jewish Meditation, did much the same thing regarding his Jewish heritage.

In the chapter “Mind Embodied,” Davis tells Frankenberg about his first encounter with what he believed to be the divine: “It was more me being in a place in nature and feeling a place of great light, hearing many, many voices… of great compassion, great love,” he says, “advising me to study more within the tradition, to relax a little bit, to open… It felt like I was inside and outside soaked in honey.” Frankenberg comments, “Avram does not say so, but context makes clear that the tradition in question [for him] is that of Judaism.” Thus, she says, “[While… the experience of Godtalk is spontaneous, it must also be understood as emplaced within a set of what one might call protocols of comprehension,” systems of belief and understandings people rely on to make sense of their experience.

Frankenberg sees many of her interviewees, especially when they are about issues of sexuality, as struggling with the apparent contradiction between Buddhist notions about the connection between suffering and attachment to the self as a fixed, never-changing identity, and marginalized people’s need sometimes to affirm exactly such fixed identities as a strategy for political and psychological empowerment. Frankenberg’s perspective can also be inferred from the questions she poses to her interviewees, especially when she asks, “What’s it like to take ownership of your stable sexual identity, or necessarily binary notion of gender identity or sexuality?” (p. 45). While Frankenberg sometimes refers to also function as barriers to inclusion, the implicit or explicit presence of Frankenberg’s opinions aside, the book is an excellent assessment of the challenge of translating faith into everyday life. I look forward to hearing more from her about this subject, as well as about how these challenges have shaped her own personal journey.
I love that woman’s writing. It is an idyll. Writing, with ‘why?’ opens Julia Kristeva’s book on Colette, the third in her triptych on “female genius.” Following her analyses of Hannah Arendt and Voltairine de Cleyre, the speaker, Kristeva seems to feel compelled from the start to defend her choice of Colette as a primary example of the female genius. No sooner does Kristeva proclaim her love “without a ‘why’” than she begins her over-400-page explanation—part psychoanalysis, part apologia—all based in love.

Exploring in depth her reasons to love Colette, Kristeva interweaves the details of Colette’s life with her own analysis of Colette’s work, often mirroring Colette in style, thus producing an analysis turned reverie, history turned meditation. In places, Kristeva creates pastiche of quotes from a wide variety of Colette’s texts—novels, letters, notes—to present Colette’s sensibilities in relationship to a range including politics, poetry, femininity, and feminism. In other sections, the identity of the speaker slips, producing a sense that texts and authors have all merged. For example, speaking of Colette’s “radical shift” that replaces “the human point of view on the world with that of a sensibility supposedly belonging to a dog and a cat,” Kristeva begins with an animal. Kristeva wants to define the extreme destitution of her own sensibility, pushed to the limits of animality and in so doing, succeeds in taming and excising the paradoxes of the psyche that, in other people dig hells and promise paradises. For her, the animal brings a touch of simplicity and humor, which, like a modest grace, saves speaking beings both from Gehenna and from ecstasy. (p. 85)

But by the end of the paragraph, Kristeva’s voice has merged with author and texts, and it has become completely unclear who the subject of these sentences might be:

Hence, through the “Four-legged Ones,” the rapt of the sensuous mouth, and its strangeness, which brings the jouissance and death, is called my animality. That is also my humor, my irony, my way of not becoming fixed as an écorché [an anatomical figure showing the muscles and bones that are visible with the skin removed, and even less as something sublime, a way of laughing about it with unlikeliness and, when all is said and done, unlikeliness as places]. That animality, the figure for a sense of humor about oneself, therefore attests to a beautiful optimism. The other is not only my enemy, his beastly jouissance is inside of me: I am the beast. Of animal, my same-life, my brother. (p. 85)

Effectively playing both Colette’s lover and her psychoanalyst, Kristeva merges identity with writing in the same way that Kristeva claims Colette does with her mother, Sidon, and presumably for the same purpose: to “transmute perversion—père—version, turning toward the father—into jouissance and death, to reconcile herself with her always somewhat humiliated femininity.” Such merging of subjects can be dizzying.

Kristeva’s psycho-linguistic frame, in Kristeva’s psycho-poetic framework, to be found in Colette’s “alphabet of the flesh,” a synesthetic “interpenetration of language and the world, style and flesh.” In Kristeva’s analysis, Colette’s “alphabet of the flesh” has two aspects: the first is “radiant” or “solar,” which “delivers the play” of the metaphoric body to us… an alphabet of words, things, and sensations mingling indiscriminately, in which I hear the music of sounds. While Kristeva does not directly say it, it seems that Colette wagered correctly that her stature as a writer would not be substantially harmed in the bathroom. While Colette’s age, illness, or gender played a role in the public’s willingness to accept her as a writer, Kristeva does not directly say it, it seems that Colette wagered correctly that her stature as a writer would not be substantially harmed in the bathroom.

No more does Kristeva proclaim her love “without a ‘why’” than she begins her over-400-page explanation—part psychoanalysis, part apologia—all based in love. (p. 84)


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