

# The Women's Library

N E W S L E T T E R

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY INC. PO BOX 271 NEWTOWN NSW 2042

Vol. 1 No. 4 NOVEMBER 1992

## Why do we need a women's library? Your views

We asked a number of women why they thought it was important to establish The Women's Library. Here are some responses:

*We need a women's library, with a reading room, because it will give women a safe place to come and explore ideas, to find information which is hard to ask for in conventional libraries, to read current books and to meet others. It is particularly important that this library be an active place (will act to distribute information) and that it be located in the inner city area.*

**Eva Cox**

*Women's writing has never had a valued place. The Women's Library, in bringing women's writing together in such a way, will afford greater opportunity to trace lines of thought through women's works and novels. The Women's Library is an important statement.*

**Cath Zimdahl**

*We need both the resources that a women's library will provide, as well as the library itself. A lot of documents would not be available except in a specialised women's library. The library itself will be important because it will be a welcoming and friendly place which lots of libraries aren't.*

*A women's library will encourage women to make donations once they know there is a particular place things can go to - it will have a snowballing effect.*

**Meredith Burgmann**

*We need a women's library so that we can go to a library that has lots of lesbian books, especially lesbian trash - I love it.*

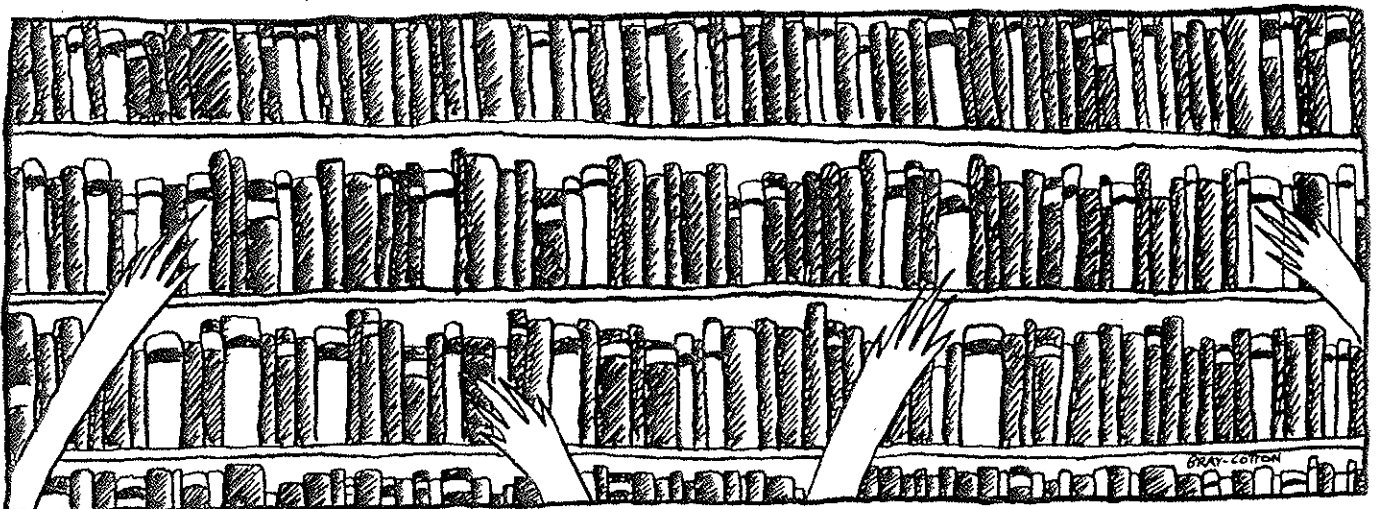
**Jane Clements**

*Books by women are a way of sharing concepts, ideas, awareness, dreams, visions and hopes. The beauty of 'the book' lies in its ability to reach a vast audience. All too often women's words have been censored or lost. At this herstorical point, it is important that this work is reclaimed and that more recent women's writing is made readily available to many women. The cost of books in Australia often means that much women's literature reaches a limited readership. The Women's Library acts as a crucial step between the published product and the woman reader - it allows more women access to this vital form of communication, while also fulfilling the important role of housing women's work in one place - a much needed reference point.*

**Judith ton**

*We need a women's library to preserve access to books, journals and articles by and about lesbians and to ensure, therefore, that our history will not be lost.*

**Carole Ruthchild**



## A quick update

These last three months have once again been busy for The Women's Library committee. We now have a submission prepared for South Sydney Council - securing a venue for the library is our number one priority at the moment.

We are constantly receiving good quality and unusual books - our collection is nearing 3000. Books are rolling in, new and second-hand, from publishers, authors and other women who believe there is a need for The Women's Library.

Membership opened with the August newsletter and the response has been good. We now have approximately 500 individual members, and 200 organisations on the mailing list. To become a member simply fill out the form on the back of this newsletter. At this stage, membership will not be compulsory until August 1993, unless the library opens earlier. As a member you will receive our quarterly newsletter and be eligible to vote in our AGM next June. Donations are tax deductible, and always welcome.

Let us know if you are interested in helping out with the library. We currently have a list of approximately 50 women who want to be contacted when we need a hand - it won't be long now. Thanks to everyone who has volunteered. Our next fundraisers will probably involve a stall at Mardi Gras Fair Day, and another bookfair next July. Keep saving those books.

**Vicki Harding, Convenor**

## Thanks to UTS Women's Forum

The mailout of this newsletter has been funded by the Women's Forum, University of Technology, Sydney. The Women's Forum at UTS is open to all women students and staff. It exists to:

- ▼ provide a forum for information exchange and discussion among all women students and staff at UTS;
- ▼ gain information from women on the barriers they perceive within the university which limit the potential of women students and staff, i.e. situations where systematic discrimination may operate;
- ▼ assist in the implementation of the university's Affirmative Action Program for women;
- ▼ Advise the Equity and Access Committee, a committee of Council, on issues of relevance to women's education and employment.

As well as meeting to discuss issues and represent women's views to the university, the Women's Forum has arranged a series of women's lunches, with guest speakers drawn from a range of interests and occupations such as politics, business, trade unionism and religion.

## Thanks to:

- ▼ Carley Tucker for pulling our submission into order
- ▼ Jennifer Bliss for her constant layout skills
- ▼ The Valhalla Cinema for allowing us to preview *Wisecracks*
- ▼ Debbie Atkins who organised sponsorship of this newsletter mailout
- ▼ Chris Bray-Cotton for the graphics used in this newsletter
- ▼ All the gals who lent a hand with the mailout
- ▼ Our new members
- ▼ Nicola O'Shea who organised a fundraiser for the library
- ▼ *Wicked Women* for the donation of a set of their magazines.

## Book Donations

If you would like to donate books for the library's collection, drop off points are:

- ▼ The Feminist Bookshop, shop 9, Orange Grove Plaza, Balmain Road, Lilyfield.
- ▼ The Newtown Women's Centre, 523 King Street, Newtown.

Please contact us at PO Box 271 Newtown 2042, if you would like us to pick up your donation.

Please note that The Women's Library has a no-strings-attached donations policy. The Women's Library reserves the right to decide whether a donated item will be integrated into the collection, discarded, exchanged or sold.

## Books and publications received

The following titles have been donated to the library by their authors since the last newsletter:

*Feminism Confronts Technology* Judy Wajcman  
*Women in Control* Judy Wajcman  
*Italy and the Train* Anna Couani  
*Were All Women Sex Mad? and Other Stories*  
Anna Couani

*The Harbour Breathes* Anna Couani  
*Period* Jo Ann Gardner Loulan, Bonnie Lopez and Marcia Quackenbrush

The following magazines and newsletters are arriving consistently in The Women's Library letterbox (thank you to the various publishers):

*No Frills*  
*Womanspeak*  
*Team Sydney*  
*Gay Gazette*  
*The Laughing Medusa*  
*Pink Thylacines*  
*Wax and Polish.*

# Feminism and Aboriginal women

Following are the ideas of two Aboriginal women on feminism. I spoke with Linda Burney, president of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and wrote a summary of her thoughts. Sue Green, a Sydney University student, contributed an article entitled 'Colonial Attitudes'.

Vicki Harding

Linda Burney sees herself fundamentally as an Aboriginal woman, but as an Aboriginal before a woman. She believes the feminist movement has done to Aboriginal women what the general population has done to Aboriginal people. Further, she maintains that the feminist movement does not take into account different values; Aboriginal women are expected to conform to a white feminist viewpoint, and have not been able to be part of the feminist movement in their own terms.

Linda says, "My concept of feminism is from an Aboriginal frame of reference. My responsibility from an Aboriginal perspective is to the family; the women's role in the Aboriginal family is very important." Linda points out that Aboriginal society is matriarchal and Aboriginal women, in the main, do not see men as the enemy. Aboriginal women also have a leading role in Aboriginal politics.

## Colonial Attitudes

There have been three notable stages in Aboriginal history since the arrival of the whites in 1788. Firstly, there was the annihilation when all Aboriginal men, women and children were indiscriminately murdered. Then came the second stage of segregation when Aboriginal people were removed from their homes and placed into missions in remote areas. Thirdly, there was the stage of assimilation, which we do not seem to have moved on from. During this stage, Aboriginal people have been forced to accept the white's culture and discard their own.

White feminists are currently playing a role within this third stage of assimilation, maybe through ignorance and/or good intentions, but still with the same end result; assimilation and cultural genocide.

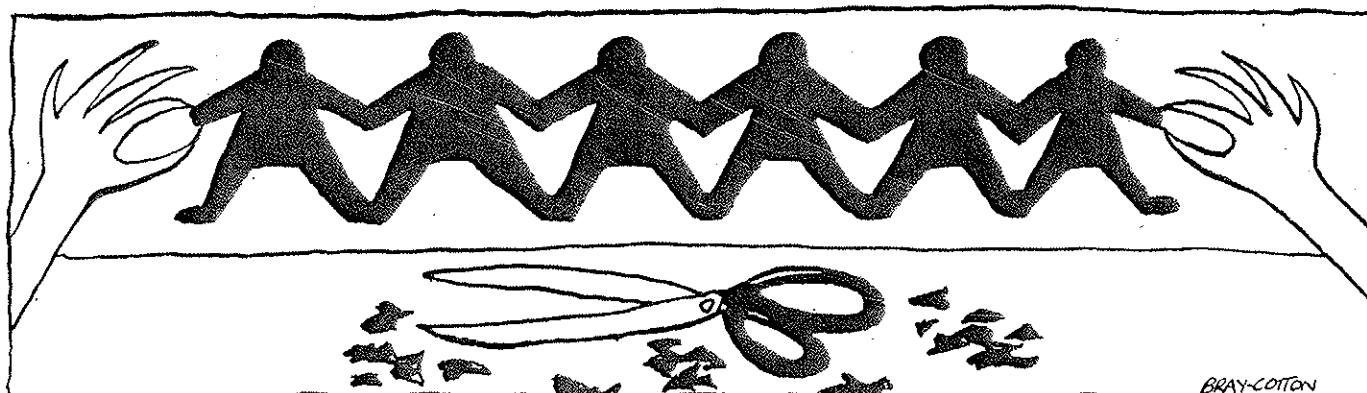
Of great concern to Aboriginal women is the colonial attitude a lot of white feminists appear to display. A lot of these women appear to have set themselves up as the saviours of Aboriginal women. They feel they need to show Aboriginal women how men are exploiting them, how Aboriginal women should react, how they should feel, how they should dress and speak, and what expectations they should have. In doing so, white feminists overlook one very important fact: Aboriginal women have survived for many years against the strongest opposition without the knowledge and guidance of white women. White feminists are not past the behaviour the rest of white society often displays; judging Aboriginal society by white standards, values, experience and expectations.

Aboriginal women are not childlike, needing some big, strong, all-knowing, white women to save them. Aboriginal women have a great strength, as a group and individually. They know exactly what is occurring around them and why. They know what their strengths are and what their limitations are. They also know exactly where their oppression comes from.

The oppression Aboriginal women suffer is racism. This racism comes in many forms and practices, including sexism, but all are directly linked to racism. When an Aboriginal woman is discriminated against, it is rarely because she is a woman; it is because she is Aboriginal. An Aboriginal woman does not even have the same standing as a woman (a white woman); she is just black. Her life experiences are totally different from those of white women. Her expectations are different too.

Another very important point that needs to be remembered is that just because a woman is a feminist does not automatically mean she is not a racist. Many feminists are racist. Also, just because a woman is an Aboriginal does not mean she is not a feminist; it all depends on whose definition you are looking at and defining that person by. Within many Aboriginal societies, both traditional and contemporary, Aboriginal women have what white women aim for: equality, which they do not have within white society.

Sue Green



## Holes in Lesbian Publishing

Australia is desperate for new local lesbian literary talent. A recent survey conducted by The Women's Library around bookshops nationwide drew one conclusion: there isn't enough product to satisfy the demand. According to a spokeswoman from the Feminist Bookshop, lesbians are reading more than ever before. So why is there such a dearth of lesbian material on the market? Is the problem that lesbians are not writing, or is the problem that their writing is not getting published? If not, why not? The Women's Library would like to hear what lesbian authors have to say on the subject, so if you have had experience of trying to get your work published, please write to us.

Two Australian authors were repeatedly cited in the survey as forming the current core of Australian lesbian publishing: Susan Hawthorne and Claire McNab. Susan Hawthorne's publishing history is an interesting one. Former editor at Penguin Books and responsible for their excellent but short-lived local lesbian list, Hawthorne is enjoying considerable success as co-director of Spinifex Press. The Spinifex catalogue includes the work of overseas as well as Australian writers working in an impressive diversity of genres. Their fiction list kicked off with Melissa Chan's successful first novel, *Too Rich*, and followed up with her second, *Getting Your Man*, a collection of short stories. Sue Hawthorne's own novel, *The Falling Woman*, has been widely acclaimed since its publication earlier this year.

Claire McNab is now a household name, not only among lesbians, but also among heterosexuals with a penchant for crime fiction. However, her path to stardom has been long and winding, with a detour via the US. Her credible hero, Carol Ashton, had to win American hearts before an Australian publisher was prepared to go out on a limb and publish McNab's books here.

Disappointingly, her most recent novel, *Under the Southern Cross*, imported by Bulldog Books from Naiad Press, failed to find a local publisher but has become a bestseller notwithstanding. The good news on the horizon is that Allen and Unwin has taken Australian rights to McNab's fifth Carol Ashton title, *Off Key*, due to be published at the end of the year. Allen and Unwin's most recent lesbian title by American author Dianne Salvatore, *Love, Zena and Beth*, has sold extremely well and bookshops have received positive feedback from customers despite the book being reviewed as 'trash' by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The review went on to say that 'lesbians are a minority market that can be targeted to buy crap'. Closer to the truth perhaps is the fact that lesbians enjoy reading light fiction.

The Women's Library will not act as an arbiter of good taste in feminist and lesbian publishing. Trash or treasure, the library welcomes donations of all books, and don't forget that donations of money are fully tax deductible. On the subject of tax, the Australian Book Publishers Association has recently been doing some

sums and has discovered that if the proposed Goods and Services Tax is brought into legislation, the price of books will rise by 19 per cent. This is yet another reason why Sydney needs a women's library - as books become increasingly unaffordable, many women will rely more heavily on borrowing the books they want to read from the library.

Grace N. Danger

## A survey of our local libraries

Since the publication of our last newsletter, The Women's Library committee has been busy conducting research into the availability of women's texts in our local libraries. Women who use council libraries are probably already aware of the shortage of feminist and lesbian material and the long waiting lists that exist for popular and more recent texts such as Susan Faludi's *Backlash* and the novels of Jeanette Winterson.

With each committee member researching a particular library locality, our survey found that those council libraries in the inner-west were at a significant disadvantage with regard to the representation of women's texts compared with Stanton Library in the more affluent area of northern Sydney. For example, Leichhardt Library (which is affiliated with the Glebe and Balmain Libraries) registered 52 entries under the subject heading 'feminism' and 10 entries under the heading 'lesbianism'.

The Newtown Library catalogue (which is linked to eight other libraries in the Sydney City and South Sydney City Council areas) registered 37 titles under 'feminism' but only five of those were located at the Newtown branch; 43 titles under the subject heading 'Women-Social conditions', four of which were at Newtown; three under 'lesbianism', one of which was at Newtown. This can be compared to the Stanton Library which has 150 titles under 'feminism' and 23 titles under 'lesbianism'.

Our survey also found that computer catalogue systems were often incomplete and confusing in their categorisation of certain texts and varied greatly from one library to another. One of the most important aims of The Women's Library is to have a centralised collection of women's texts that can be easily accessed via a user-friendly catalogue system. In offering a catalogue system that is detailed and specific, anyone doing research in a particular women's studies area will find it much easier to get relevant information.

Our research also concluded that those women's texts that were represented in local libraries came from mainstream publishers. Another important aim of The Women's Library is to collect the work of self-publishers and small women's presses in Australia and overseas.

Given the poor representation of women's texts in the libraries of the inner-west, particularly in Newtown, our survey reinforced the suitability of King Street, Newtown as a site for The Women's Library collection.

Natalya Lusty

## Reviews

Here is a sample of the kind of books you will be able to find in *The Women's Library*. All of the following titles have been donated by the publishers. Thank you to the following publishers and the reviewers for your support.

### **Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation**

Edited by Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, 1992

This comprehensive and up-to-date text explores the themes of gender, race and class relations, family life, work, education, social conflict and culture in the lives of Australian women from pre-settlement times to the present. The collection's 24 contributors challenge dominant white Anglo male historical paradigms, and instead foreground women's activities and patterning their significance on Australian historiography. The unifying thread of the chapters is that of the dualistic social tendencies toward domination and negotiation - the interactive process of male control and the female attempts to bargain for increased privileges and resources. Processes of domination and negotiation occur within confines prescribed not only by sexism, but also by racism and class oppression.

Divided into five sections, the first deals with gender and race relations with Nancy M. Williams, and Lesley Jolley exploring women's place in Aboriginal societies before they were altered by the invasion and its aftermath, while Mary Anne Jebb and Anna Haebich move 'across the great divide' in their discussion of gender relations on Australian frontiers.

The second section of the book deals with gender and reproductive relations focusing on the manner in which reproductive imperatives helped to constrain women's choices and to locate them primarily within the private domain. Chapters cover colonial and post-colonial demographic patterns, convict women and the state, and sexual and reproductive imperatives. Evans and Saunders' chapter on the evolution of the Australian housewife contains some wonderful illustrations in which 'women of all ages were encouraged to define femininity through domestic chores', while Raymond Evans' chapter 'A Gun in the Oven' on masculinism and gendered violence problematises masculinity and traces the origin of violence to a gendered base.

In section three, the relations of production which invariably advantage one gender more than another are examined in detail, adding to our understanding of how these two modes intersect. Strongly highlighted is the variable but strongly symbiotic interrelationship between patriarchy and production. Margaret Anderson's chapter on colonial women and work stresses the value of women's contribution to the 'hidden' economy, while Jocelyne Scutt's exhaustive chapter on the struggle for equal pay reminds us that the gains made for parity need to be augmented with continuing action by women in political and industrial arenas if they are to be enjoyed in the future.

Chapters in sections four and five cover in detail Melanesian and Asian women in Northern Australia, migrant women and multiculturalism, Australian women's literary production, gender and social struggle, first wave feminism, women's mobilisation in the First and Second World Wars, and the women's movement since 1970. Heather Goodall and Jackie Huggins' chapter 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere' discusses Aboriginal women and land rights; violence and alcohol abuse; the need to redefine issues such as ill-health, poor education and imprisonment so they are 'no longer seen

as the fault of Aborigines, but are recognised as the effects of colonialism, racism and cultural intolerance'; the overpolicing of Aborigines; and the cost of survival against physical and cultural genocide.

*Gender Relations in Australia* is an empirical work which contributes to a fuller understanding of the concept of gender within Australian historical texts, and seeks to dispel the tradition that maleness and whiteness define the social world. Illustrated throughout with some wonderful photographs that help fill the gaps of women in history, as well as some disgustingly sexist and racist cartoons from *The Bulletin*, this book will prove invaluable to anyone interested in gender, race and equality.

Julia Hancock



### **Who Do You Think You Are? Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia**

Edited by Karen Herne, Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss  
Women's Redress Press, Sydney, 1992

*Who Do You Think You Are?* is an apt title for an anthology of prose, poetry, drawings and essays by second generation women in Australia. The title's interrogation of identity informs the diversity of cultural and personal experiences present in this collection whilst highlighting the possible tensions inherent in operating out of two or more cultural contexts. The paradox contained in the term 'second generation immigrant' further unsettles any logic of identity by asserting as a given the social reality of those 'living two cultures and creating a third'.

My own reading of this anthology was informed in part by the excellent and informative work, *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations* (edited by Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O'Longley), since both, albeit in very different ways, explore the theme of cultural difference. In their introduction, the editors of *Striking Chords* suggest that the second generation immigrant writer may be generally described as taking up the position of translator and mediator: 'At home in both languages and cultures, these writers translate one reality into the other and mediate between the two.' In Divina Devic's *The Coffee* and Anna Maria Dell'Oso's *Zia Pina*, the position of mediator is made apparent by subtle tonal shifts. These writers move between a sympathy and understanding of their forbears' nostalgia and an amused detachment, suggesting that the gap between generations is sometimes widened by the experience of migration.

In *Conversations With Yiayia*, Vasiliki Nihás explores the mythic power of her grandmother. Seen as the bearers of cultural tradition, grandmothers become a focus for a number of these writers as they contend with the 'old' and the 'new', the past and the present, the needs of the self and the demands of the family. In moving from one reality to another, Nihás searches for the world of her grandmother, first on the small island of Kastellorizio, and then in the Greek community of Sydney in the 1920s, contrasting it to her own world of independence, university education and travel. Nihás'

emotionally charged dialogue with her dead grandmother creates a wonderful intimacy that takes you to the heart of 'one of the last in the line of unique Kastellorizian matriarchs.'

In asking the question 'What ethnic identity?', Eva Cox explores the complex web of her own cultural identity. While she welcomes the celebration of cultural difference, she questions the way in which it has become almost obligatory to develop one's ethnic identity, as if that identity can be so singularly defined. As an Austrian Jew who grew up in England, Italy and Australia, Cox finds her ethnic allegiances somewhat in conflict. From this position she rightly warns of the dangers of so ardently formulating a national identity: 'As long as nationalism and ethnic identity are surrogates for power and killing, I want no part of it.'

Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli's study of the experiences of Italian-Australian lesbians is incisive for its awareness of the heterosexist nature of many sociological studies. She corrects this bias by opening up discussion on the experiences of lesbian women from non-Anglo cultural backgrounds and by offering us the testimonies of a number of lesbian women in the Italian community. For many women in her study, attempts to retain strong cultural roots often meant that they were alienated from an Anglo-dominated lesbian community.

The presence of irony and humour in a number of pieces in this collection, notably Rita La Bianca's *Dinkum Italian*, Jo Jarrah's *The Cat, the Cream and the Canary* and Joanne Travaglia and Elizabeth Weiss's *A Girls Guide to Bomboniere*, acts to counterpoint the tendency of mainstream culture to stereotype and hence homogenise ethnic experience. In *Going Home*, Nadya Stanic indignantly exposes the irony in myths such as 'the lucky country' and the 'great Australian dream', revealing that the opportunities open to Anglo-Australians in the 1940s and 1950s were a stark contrast to the experience of her family and many other migrants - internment in labour camps, racial prejudice and slave labour.

In describing the family as 'absorbing, maddening, all-encompassing, placental', Giulia Giuffré recalls a childhood filled with endless observation, amusement and a certain amount of mystery. For Giuffré, the experience of mediating between two cultures has resulted in a rich source of possibilities opening up, affording her a perspective that sees identity, of the self, of the nation, as anything but fixed or static.

This anthology is rewarding not only for its depth and variety of personal reminiscence but also for its provocative challenge to many cultural and political assumptions about first and second generation immigrant experiences.

Natalya Lusty

### **Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory** **Edited by Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Gross** **Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990**

Feminist theory has been alive for a long time, and kicking hard for the past three decades. *Feminist Challenges* provides a focal point for a series of essays by Australian feminists, which may be seen as having been conceived in a breathing space at the end of around thirty years hard work re-reading, re-interpreting, re-discovering, and finally re-inventing social, political and cultural theory and philosophy.

This volume traces feminist thinking and theory to date, at the same time evaluating and assessing the various approaches and contributions that have been made, beginning with early feminist projects to simply put women on the agenda and identify where they were not, through to asking, as Elizabeth Gross does in the final essay, 'What is feminist theory?' 'Where

to now?'

While all the contributors are Australian, the questions being posed have wide currency in contemporary feminist thought, and indeed several close analyses highlighting both the pitfalls and triumphs of particular approaches and methodologies, notably de Beauvoir's and Irigaray's, are included.

If all this sounds too caught up in the past, from engagement with the classic philosophical texts to criticism of the liberal humanist 'left' traditions that at one time appeared to offer a way out, then I have not been clear enough about the basic project of this book, which is consolidating and building on that past, not merely reviewing it. Illuminations of the precepts implicit in "male-stream" theory concerning (male) universality and the (male) individual having been made, there is a certain excitement about the new directions being taken, specifically discussions of the feminine body and text and discussions surrounding a feminine autonomy, as opposed to equality in relation to theory. As Elizabeth Gross says, 'No longer simply condemning or accepting certain discourses, now they are analysed, examined and...challenged in their operations...both the content and the framework of discourses, disciplines and institutions...' (p 194).

*Feminist Challenges* views (forward) and reviews (backward), making it useful to newer readers of feminist theory as well as to the more serious or academic students it seems to be aimed at.

Victoria Hunt

### **Lesbian Sex, 1984 and Lesbian Passion, 1987** **Jo Ann Loulan** **Spinsters Book Company**

*Lesbian Sex* is frequently mixed up with the much older *Joy of Lesbian Sex* (a sequel by the writers of *The Joy of Sex*, no less) and *Lesbian Passion* sounds like a rather nice evening read for the single non-SMers. Do not be mistaken by the titles, however; these are not 'how to' manuals with big glossy pictures (perhaps, if Jo Ann is considering doing another edition of either, she could keep this in mind when contemplating how to spice up her presentation.) I know this because it was by just such an error that I came into my own copy of *Lesbian Sex*.

It is a true story that at the age of 15 I discovered *The Joy of Lesbian Sex* in The Bookshop in Darlinghurst. Unfortunately, it was on the very highest shelf. Having tried on a number of previous visits to scale the shelves or stand on boxes with ease and discretion to reach it (and failing), I asked my friend Frances to get it down for me. Frances was 16, a lot taller than me and with a hell of a bigger mouth. To my undying embarrassment, she not only fetched the book down, but opened it up and after a few moments of flicking through it exclaimed loudly, 'Oh this is so nice, Jenni, look at the pictures, all of the women have smiles on their faces.' I never did look at the book. I was too busy fleeing from the shop. I told this story to a lover some years later and she embarked upon a secret quest to get me a copy as a joke for my birthday, by which time (and probably not a minute too soon) it was out of print. She thought that Jo Ann Loulan must have done some kind of revised version and bought it for me. Which brings me back to where we began: no pickies.

Jo Ann Loulan is a sex therapist in the USA and her books are much more about sexuality than about sex. She takes it pretty much as read that we all know (or quickly learn) how to get our fingers wet, and that the pressing issues are far more to do with our relationships; how they work, as well as why they don't. Her observations and opinions cover all manner of

sexuality issues faced by lesbians. For example, she has chapters on monogamy and non-monogamy, celibacy, orgasm, motherhood, disability, lesbian dates, what happens when couples stay together for ages and the lust factor drops away, sex toys, incested women and sex, partners of incested women, AIDS, and addiction issues. *Lesbian Passion* also contains the results of a survey Loulan conducted of the sexual practices of 1566 lesbians in the US and Canada. This is interesting and valuable, as I don't know of any woman, other than Shere Hite, who has done this (and Shere's questions in *The Hite Report* and *Women and Love* do tend toward the heterosexist. For example, in *Women and Love* she asks the straight women 'general' questions about love and relationships, and then asks the lesbians different questions about sex with women.).

Loulan is a very conversational author (*Lesbian Sex* was compiled mostly from speeches) and her books are well written and easy to read. If you are involved in a 12-step program (such as AA) or accept 12-step philosophy you may enjoy a great deal of her therapy approach. If, however, you think a 'higher power' is a government official, and the idea of a 'child within' makes you cringe, perhaps you'd best steer clear. I would recommend her books for anyone who is pre-therapy but interested in some introspection and self analysis. *Lesbian Sex* and *Lesbian Passion* also provide a good introduction to issues like internalised homophobia and 'why don't lesbians know how to make small talk' for women who are recently lesbian (recently lesbianed?). On the same note, if you're an old hand and you've seen a counsellor for a while or done some of those encounter group things, most of what you read will probably sound like common sense in an American accent.

For a bit of navel gazing, or just a stylish and high drama coming out at work (nothing like those pink and purple covers with their blaring titles to catch the eye), you can't really go past the *Lesbian Sex* series.

Jenni Millbank

### **To Live With Weeds**

**D.A. Clarke**

**Herbooks, Santa Cruz, 1987**

Clarke's poetry does not bear testimony to a sad, tortured soul expressing in words a bitter life experience. Rather, her work is illuminating and refreshing. The poetry contained in this collection has little to do with the meanderings of one woman and more to do with the universal lesbian experience.

Clarke accurately expresses both the fear and rage women experience daily in their interactions with men. In the piece from which the title was borrowed, Clarke uses quotes from famous men throughout history as a starting point to relate a profound observation of both women's contemporary and age-old persecution in our herstory. Further, Clarke demonstrates remarkable clarity regarding the more insidious operations of patriarchy in the 14 sections of this poem.

*To Live With Weeds* serves as a reminder to women, and particularly lesbians, that our lives can be so repressed, dominated and mutilated by men that even the most ingenuous action should be regarded with suspicion. For a chilling example of the 'war we must wage everyday,' *No Unoccupied Territory I and II* captures the essence of all that is dark and foreboding about the twentieth century version of patriarchy.

It should be noted, however, that although some of Clarke's work is overtly political, it is in no sense dogmatic. Clarke moves with ease through the issues of contemporary lesbian culture. Lesbian visibility is her main concern in *And Everywhere Unicorns*, while being single is poignantly

handled in *Lovers are Something Other People Have*.

Overall, *To Live With Weeds* offers insightful and thought provoking reading, even for those who do not usually lose themselves in poetry. A special mention should go to the graphics by Eva Wilson, scattered throughout the book. These are both intricate and beautiful and mirror the mystical and powerful workings that are women.

Jo O'Shaughnessy

### **Women, Souls and Shadows**

**Beatrice Copello**

**Bemac Publications, Sydney, 1992**

Good poetry can explore the human condition more thoroughly than any other medium. Above all, it celebrates the human capacity for love. It is no accident that poetry has always attracted those who, for whatever reason, have found themselves marginalised by the prevailing attitudes of society. Today an alternative tower of strength is painstakingly being built, brick by brick, by women who refused to be defined by others as 'on the outer'. Copello's work can be seen as a valuable addition to this effort. This book has a clarity and accessibility that is, in itself, subversive. Copello tells it like it is, in all its simple beauty, the pleasure and the pain.

Those who need reassurance in their lesbian identity will find help here. The constantly developing and changing image that our society has of itself can only be enriched by the inclusion of Copello's clear-eyed focus on the love between women.

C.C. Reader

### **Lizards/Los Padres**

**Bettianne Shoney Sien**

**Herbooks, Santa Cruz, 1988**

This collection of short stories is linked together by characters, feelings and situations that reappear time and again to unite the vignettes contained within each tale. Raised on a small Wisconsin farm, Bettianne's feelings for the land and the endless cycle of agriculture prevail with *Ida* and *Crocks of Kraut* being crafted around what the dictionary terms husbandry (the business of a farmer; frugality; thrift). That such a term is inappropriately gendered, like so many words in the English language, is significant because the farmers Sien writes about are all women, whether they are older women battling to keep their land holdings together or mothers trying to feed their families. As the eighth of 13 children herself, Sien's depiction of family life is often confused, anguished and claustrophobic. She writes about the resentment of never having a room of one's own to study in without being pestered by older brothers, the burden of responsibility towards younger siblings, and the resistance against being coerced into assuming the mother's role when she is sick. Fear seeps into these stories at any opportunity - fear of rape, battery, loneliness, failure, embarrassment and ridicule; fear of not being able to hold someone in your arms and tell them you love them. However, Sien avoids depressing her readers by the sheer charm of her writing and the faith that it exudes; that everything will be alright in the end. Like an old Wisconsin farm, her book is ramshackle, but somehow it muddles through.

Grace N. Danger

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