



# NEWS LETTER

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EDITOR

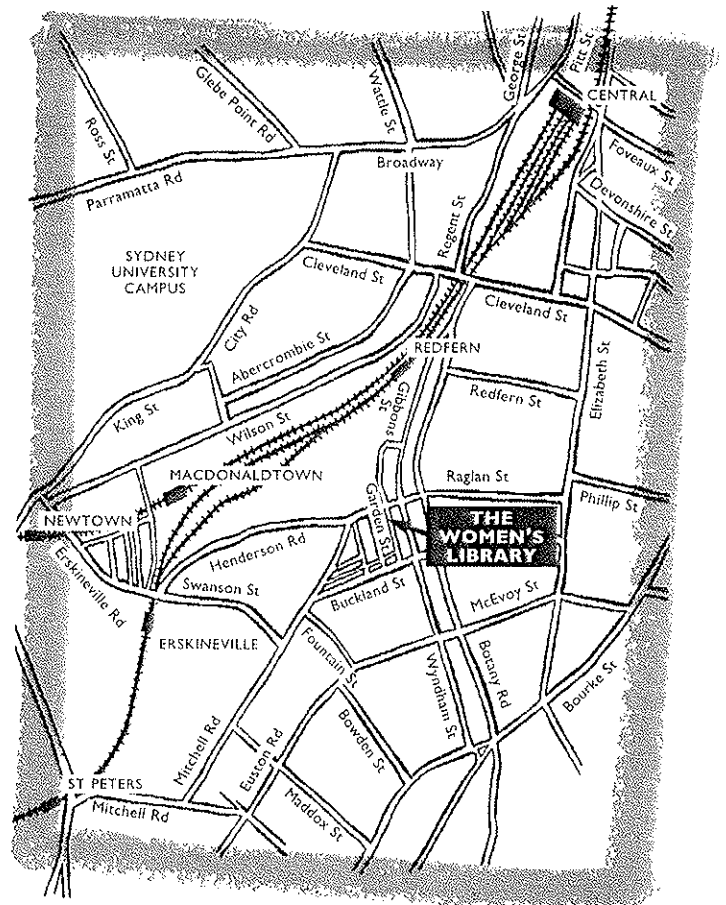
VICKI HARDING

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

## *Come and visit The Women's Library!*



DALE SPENDER AND ANNE DEVESON LAUNCHING THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY



## TWL CONTACT DETAILS

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**POSTAL ADDRESS** PO Box 271 Newtown, 2042

**PHONE** (02) 319 0529

**FAX** We desperately need one to be donated

**OPENING HOURS**

TUESDAY TO FRIDAY 11am-8pm

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY 11am-5pm

**PARKING** Plenty of free parking!

**TRAINS**

10 minute walk down Gibbons Street then Henderson Road from Redfern Station. Or 15 minute walk down Henderson Road from Erskineville Station.

**BUSES**

WEEKDAYS: 305 down Botany Road from Central  
WEEKDAYS AND WEEKENDS: 309 and 310 from Circular Quay, through Central and down Botany Rd.  
Get off near the corner of Henderson Rd.  
3 minute walk down Henderson Road.  
306 and 308 go down Henderson Road.

**REFRESHMENTS**

Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided for volunteers.

**KIDS**

Children are welcome to visit the Children's Room and library.

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!**

**OCTOBER 10, 1994**

On October the 10th, 1994, consultants for **THE MINISTRY FOR THE STATUS AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN** (NSW State Government) are conducting a phone-in to canvass opinions regarding the establishment of a **WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR NSW**. ■ Nothing definite about a centre has yet been established. This phone-in is to determine whether women want a centre, and if they do, exactly what they would like to see in a centre.

■ At **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY** we encourage you to call the number (it's a free call) and put **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY** on the Ministry's agenda. ■ Maybe you believe there does not need to be a new women's centre established, but there needs to be more funding for existing services such as **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY**. ■ Or you may believe that the existing **WOMEN'S INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE** (established by the Ministry) could be expanded to include an inter-agency networking facility, with new funding opportunities established for existing services (like **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY**).

■ Or you may see the need for a new centre which you believe should house existing services (eg. **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY**) in a central location and provide wages for workers who currently offer their services voluntarily. Please be sure to have your say (and let others know). **CALL 008 817 227 ON OCTOBER 10** and do your bit toward finding funding for **THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY**.

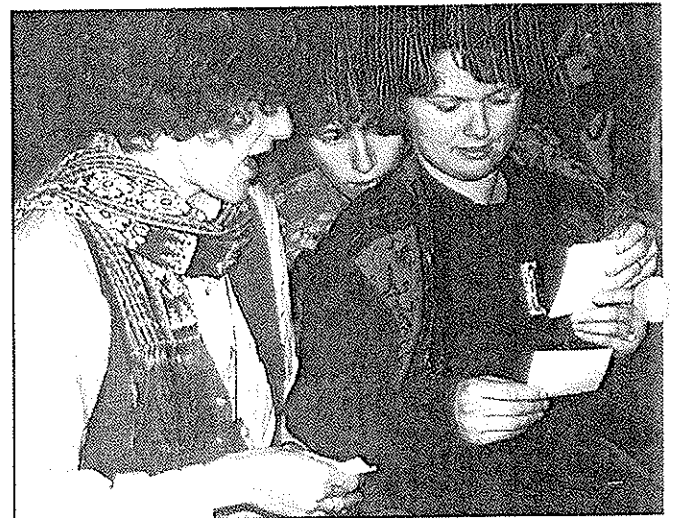
**OCTOBER 10, 1994**

# BUY A BOOK TO JOIN THE LIBRARY

**A**re you interested in **CONTRIBUTING A BOOK** rather than cash for your membership fee? **YOU CAN!** But there are one or two conditions. The only books that we can accept in place of membership fees will have to be purchased from the list of titles lodged with **THE FEMINIST BOOKSHOP** (see advertisement on **PAGE 9** for address details).

This list will contain titles that are required reading for women's studies courses, and this system will ensure that we do not receive multiple copies of some titles, and no copies of others. (As you can see, this works just like having a wedding list at David Jones!)

Simply bring your book, membership form and receipt to the library during opening hours, and we will be happy to process your membership on the spot.



WOMEN CHECKING OUT THE WISH LIST AT THE LAUNCH PARTY

## NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

**EDITOR** VICKI HARDING

**TYPING** DONITA SHADWICK

**LAYOUT** INGRID URH

# How The Women's Library Works

- You must become a member of THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY to be eligible to borrow books.
- MEMBERSHIP FEES per year are:
  - \$50 funded institutions
  - \$30 unfunded institutions and waged individuals
  - \$20 unwaged individuals
  - \$5 high school students
- LOAN PERIOD
  - Two weeks for all books except required Women's Studies texts, which can be borrowed for one week.
  - Disabled members or those living outside the Sydney metropolitan region are eligible for loans of four weeks (two weeks for required Women's Studies texts). These books can be sent to you, or better still, get a friend to pick them up for you.
- Members must lodge a \$10 deposit with us before borrowing. This deposit is retained by THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY if a book is not returned or is returned damaged. It may also be retained if a book becomes very overdue.
- This deposit is held by THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY until you are no longer a member. Members who have done volunteer work for the library on a number of occasions (active members) are exempt from this deposit.
- Serials, magazines, journals and reference materials cannot be borrowed, but may be read in the library. We have a photocopier for the use of members.
- Members can borrow up to three books at once.
- Loans may be renewed by person or by phone, unless the books are on reserve or very overdue.

## HUGE GARAGE SALE

The Women's Library is holding a **huge garage sale** to raise funds to improve the collection and services already available.

### DATE

Saturday, 3 September

### TIME

From 9am onwards

### PLACE

The Women's Library  
73 Garden St Alexandria

If you have any old furniture, books, clothes and bric-a-brac you would like to donate to the sale, please contact the library on **319 0529** or

Wendy Holz on **569 7730**  
If you would like to help out with organising the sale, please contact Wendy on either of the above numbers.



**SHOP 14, BRONKA ARCADE**  
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**SYDNEY NSW 2022**  
**PHONE (02) 389 1683**  
**FAX (02) 387 8231**

## THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY RAFFLE RESULTS

We are pleased to announce that The Women's Library raffle raised approximately \$1,500 for the library. Thanks to all who sold tickets and thanks to the businesses who donated prizes (their advertisements appear in this, the last, or the next issue of our newsletter).

The winners were:

- 1st (6 mths membership to Newtown Gym) – Inner West Vet Hospital
- 2nd (A tour for 2 to the value of \$190 with BreakOut Tours) – P. Finlay
- 3rd (Books from the Library Shop, The State Library) – Judith Cobb
- 4th (\$100 voucher from Downbeat Music) – Judy Howe
- 5th (2 tickets to Hamlet at Belvoir Street Theatre) – Allie
- 6th (Voucher from Oggi Haircutters) – Lorraine Reynolds

# THANK YOU!

## THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY

### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

CONVENOR - Vicki Harding  
TREASURER - Ellen Shenfield  
SECRETARY - Natalya Lusty  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS - Anne Jones,  
Mary O'Brien, Wendy Holz,  
Anneliese French, Suzanne Delaney,  
Victoria Hunt, Helen Garnaut

### PUBLICITY SUB-COMMITTEE

CO-ORDINATOR - Victoria Hunt  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS - Joanna  
Syriatowicz, Nicole Moore,  
Annabelle Lukin

### LIBRARY SYSTEMS WORKING GROUP

CO-ORDINATOR - Wendy Holz  
GROUP MEMBERS - Anne Jones,  
Helen Garnaut, Mary O'Brien,  
Samantha Beaty, Jo Alley, Anne  
Hocking, Annie Bonney, Lesley  
Watson

### DESKTOP PUBLISHING

NEWSLETTER AND BROCHURE  
DESIGN AND LAYOUT - Ingrid Urh  
OTHER DESKTOP PUBLISHING -  
Monika Jansch, Alana Logan  
NEW LOGO - Victoria Hunt and  
Antonia Pesenti  
POSTCARD DESIGN - Gabrielle

### EQUIPMENT DONATIONS

PHOTOCOPIER - Marion Centre  
Women's Refuge  
MICROFICHE READER/PRINTER -  
Plather Exploration Ltd

### COLLATION OF REQUIRED READING LISTS

Suzanne Fraser, Deb Worsley-Pine

### WORKING BEES, MAILOUTS AND MEETINGS

The Women's Library Committee members and Annabelle Lukin, Anna, Annie Holstock, Carmel, Caroline, Caz, Di Yerbury, Eva Cox, Evelyn Synnott, Fiona Kerr, Joanne Roddis, Karen Davis, Karen Dubb, Katharine Sale, Maritsa Karamina, Nicola O'Shea, Pearle Clustre, Simone Ford, Sue Chalmers, Sue Kucharova, Trish, and Ximena Quiñones-Géldrez

## STAFFING

The Women's Library Committee members and Angela Sokialis, Anna Fitzpatrick, Bernie Sheehan, Diana, Evelyn Synnott, Gabrielle Cleeland, Gillian Little, Janine Garrier, Jen Bliss, Jennifer Russell, Joanne Roddis, Julie Savage, Karen Davis, Lesley Watson, Melinda Conry, Nicola O'Shea, Nicole Moore, Paula Major, Samantha Beaty, Simone Ford, Tamaris Cameron, Thea Corbett

## THE LAUNCH PARTY

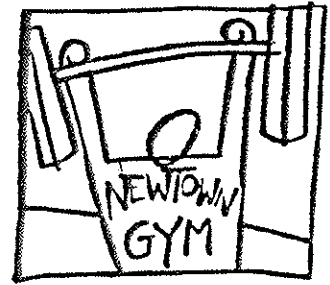
The Women's Library Committee members and Alana Logan, Alex Smith, Amanda Thompson, Angela Pink, Anna Couani, Anne Hocking, Brandon Cavallari, Catherine Fargher, Celia White, Cindy and That Girl Group, Clare, Debra Anthonisz, Dianne Payne, Finn Drury, Fiona Kerr, Fiona Munro, Fiona Power, Ingrid Urh, Ivone Curto, Jade Snow-Kemety, Judith Greenaway, Janelle Mussared, Jeanne Ellard, Jennifer Bliss, Jessup Watson-Brown, Jo Northey, Joanna Syriatowicz, Joanne Frare, Karen Davis, Karen Smith, Kerry Cheers, Kym Hodder, Lesley Watson, Lisa, Magda Szubanski, Marele Day, Mignon, Nicola O'Shea, Nicole Moore, Pauline McLeod, Rosemary Moon, Samantha Beaty, Samantha Leith, Sherri Hilario, Susie Wickes, Ximena Quiñones-Géldrez

## LAUNCH PARTY SPONSORS

The Bookshop - Newtown, Café Blue, The Craven, The Feminist Bookshop, Frito-Lay Australia, Gleebooks, Green Iguana, Hahn, KFC, Marlborough Hotel - Newtown, Oddbins, Schweppes Drinks, South Sydney Council, Spanish Deli Café, Spring Valley, Steppin' Out, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Workshop, Thai Thai, The White Cockatoo - Petersham

## DECORATION OF KID'S ROOM

Rosemary Kent and the children of Waterloo Public School



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Mon to Sat **6am - 10pm**

Sun **8am - 6pm**

## Positive Women FUNDRAISER

**SEPTEMBER 1994**

Early in September a set of 1920's Art Deco woodcuts will be sold by a bidding process as a fundraiser organised by the **WOMEN'S AIDS PROJECT, ACON** for Positive Women (NSW). The bidding opens with an exhibition of the woodcuts, which are erotic images of women, and have been donated by a Belgian artist.

### VENUE

The Bare Gallery, Newtown

### DETAILS

Contact **SHAN SHORT** for further information, or to receive an invitation: **(02) 206 2049** or **(02) 206 2054**

Tuesday to Thursday

# Women's Library LAUNCH PARTY

If you didn't go to The Women's Library launch party then you'll just have to read about it. But be warned that once you read about it you will wish even more that you had been there.

The night saw hundreds of women gather at Alexandria Town Hall all eager to view for the first time The Women's Library in its finished state.

Judging by the excited cries of delight and awe with frequent comments such as 'Wow! It's a real library' being echoed through the corridors, the committee and all those who have been actively involved were feeling very proud and very very relieved.

With the hall filled to capacity, the night's entertainment included a reading by Marele Day (a snippet from her yet-to-be-released novel, to tempt all those Claudia Valentine fans) and Anna Couani's personal and humorous response to the women's movement – its high points and its ironies.

Pauline McLeod had the audience enthralled with her animated story of Brulga the dancing bird and what happens when a girl breaks the rules. Also exploring the theme of transgression was the multi-media performance written and performed by Catherine Fargher with Susie Wickes, Celia White and Fiona Munro.

With plenty of food and drink to replenish the culturally overloaded audience, the evening was crowned by the presence of the queen of comedy, Magda Szubanski, who warned us of the dos and don'ts of "feminine protection" (don't leave home without it!).

The launch itself was the highlight of the night with the eloquent duo, Anne Deveson and Dale Spender delivering speeches of congratulations before cutting that red ribbon which declared the library officially open. From then on it was champagne and much merrymaking until we all staggered home weary but jubilant.

NATALYA LUSTY



SNOOPY 77 PERFORMING AT THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY LAUNCH PARTY



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DISCOUNT LOCAL and OVERSEAS TRAVEL to members  
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Each booking will gain a commission for The Women's Library

## The Women's Library Aims TO HOUSE...

*A comprehensive range of feminist and lesbian novels, texts, journals and magazines, and in particular to house all Australian lesbian books and magazines*

*All required reading for tertiary courses in Sydney that focus on women's issues*

*The works of Aboriginal women and women of non-English speaking backgrounds writing in Australia*

*A collection relevant to women of non-English speaking backgrounds*

*To provide a comfortable and accessible space for borrowing, reading and relaxing*

*To act as a local women's resource centre*

*To provide a children's room with a range of great children's books*

# 6th International Feminist Bookfair

**N**atalya Lusty and I have recently returned from Melbourne where we attended the 6th IFBF from 27th to 31st July. We were delighted with the enormous interest shown in The Women's Library by all who stopped by at the stand.

If our conversations with many women from all over Australia come to fruition, 5 years down the line I'm sure we'll see a Women's Library in every capital city. We were the envy of many, and congratulations came from all around.

Armed with stationery to die for (proudly sporting the new TWL logo), sample bags and loads of enthusiasm, we were able to meet many publishers, distributors, authors, booksellers, media personnel and representatives of community groups to introduce the library, negotiate possible donations, subscriptions and exchanges and tell the story of the library's foundation. Our new postcards and bookmarks were very popular, as were the sample bags which have gone to homes worldwide.

The theme of this fair, which is a bi-annual event, was *'Indigenous, Asian and Pacific writing and publishing'*. About 20,000 visitors (mainly women) from all over the world

converged on Melbourne; the 7th IFBF will be held in Brazil in 1996 – I'm saving my pennies already.

It was most valuable to be able to establish contacts with women and groups from all over Australia and overseas. And being in the right place at the right time when the fair was packing up, we were able to secure about 15 boxes of books and magazines 'hot off the press', as well as many interesting brochures, catalogues etc...there's even a new-style tarot set produced by two New Zealand women who had a stand close by.

As I write whilst in the library, I have been visited by two women from Barcelona who publish a newsletter, 'Laberint', for Spanish-speaking lesbians, which will now be received in the library in exchange for our own newsletter. I think we can expect many such contacts as a result of our attendance at the fair.

TWL is most grateful for the generous support of Gleebooks, and in particular Anneliese French, who arranged prominent exposure for TWL – being surrounded by their generous display of women's titles was just like being at home!

MARY O'BRIEN

## DIVERSIFYING THE COLLECTION AND USERS OF THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY

**O**n 2nd July, an initial meeting was held where fifteen women came together to discuss ways in which the library can effectively involve and represent Aboriginal women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds in the library process and collection.

As a result of the meeting, books by and about Aboriginal women will be kept separately for ease of access. Some members of the group will also work toward finding sponsorship to build up this part of the collection.

Also discussed was the need to house relevant books in languages other than English. In order to do this we need to find bilingual women who have contacts with international publishers, so that we can locate and obtain appropriate books. This project will be a long term one, focussing on one language at a time. Please don't hesitate to contact the library if you have relevant skills that you are willing to offer.

Other ideas include establishing a collection of unpublished manuscripts, setting up an audio-visual

collection, running a writing project and holding launches. Obviously the library is restrained by lack of funding and consequently we are dependent on the initiative of volunteers to set up and run projects.

As a result of this meeting, and others that are to follow, we hope to seek out interested Koori women and women of non-English speaking backgrounds to become involved. Please call **VICKI** on **319 0529** if you are interested.

**DYKE ENERGY**

*Moving?*

Ute and driver/lifter

\$35 per hour (including petrol)

PHONE JUDITH

**018 981 837**

# Crimes of Violence

## FOCUSING THE BLAME

As the 'International Year of the Family' takes the spotlight, it seems we may be ignoring the crimes and shames that lurk in its shadow.

In her book 'Crimes of Violence: Australian responses to rape and child sexual assault', JAN BRECKENRIDGE brings to light the messages we don't really want to hear. As a lecturer in contemporary social theory, she finds that the public response to issues such as sexual assault is too often a preference to be left in the dark.

"People don't want to know. It makes them feel too unsafe and it threatens their ideals about the sanctity of the family," says Jan. "If you threaten the 2.2 children and the nuclear family unit, that message becomes misconstrued and you are considered a heretic."

It seems that our society is particularly good at misconstruing messages. On one hand we publicly say we think child sexual assault is disgusting but, when faced with the reality, we often dismiss the responsibility of the offender. The offender is made invisible.

According to Jan, there are many myths which make this process possible. Firstly, we are now experiencing a backlash in the demand for community services, which has turned the focus from the needs of the victim to those of the offender. This counters the extraordinary progress made in New South Wales between 1984 and 1988 in the standard of service for survivors. Whilst help for offenders is obviously important, it should surely not be at the expense of survivors.

Furthermore, legislation around child sexual assault is one of the few sets of legislation still to be gender neutral. There is currently a trend to subsume child sexual violence under the term 'child abuse', which hides



JAN BRECKENRIDGE, bringing to light the invisible offender and the culture which hides him

gender differences and the different dynamics involved in child sexual assault. Whereas offenders of child emotional abuse, physical abuse and neglect are split between men and women, with sexual offenders the majority is still male.

"Just saying there are power relations doesn't necessarily mean they're good or bad but what is characteristic of patriarchal societies is the use of sexual means to exhibit or claim power," says Jan. "I don't think it's possible to remove rape and incest from that patriarchal system."

Being a systemic problem, it requires more than just looking at individual cases of rape or child sexual assault. What needs to be examined is the way people have historically understood the relationships between men, women and children in terms of sexual ownership.

The way women are located in this context is that they're either dismissed as being absolutely unimportant or given enormous power, by virtue that they should have stopped it or known better. Once again, a shift of blame.

Jan says women can be blamed in a number of ways – mothers in particular. "You've only got to look at some of the attitudinal stuff that's coming up with magistrates and judges about women in relation to sexual crimes. There is still the concept that women, if they were being good, should have known."

She believes that people just don't know how to respond to rape and child sexual violence. There is insufficient ongoing supervision of the Department of Community Services; there is insufficient ongoing supervision of the police; and there are insufficient conferences for child sexual assault where experience can be shared.

This means that, on the whole, there is insufficient accountability. And a lack of specialist services then leads to a lack of specialist responses. People either deny the occurrence or minimise the significance.

Before 'Crimes of Violence', very little literature had even been written about rape and child sexual assault from a specifically Australian perspective. This book combines a whole range of different voices – workers in the field, people in research, women who have been raped – all talking about their experiences. It is an attempt to get some dialogue going about being more responsive, both to research needs and service provision.

Jan Breckenridge reminds us that with child sexual assault it is difficult to determine an absolute truth; only dominant discourses, institutions and power relationships at the time, from which we come up with what seems to be knowledge. Hence the importance of hearing the various voices and of seeing the faces behind the myths.

"It is about gender and it is still a political issue," Jan says. While we are busy celebrating the family and its merits this year, let us not forget that.

RACHAEL TURK



# 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 or the author. Thank you to the following publishers, authors and reviewers for your support.

**THE FALLING WOMAN**  
SUSAN HAWTHORNE  
SPINIFEX, MELBOURNE, 1992

This book tells the story of a woman who is conjured in three ways. There is the life journey of Stella through childhood and adolescence to womanhood; there is the camping holiday of Estella and her lover Olga as they journey deep into the heart of outback Australia; and there is the spiritual journey of Estelle to confront the very nature of feminine being.

The interleaving of these stories occurs in both first and third person and although initially disconcerting because of the shifts in narrator and mood, the deftness of the writing compensates for this.

The more linear narrative of the Stella section was more engaging, whilst the depiction of the relationship of Stella and Olga lacked substance and remained too shadowy and loosely defined for this reviewer's satisfaction. It was however, the mythopoetic story of Estelle that was too taxing to sustain an unflagging interest. Those who stay with the book though, will find many delights.

Susan Hawthorne has devised a book of great scope, imagination and ambition, and **THE FALLING WOMAN** is consequently a challenging book to read. The writer's erudition makes for an enlightened journey for the reader herself. For example, it charts with great compassion and clarity the nature of epilepsy and its enveloping effects.

I felt great empathy for the falling woman and wondered how the story would end. It does in a most unusual but surprisingly satisfying way. This is a book that entertains as well as informs.

PAMELA LEWIS

**UNLEASHING FEMINISM - CRITIQUING LESBIAN  
SADOMASOCHISM IN THE GAY NINETIES**  
ED. IRENE RETI  
HERBOOKS, USA, 1994

When I was asked to review this book I immediately thought "OH NO! Not a book on sadomasochism. I've already read all about that. Why can't they send me something interesting, like a lesbian detective novel, for a change?"

Being a dutiful reviewer I nonetheless proceeded to read this collection of radical feminist writings and found myself getting absorbed and challenged. It proved to be much more than a mere critique of sadomasochism.

The quality of writing and analysis is very high and together they give an insight into the tenor of our time. Often when we are caught up with day to day life we lose perspective on the broader trends of the era we are in and

can only see, in hindsight, the flavour of the 60s or 20s. This book lets us know what is happening in the 90s and what the implications might be.

The collection consists of seven contributions which range from long theoretical pieces to poetry and short stories. Contrary to expectation they are not merely diatribes against sadomasochism but well reasoned observations which include a critique of how power differentials also operate in the relationships of anti-SM lesbians.

In Anna Livia's creative contribution, a lesbian humiliated by her right-on lover realises, "*Thank heavens for sado-masochists, without them I never would have known that you could consent to humiliation and therefore...withhold consent.*"

The major essay by Kathy Miriam reveals the change lesbian SM ideology has undergone from claiming to be a form of feminism to being actively anti-feminist. Going beyond critique she suggests how feminism, which is dangerously under attack by the Gayly Queer agents of the patriarchy, might revitalise and re-politicise itself.

Similarly D.A. Clarke, who used to be a Gay Pride organiser, explains that she has dropped out of the Gay community "*whose culture is dominated by gay male traditions and aesthetics, (and) is identifying itself with the sex industry*".

Clarke abhors the hypocrisy which upholds the rights of free speech to glorify the torture and humiliation of women (surely a standard feature of patriarchy rather than the rebellion it is painted to be) and yet advocates the gagging of anti-gay forces.

SM is not, she points out, a trendy style amongst youth which will pass. "*It is a long cultural tradition in the industrialised West*". Irene Reti develops this perspective further in her contribution as a Jewish daughter of Nazi holocaust survivors.

**UNLEASHING FEMINISM** reveals how the 'War Against Feminism' has penetrated our very midst and warns us to be wary. It is a valuable contribution to lesbian feminist debate and a good read. Feminists who are still dedicated to eliminating the agonising pain of women's oppression will be heartened by its insights while the 'stylish' 90's lesbians may be given pause for thought - if they put down their sex toys catalogue long enough to read it.

CHRIS SITKA

**NO MATTER WHAT**  
MARY SARACINO  
SPINSTERS INK, MINNEAPOLIS, 1993

The ten-year-old narrator in this novel of a working class Catholic family falling apart is Peanut, the oldest daughter and her mother's confidante. "*Long ago*", the novel begins, "*I made a promise to love my mother with all my heart and soul. No matter what.*"

Peanut does love her mother, even when that mother is less than lovable and the reader wants to kick her arse.

Mama is having an affair with a priest and plans to run away with him, taking her young daughters but not her older sons. Her departure is always possible and everyone is aware of it. The strain of this constant possibility divides the family even more, perhaps, than the action itself.

It is the strength of this at times seering account of family breakdown that we never entirely lose sympathy for Mama, despite what she puts her children through. They are put through too much, especially poor Peanut, who is not only her mother's confidante but also her skivvy and child-minder.

The husband is a boor who communicates only with God. The priest may turn out to be not much better, but at least he is a change and his manners are better. One is constantly aware of the trap of motherhood, poverty and ill-education that has caught Maria and it is because of this that one doesn't really blame her for grabbing something better, even if it turns out to be an illusion.

The book sometimes seems overlong; the same scenes repeat themselves. But that is the point, really: for the children, like a nightmare that will never end, at least not until Mama makes her decision. When she finally does, one senses that Peanut will survive. But what of the sons?

ANNE COOMBS

#### WE SAY WE LOVE EACH OTHER

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

SPINSTERS/AUNT LUTE. SAN FRANCISCO. 1985

If you have ever wondered if there is such a thing as good lesbian poetry, the answer is yes. WE SAY WE LOVE EACH OTHER is a collection of measured yet passionate poems in which Minnie Bruce Pratt traces all that she has known of the forms and distortions of love between women, from mother to lover to self.

I once heard a story about Minnie Bruce, about how she always writes on a manual typewriter because that way she doesn't have to worry about the possibility of power failure, of being unable to get her words onto paper just the way she wants them.

I don't know if I believe that story exactly, because to me her poems read like they are written in stone, carved in granite. Each one is a monument to a woman she has known or an experience she has shared.

Loss, lust, rage, joy, peaches and an old torn shirt, Pratt writes the stuff of her life and more often than not I found that it was the stuff of my life too. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

LUCY TATMAN

#### KISS & TELL

ROBBI SOMMERS

THE NAIAD PRESS, FLORIDA, 1991

"I want it all - a bad girl, a rebel girl, a sweet girl, a good girl, a wild-haired femme, a tough-assed butch - I want it all", writes Robbi Sommers by way of introduction to this collection of raunchy lesbian tell-all stories. Sommers, author of the best-selling PLEASURES AND PLAYERS, is certainly not lacking in imagination and she writes a good tight story when it comes to lesbian erotica.

The fourteen stories in KISS & TELL are so diverse in content and context that I would be surprised if there wasn't something to 'please' every dyke amongst them;

from Marla who'll do anything to get into med school, to Marci who discovers that a visit to the dentist isn't always bad, to Frances who celebrates her 40th birthday in style, to the biker gang who are more than happy to fulfil a cashmere clad gal's wildest fantasies...

In these 'sex war' years where dykes, lesbians, butches, femmes, gay women, feminists (just to name a few!) have very different opinions as to what constitutes 'good' lesbian sex, it's rare to find a woman who will publicly sit on the fence and non-judgementally juggle the lot - but Robbi Sommers manages (or chooses) to do just that.

You'll find a range of sexual practices from vanilla to SM and most things in between on the pages of KISS & TELL. Sommers would have us believe that the stories are the result of 'relentless research' on her part rather than mere imagination - I'll leave that judgement up to the individual...

JUDITH ION

#### GIVE ME YOUR GOOD EAR

MAUREEN BRADY

SPINSTERS INK, MINNEAPOLIS, 1994

This novel is the story of the main character's struggle to break from a destructive relationship in her adulthood. She does this by making connections to her childhood, her relationship with her mother and her memories of her father, including the circumstances surrounding his death.


Her father was an alcoholic and her present relationship is with an emotionally dependent hypochondriacal male. He uses emotional manipulation to control her and to deny her the right to her own emotional responses.

The story is about how she connects his behaviour with her father's and discovers how she learned to relate to men. The novel is about the beginning of the process of identifying that she wants something different from her life than what she was taught to want.

I found the writing style annoyingly simplistic, especially as the author, Maureen Brady, is a teacher of creative writing. The final confrontation between the main character and her mother, which the reader waits for from chapter four, is disappointingly written.

The novel is written in a very naturalistic style. I found sections interesting, but the flatness of the style repeatedly bored me until I lost interest. I wouldn't have continued reading it, except for necessity to write this review.

JENNIFER RUSSELL



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## ABSTRACTLY REPRESENTED

HAZEL SMITH

BUTTERFLY BOOKS, NSW, 1991

DONATED BY THE AUTHOR

My previous experiences with poetry have been limited to limericks and romantic poets studied in high school, so I found Hazel Smith's, *ABSTRACTLY REPRESENTED*, an interesting experience.

The title is very appropriate as there is a lot of variety represented within the book. While not all the poetry and performance texts are my cup of tea, I did find this book fascinating as a documented journey through Smith's life.

Smith has divided her poems into a number of sections. However, I found the first sections, her later work, rather self-indulgent.

The poet is writing for herself and admits this in her preface, "*I usually start to write not so much because I have a particular subject I need to write about, but because I have an urge to manipulate words in new ways*" (p v).

Bearing this comment in mind, the poet's experiments with rhythm and movement become an exciting journey of words. Smith uses words that flow well with interesting syncopation. She is conscious of the mechanics of poetry writing which is evident in 'Lifestyled', where poetry itself is discussed and manipulated.

Smith has experimented with many different styles of poetry and especially with sound. It becomes evident that sound rather than meaning has become more important to Smith. Her use of alliteration and assonance in 'Texts Weave World Tomb' is rather awe-inspiring.

It would be interesting to see the performance texts actually performed, as I feel a lot has been lost in their translation to paper. To her credit, Smith gives detailed instructions on how these texts are to be performed.

However, it is the last section of the book that captured my interest – Smith's earlier poems (1982–1984). These poems are far more aggressive and punchy. They are high in allusion and readily identifiable images. In short I found these earlier poems a lot more accessible.

*ABSTRACTLY REPRESENTED* is a book of one poet's experiments and makes an interesting read to see how poetry, words, rhythm and sound can be explored. While I do not necessarily appreciate the poetry Smith eventually grew into, I do appreciate the fact that she was prepared to expand and explore as a poet. This book is a documentation of that growth.

VICKI BATES

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## UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

CLAIRE MCNAB

THE NAIAD PRESS, FLORIDA, 1992

A lesbian novel set in Australia! And by Claire McNab – the author of the tightly woven Detective Carol Ashton mysteries. A combination not to be missed, or so I thought until I actually read *UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS*...

Like most Aussie dykes I am starved of good lesbian fiction which is actually set in Australia. I don't know why this dearth exists, but it does. Certainly it is not due to a lack of talented Australian writers. And yes this is a plea to them!

So what exactly do I mean by 'good lesbian fiction'? Well, I don't have a particularly high 'academic' standard when it comes to fiction and I am the first to admit to a partiality for good mindless 'trash' every now and then, but I do draw the line at lesbianised 'Mills & Boon'.

In my opinion *UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS* either falls beyond or is suspiciously close to such a line. I like a story in which I can relate to the characters, believe in them and even come to like them. As a lesbian and a feminist I expect more from a lesbian plot than 'closeted career woman meets out lesbian equals anguish, vanilla passion and happily ever after'.

As for the Australian setting, I would have been more convinced if I'd read such descriptions of Ayers Rock (Uluru), Alice Springs, the Great Barrier Reef and Cape Tribulation in travel brochures – at least then I would be expecting embellishment!

The combination of *THE WELL OF LONELINESS* and *DESERT HEARTS* which McNab has woven in *UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS* is just not my cup of tea. It will however appeal to die-hard romantics, especially those who haven't worked out that it's 1994!

Would just a sprinkling of feminist politics (or even just a realistic portrayal of lesbian relationships) be asking too much?

JUDITH ION

*The views and opinions expressed in these reviews are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the views of The Women's Library committee or individual committee members.*

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- 6th International Feminist Bookfair News
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