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The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Edited by Brent L. Kendrick

(Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985)

by Josephine Donovan, Portsmith, New Hampshire.

The fictional world of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) is peopled by militant, beleaguered women who live on the margins, are reduced to the most meager of material and emotional circumstances, yet tenaciously – often obsessively – affirm their small portion. Powers are at work, however–patriarchs who are bent on ripping these women from their rooted plots, obliterating their precious bowers. Nevertheless, the women in Freeman's work attempt desperately and sometimes violently to preserve their sphere.

In "The Balsam Fir" (1901), for example, Martha Elder, a bitter spinster who had a "strong . . . spirit of rebellion against the smallness of her dole," is compared to a "caged panther." Cheated of life's bounty, her one joy is a magnificent balsam fir tree that grows in her yard. One day, just before Christmas, a man begins chopping it down. Martha races out, grabs the axe, waves it over his head, and threatens to kill him if he touches the tree. This experience not only leads Martha to appreciate her own world more, it also opens her up to another woman with whom she then decides to live.

Several Freeman stories are similarly concerned with women who rebel, who assert their rights over a particular place. The best known of these is "The Revolt of 'Mother'" (1890) in which a wife defies her husband by turning a freshly constructed barn into the new home she had long been promised. In "A Church Mouse" (1891) a homeless woman successfully lays claim to a loft in the town meetinghouse by means of a "sit-in," or rather a "lie-in," for she secretly moves in her bed and a stove. The support of the town women makes her protest successful. "A Village Singer" (1891) is another story that involves nonviolent protest.

"Christmas Jenny" (1891), a wonderful story that deserves the status of classic, similarly plots the women of the town against its patriarchs, who have concluded that Jenny Wrayne, a local eccentric, is a witch because of her "uncanny deviation from the ordinary." Jenny is in fact one of those rural matriarchs whose potencies inspirit the literature of the New England local colorists Sarah Orne Jewett, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Rose Terry Cooke. Jenny lives in the woods tending animals who have been injured by hunters and trappers. Her realm is the Dianic, green-world, interspecies wilderness so celebrated in local color writing (1). The town women save Jenny from the men's witch-hunt, allowing her to remain at peace.

In other stories the accent is more on the pathos of failure or on the ambivalence of success, as in the celebrated "New England Nun" (1887) where Louisa Ellis successfully preserves her sanctuary against a male suitor-intruder; but the price, the author implies, is confinement to a narrow and limited sphere. In these stories the stress is upon the love the protagonist feels for the particulars of her environment and the pain she experiences when threatened with removal. A mystical inversion seems to take place: the more paltry the circumstances, the more intense the spiritual exaltation.

In "Brakes and White Vi'lets" (1887) a seventy-year old spinster, Marm Lawson, is torn between loss of her beloved home and loss of her cherished granddaughter when the child's father, another patriarchal intruder, destroyer of women's love and ritual, declares that Marm's house is not suitable for his daughter. Marm, therefore, has the choice of remaining in her home without the girl or living in his house – alien territory – with her.

When she decides reluctantly on the latter course, she asks that roots of her favorite "white vi'lets an' some brakes" be transported with her. But, of course, she dies before the move can be accomplished. The pain in this story, as in many of Freeman's works, is palpable, made all the more intense by Freeman's laconic, unsentimental style.

The underlying mythic reality expressed in much of Freeman's fiction – providing its subtext – is the historical confrontation that occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century between the rural, green-world matriarchs and encroaching patriarchal-industrial imperialism. Freeman's women are defending their female world, its animals and vegetation, against the destructive hegemony being cast at the turn of the century. Perhaps the archetypal story expressing this conflict is Sarah Orne Jewett's "White Heron" (1886) in which the young girl protects a wild bird from a male ornithologist (modern science is, of course, an important aspect of patriarchal ideological hegemony) who wishes to kill the creature and stuff it for his collection.

Perhaps the most powerful of Freeman's stories – and the most significant in the context of women's literary traditions – are those that deal with mothers who are trying to hold onto their daughters, to keep these "new women" from assimilating into patriarchal traditions. "Old Woman Magoun" (1905), the most celebrated, exemplifies the type. Here a grandmother is faced with a situation similar to Marm Lawson's in "Brakes and White Vi'lets," only the dilemma is more acute. Grandmother Magoun has raised her granddaughter from infancy. When the girl approaches puberty her father comes to claim her. The grandmother believes he is going to sell her into prostitution. In order to prevent this fate, the old matriarch uses her herbal knowledge perversely, allowing the girl to eat the poisonous berries of the deadly nightshade. As the girl dies, the old woman projects that she will meet her mother in heaven and that the female sanctuary will thereby be preserved.

In "Evelina's Garden" (1896) an older woman representative of the mothers', generation similarly attempts to keep a daughter-niece at home through a will that prohibits her from marrying. The only way the girl can break this clause is by violating another term of the will – that she perpetuate the older woman's garden. In a symbolic gesture that holds mythic significance, the young Evelina pulls up all the plants by the roots and pours boiling water and salt on them. By destroying her mother's garden – the green-world bower of the nineteenth- century women's community – Evelina can marry, and go over to the other side, can assimilate into patriarchy. In this symbolic story Freeman recorded the destruction of the nineteenth-century rural matriarchy.

Not only is Freeman a key figure in women's literary traditions, she is one of a dozen or so great writers this country has produced. Her critical and popular neglect, therefore, evokes the same kind of pain as some of her stories. One is maddened by the injustice.

The Infant Sphinx: Collected Letters of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, edited by Brent L. Kendrick, is the first book on Freeman to appear in nearly twenty years. Perry D. Westbrook's Mary Wilkins Freeman (New York: Twayne, 1967) and Edward Foster's Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (New York: Hendricks House, 1956) are the only available biographical/literary studies, and they, while still useful, are obviously out of date and uninformed by the new feminist scholarship. There are still no primary or secondary bibliographies, although it is my understanding that Kendrick is at work on the latter and Philip B. Eppard on the former. These will, of course, facilitate study considerably.

The Collected Letters includes 517 letters dated from 1875 when Freeman was twenty-three to 1930 when she was seventy-seven and near death. Freeman's first published adult story appeared in 1882. Largely because of economic necessity, she was a prolific writer. In her lifetime, she

produced twenty-two volumes of short stories and essays, over fifty uncollected stories, fourteen novels, three volumes of poetry, three plays, and one filmscript. By the late 1940's all her work was out of print. Happily, the women's movement has sparked some renewed interest; numerous reprints have appeared in the past two decades.

The letters that appear in this volume comprise all the extant correspondence, according to Kendrick who conducted a thorough search. Most are letters to publishers and editors about the mechanics of publication; some are insignificant letters in response to fans' requests for autographs or pictures. There are unfortunately few personal letters and few that include aesthetic or critical statements. The value of this work lies principally in the voluminous notes Kendrick has provided, in the new biographical information he has elicited through obviously painstaking research, and in the previously unavailable bibliographical information about numerous Freeman stories, many of whose first dates of publication are provided here for the first time. In this sense the work is impressive, a valuable addition to Freeman scholarship.

Kendrick's introductions are, however, weakened by his lack of knowledge of feminist scholarship, and his use of stereotypical notions to explain Freeman's character. Even such basic sources as Smith-Rosenburg and Faderman (2) are not cited to explain Freeman's relationships with various women friends. In speculating on Freeman's "feminine" personality, Kendrick refers mainly to her looks (her "daintiness," her "delicate," "doll-like beauty"), the fact that she occasionally mentions clothes, and her "vanity." To stress the delicacy and daintiness of the author of Pembroke is about as relevant and useful as it would be to make the same points about the author of Crime and Punishment.

In fact, Freeman's few autobiographical comments suggest a personality that was far from "delicate" and "dainty." In a letter probably written in the summer of 1892, Freeman observes of her photo: "I have tried very hard to look cheerful, but I should have enjoyed 'making a face' much more. You think I am modest, but I am not. I am vicious." In an unpublished autobiographical story cited in Foster, Freeman noted: "I am a graft on the tree of human womanhood. I am a hybrid. Sometimes I think I am a monster, and the worst of it is, I certainly take pleasure in it." These assertions suggest a more problematic attitude toward conventional notions of feminine identity than Kendrick's comments allow. He also uses annoyingly sexist diction: "the reader . . . he."

Nevertheless, there are some useful items in this work. For example, there is a letter to Jewett, 12 August 1889, in which Freeman expresses admiration: "I never wrote any story equal to your 'White Heron.' I don't think I ever read a short story, unless I except Tolstoi's ('Three Deaths') that so appealed to me. I would not have given up that bird any more than you...."

In a 1916 letter she observed how much she liked her own "Old Woman Magoun" and wondered that it was "not much praised." In emotional terms to Mary Louise Booth, her first editor at Harper's Bazaar and an important mentor, she described a "poor old dog, who had been chained thirteen years." This incident clearly found fictional recreation in "A New England Nun," and the intensity of Freeman's reaction helps to interpret that story.

There are several letters about one of Freeman's most extraordinary stories, "The Long Arm" (1895), in which the older woman of a lesbian couple murders the suitor of the younger partner. The story idea was evidently Freeman's but she collaborated in some respects with Joseph Chamberlain who is sometimes listed as coauthor. Apparently, his idea was to provide an answer to the Lizzie Borden mystery. That murder had occurred in 1892 and the trial in 1893. But there was another sensational murder in 1892 – that by Alice Mitchell of her beloved, Freda Ward – which has more parallels to "The Long Arm." Faderman suggests it indeed is the source for Freeman's story. Freeman later discouraged

serious interpretation of the story, saying such speculation "terrified" her, and she stipulated that its events were "strictly fictitious."

Freeman was in fact one of the first authors to explicitly address lesbianism in her work: this in her novel The Shoulders of Atlas (1908), which concerns a mother-daughter connection that reaches lesbian intensity. Lesbianism also figures in The Portion of Labor (1901) and By the Light of the Soul (1907), the latter considered Freeman's most autobiographical work. It remains unclear, however, whether Freeman was simply catering in these works to the popular interest in sexology that had quickened in the latter 1800's, or if her fictional treatment was rooted in her life. Unfortunately, the current volume sheds little light on the matter.

The other letters in this collection that are of particular value are those to Hamlin Garland in which she makes sketchy theoretical comments and to Fred Lewis Pattee in which she discusses influences on her work (she denies there were any).

Unfortunately, however, despite its value, the collection leaves one with a sense of silences. Most of her personal letters were destroyed either deliberately or through negligence. There are no letters to her husband whom she married at the age of forty-nine. And no letters survive to her most intimate woman friend, Mary Elizabeth Wales, with whom she lived from 1883-1902. This is a great loss. Apparently, Wales willed her books and manuscripts (presumably including her letters) to Freeman's husband on her death in 1916. Why she endowed them to him, an alcoholic and half mad, and not to Freeman herself, who was still alive, is a mystery. In any event, the Freeman family was apparently cavalier about preserving Mary's effects; indeed all or most of her property was auctioned off at her death in 1930. This loss points up once again the warning sounded by Louise DeSalvo, in a letter to the Women's Review of Books in July, 1985, that those with valuable literary effects should take care not to will them to uncaring or too caring relatives. The latter, by controlling access to materials, can exert censorship.

Perhaps the most poignant comment among Freeman's remaining letters is one that she made late in her literary career: "I do know and have always known," she stated, "my accomplished work is not the best work of which I am capable, but it is too late now." Considering the extraordinary power of what she did produce, her "best work" would have been rare indeed.

1. Annis Pratt coined the term "green-world" in her Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981). See also Estella Lauter, Women as Mythmakers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984); Jane Marcus, "A Wilderness of One's Own," in Women Writers and the City, ed. Squier (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1984), and my "Mary E. Wilkins and the Tree of Knowledge," in New England Local Color Literature: A Women's Tradition (New York: Ungar, 1983).

2. Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," Signs 1 (1975) 27-55; Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men (New York: Morrow, 1981).

A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women. By Sarah Elbert

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984)

by Maria Goodchild, Department of English, Ohio University

Louisa May Alcott's novel Little Women has been recognized as a landmark in children's literature for many years. However, Little Women involves complex issues not always found in simple children's literature, issues which require analysis for a full appreciation of the book. Sarah Elbert's A Hunger for Home: Louisa May Alcott and Little Women demonstrates that Little Women evolved from Alcott's interest and participation in politics, education, and, most importantly, feminism. Elbert does not simply state, however, that feminism is the most important idea running through Alcott's work; she articulates the definition and history of feminism as it evolved in Alcott's time and pertained to her work and her life. Elbert does not limit her exploration to Little Women; she also interprets Alcott's earlier works, as well as those that came after. In addition, Elbert provides a comprehensive discussion of the important role Alcott's family played in the writing of Little Women.

A Hunger for Home begins with the birth of Alcott's parents who were fundamental to the development of Louisa's ideas and philosophies. Bronson Alcott was an educator and an advocate of transcendentalism, while Abigail May was a committed participant in the feminist struggle. Elbert shows the effect each had upon Louisa's thinking, from her first thoughts on domestic equality to her later, stronger ideas concerning sexual equality out of the home. For example, Elbert suggests that Alcott's feminism was sparked by her mother who found herself increasingly dissatisfied with woman's position, though she never ultimately questioned the "separate spheres" of men and women. Louisa came to believe, as Elbert says, "that a democratic household could evolve into a feminist society. In Little Women, she imagined that just such an evolution might begin with Plumfield, a nineteenth century feminist Utopia."

A Hunger for Home also addresses the work of other romantic innovators who were reforming education as well as redefining roles for women. Transcendentalism became a large part of this movement, as it "criticized the dominant materialist ideology, but remained optimistic about human perfectability." Alcott's father applied transcendental theory to education and raised Louisa accordingly. This learning atmosphere, with its emphasis on questioning and self-reliance, combined with her mother's growing dissatisfaction with the demand that women sacrifice themselves for their families, allowed Alcott early in life to form opinions that corresponded to and yet conflicted with those of her parents.

Criticism and interpretation of Little Women begins in the middle of the book. However, to dive immediately into these chapters is to deprive oneself of the many parallels Elbert draws earlier between Alcott's personal life and the story of Little Women itself. Elbert feels that Alcott's maturing feminism evolved from her experience in her family and her broader social environment, thus making these aspects of her life an integral part of her writing. The family in Little Women is modeled after Alcott's own family, yet is also vastly different from it. Elbert assists the reader to comprehend these differences by showing how characters in the story are altered in order to be realistic, yet thematically useful, especially in the statement of Alcott's feminism. Elbert's combination of historical data and straightforward, honest analysis, is successful throughout. A Hunger for Home is both a good source for the study of early feminism, as well as of Little Women and Louisa May Alcott.

Female Sexual Slavery. by Kathleen Barry

(New York: New York University Press, 1984)

Verta Taylor, Department of Sociology, The Ohio State University.

This is a reprint, with a new author's introduction, of a book originally published in 1979 by Prentice- Hall. When Female Sexual Slavery was first released, the evidence it presented about the widespread existence of international trafficking in women for the purposes of forced prostitution, what Barry refers to as female sexual slavery, surprised most readers. From an analysis of newspaper clippings, documents of a number of international organizations, interviews, and personal observations, Kathleen Barry draws a bleak picture which includes practices such as slave auctions of women in Zanzibar in which most of the purchasers are Middle Eastern; the exportation of young peasant girls from Paraguay to the United States and Europe for prostitution; a booming sex industry in South Vietnam and Thailand and eros centers in Hong Kong, Korea, and Germany where during various periods young girls and women have been forced into prostitution to serve the war markets; a businessmen's brothel tour from Japan to South Korea where prostitutes who had once been available to American troops in World War II migrated; and major ports of prostitution in the Ivory Coast and Senegal where young girls fleeing rural poverty in Europe are forced into prostitution.

Almost as groundbreaking as the information Barry presented about the pervasiveness of female sexual slavery, especially when the book first appeared, was the explanation she advanced to account for these practices. Barry does not view female sexual slavery as an unusual form of deviance, but as simply another, albeit extreme, instance of a larger pattern of violence against women. For Barry, the origins of female sexual slavery ultimately lie in the "rape paradigm" that governs social relations between the sexes and serves as a political force that maintains women's continued subordination and victimization. This book does more, then, than simply provide evidence that women are being forced into prostitution and trafficked between countries for sexual purposes. It examines, although more impressionistically than systematically, a number of different forms of sexual exploitation and violence, including the sexual objectification of women in the family, the sex colonization of women in Muslim societies through practices such as genital mutilation and crimes of honor, the kidnapping of Patricia Hearst, and the depiction of violence against women in pornography. It demonstrates that, within the context of male dominance, women are subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological violence, and have no real prospects of escaping the continuum of violence. In seeking to explain the practices documented, Barry sets forth one of the earliest statements of what has come to be called the radical feminist perspective on sexual inequality.

Radical feminism starts from the assumption that sexuality is a primary structure in social life and that women's continued sexual subordination through forced and compulsory heterosexuality is the root of women's social subordination. For Barry, "sex as power is the foundation of patriarchy, and patriarchy is rule by male right." In the world of female sexual slavery, pimping represents the quintessential exercise of male power. Among the most interesting sections of Barry's book is the discussion of the ways in which pimps "season" or break in prostitutes so as to gain complete authority over the women. The strategies used to lure women into the life range from those that draw upon prevailing gender expectations, such as befriending or love and the use of recruiting agencies offering women employment, acting, dancing, or modeling opportunities, to those that employ direct force, such as outright purchase, kidnapping, and procurement through

organized crime.

For those readers who have forgotten, or for that matter never knew, the source of a number of major concepts widely used in feminist analysis, it was this book that developed the idea of the continuum of violence by making the connection between all situations where women cannot change the conditions of their existence – i.e., prostitution, marital rape, wife-beating, incest, pornography, bride-price, the selling of daughters, purdah, and genital mutilation. Further emphasizing the broad definition she holds of female sexual slavery, Barry rejects cultural relativist justifications for violence and domination and seeks to develop a universal standard of freedom for women. She criticizes the traditional victimist perspective in dealing with the violence women experience and introduces the term "rape survivor" to replace the prevailing image of the victim as passive, pitiful, and virtually robbed of her personal identity. Finally, in seeking to understand how such practices persist, Barry emphasizes the importance of male identification – the practice of women putting men above other women – in maintaining female victimization. Undoubtedly anyone familiar with the work of Adrienne Rich, Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, Diana Russell, Pauline Bart, and Susan Griffin recognizes the major impact that Female Sexual Slavery has had on feminist theory and scholarship.

It is interesting that Barry's book has been reissued just at the time that its central thesis – the classical radical feminist perspective – is being challenged. The charges against radical feminism include the tendency to place women's issues such as sexuality above all others and to separate them from economic and other political ones, an overemphasis on the "personal as political" manifested in the growth of a cultural feminism that emphasizes changing individuals rather than social structures, and a false universalism that overgeneralizes about women's common experiences, ignoring the specificities of race, class, and culture. Perhaps the most serious debate raging among feminist scholars is whether radical feminism, carried to its logical conclusion, ultimately locates the origins of women's subordination in biological factors like the male sex drive and is, therefore, simply a restatement of the traditional non-feminist explanation of gender dressed up in feminist garb.

Wherever one falls when the lines of intellectual debate are drawn, no scholar or feminist activist interested in violence against women – whether it be rape, incest, battery, sexual assault, or pornography – should enter into the continuing and often highly charged discussions about these issues, their interrelationships, and origins without reading Kathleen Barry's Female Sexual Slavery. It is a well- written, comprehensive, and insightful treatment of the topic of violence against women that remains worthy of its depiction as a feminist classic.

Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc by Leah Lydia Otis.

(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985)

by Deborah S. Ellis, Department of English, Case Western Reserve University

This brief but absorbing study, an expansion of the author's doctoral thesis, is a significant contribution both to women's studies and to medieval social history. Otis traces the shifting attitudes of medieval society toward its prostitutes, from the casual tolerance of the High Middle Ages to municipal involvement and codifications in the late 13th and the 14th centuries to active repression in the 15th and 16th centuries. She

concentrates on one region, Languedoc, but although she is aware of the limitations of her study she is still able to extrapolate plausible implications for contemporary attitudes toward sexuality, toward women, and toward the 'marginal elements' of medieval society in general. Otis is a considerable scholar who seems equally comfortable working with sources in Latin, Occitanian, German, French, English, and Italian (at one point in her notes she actually apologizes for not being able to read Arabic) and who compensates for limitations of scope in density of research. She takes an interdisciplinary approach, relying heavily on primary municipal and court records and interpreting them in the light of studies of sexuality, psychology, anthropology, and social history in general. Thus her work, while consistently interesting for its own sake, is also valuable in its wider implications towards such issues as the "sexual morality of the new emerging bureaucratic classes" of the later Middle Ages and their influences on Protestant doctrine, or the connections between repression of prostitutes and repression of all women.

We learn a great deal about medieval society from this book's combination of analysis, reportage, and anecdotes. We learn, for instance, of the custom of "once-a-week," in which towns too poor for brothels or for resident prostitutes invited them to visit every seven days to serve the needs of unmarried men – but not to stay overnight. We learn that most prostitutes were poor and frequently seemed to have had some sort of physical abnormality, such as a squint or a limp, and that they probably never practiced in their home towns. Certain legal questions preserved in the records have obvious far-reaching implications for attitudes toward sexuality: could prostitutes make an accusation of rape? Could they testify in a lawsuit? Did they have to wear identifying marks on their clothing, like medieval Jews? Were their customers ever punished? Could they profit? The answers varied with the times. Some of the most interesting information presented concerns society's prosaic attitudes toward clerical sin. Members of the clergy were frequently punished for frequenting prostitutes; municipal brothels were run like parodies of convents, controlled by "abesses" (in at least one case, the brothel owner was a real abbess). But although the transgressions of priests and married men did not greatly threaten society until the end of Otis's period, the threat to "honest women" was the main impetus for action against prostitutes throughout the Middle Ages. Women were easily inflamed to lust, after all, or so thought their patriarchal society; it was most important to protect them from exposure to prostitutes – and the sight of prostitutes' profits.

The contradiction between the image of prostitutes as poor, homeless, and perhaps disabled, and the image of prosperous bordello-dwellers, reflects the disparate roles of prostitution throughout this period. It also suggests one of the book's limitations. This is, as the title announces, a book about the institution of prostitution, rather than a book about prostitutes. The author was, of course, limited by the availability of documentation, which primarily concerns the relationship between prostitutes and city governments. We are thus able to envision the plan of the houses on the "hot streets" where the prostitutes lived, but we see few glimpses of the prostitutes' daily lives. We learn where retired or converted prostitutes went to live, but not what happened to pregnant ones. Was some form of birth control in effect? Such questions have been studied, by Bullough and others, but they are not addressed here. Occasionally, too, Otis's skepticism, which usually serves her well, may cause some gaps in her research. It may not be true, for instance, that all the houses for repentant prostitutes were built for cynical reasons. There was a genuine movement of female piety in the 13th and 14th centuries that organized semi-religious groups of women who had strong roots in the community: could not some prostitutes have fallen into this tradition? One of Otis's notes in fact does relate these 'retirement homes' to the cult of Mary Magdalene.

The book is designed for both general and specialist readers, and each group will find much of value and interest. The importance of the notes, appendices, and bibliographies (more than half the total content of book) lies partly in the range of information made available to students with varied interests. It may serve as a valuable text for seminars in history and sociology and should interest anyone involved in the history of women.

Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write About Their Work on Women. Edited by Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick.

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1984)

by Susan Koppelman, St. Louis, Missouri

When I was in New York City for a few days before NWSA this year, I went to Womanbooks and spent some time revelling in its plentitude of women's books. Then I began to look around for something that would insist I buy it, some book to take with me, knowing it would be important, would nurture me, would be my souvenir of this trip. Between Women, edited by Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick caught my eye. Under the title on the cover is written: "Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women." Something inside me sat up, on alert, sniffing the air for Important Experience.

I read through the table of contents. The first article is by Alix Kates Shulman about her work on Emma Goldman, the anarchist, about whom Shulman wrote her first book. I have read all of Shulman's novels and loved each one. I continue to be infuriated by the failure of readers and critics to acknowledge the importance of Burning Questions. It is a brilliant, moving, learned novel. I am angry that "we" are doing to "one of us" what we indict the patriarchal literary establishment for doing to All of Us: trashing the second novel because the enormous success of the first offends some superstitious sense we all seem to have about what is appropriate. This important novel has been silenced with tactics that seem almost like a textbook model from Joanna Russ's How to Suppress Women's Writing. The fact that Alix had an essay in Between Women was enough to draw me to the book.

But the book cost $11.95 – an awful lot of money to spend on one book when almost everything I buy is either a remainder or second hand. I am poor. I looked further in the table of contents. There was an article by Gloria Hull on her work with Black short story writer, poet, essayist, and anthologist, Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar Nelson. I had worked on Dunbar Nelson myself off and on for a couple of years, reading what she wrote, finding what traces I could of her career and life through inter-library loan, during a couple of days' work at the Schomberg, the Black literature collection in NYC, and during a long day at the Lincoln University Library in Jefferson City.

I had read all the biographical material I could find about Paul Lawrence Dunbar, her husband, the man who courted her by paying flattering attention to her first book of short stories, entering into courtly discourse via the mail with this young, talented, gently bred southern Black girl, promising her entrance via his love and approval to the world of letters she most desired. And after the marriage she seems to have been transformed into a wife, a caretaker, a nurturer of someone else's talent, his talent, and a worrier about his problems with money and health. I was angry about the story of her life, angry she hadn't written more stories, that she had instead become an editor, an essayist, and a biographer, that she had become a literary handmaiden to her people, as she had been a

handmaiden to him. I had found such extraordinary talent in those stories by that young woman. I kept thinking, wondering, about the work she would have done if she had kept at it, continuing to write fiction. I think she would have been great.

Gloria Hull published an article about her discovery and work with the diaries of Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar Nelson in But Some of Us Are Brave, the wonderful collection of articles and bibiliographies and syllabi on Black women edited by Barbara Smith, Gloria Hull, and Patricia Bell Scott. Gloria's article was the first I had ever read in which a scholar had talked about the human subject of her scholarship with the kind of passion I felt about the work I have been doing with women's short stories for the last twelve years and that my friend Emily Toth expresses when she talks about Kate Chopin (Toth's biography of Chopin is forthcoming from Atheneum). I knew once again, as I read Gloria's article, that the things that separate me from women of other races, ethnicities, classes, and kinds of experiences can be overcome so long as women in all communities can share these passions for, this excitement about, and commitment to work, the sense of vocation. So I didn't even look to see if Hull's article was a reprint of the one I had already read or if it was a new one. I just hoped very, very much that it was a new article, a continuation of the description of her adventure in scholarship.

The last two articles drew me as well, with appeals to experiences I had already had. The last one, Alice Walker's "Looking for Zora," I knew from its original publication in Ms. and its inclusion in Walker's collection of essays, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. It recounts her trip to Florida to find the grave of Zora Neale Hurston and how, in the process, she not only met and talked with people who had known Hurston as a neighbor, but people who were able, from their personal experience and from their matter-of-fact perspectives, to correct some of the wrong impressions and information about Hurston that have begun to become Official Truth in literary histories.

The woman Walker recreates for us as she shares with us her own experience of that discovery is a woman who makes more sense to us, in terms of our own experiences as real people. There is something insidious about Historians and Biographers and the ways in which they make women of achievement seem so different from the rest of us that we are unable to think of ourselves as emulating them. They are not different -- at least not in ways that make their lives and achievements something we cannot use for models. It was good to find the Walker essay in this context. It ends the book.

The second to the last essay is by filmmaker Martha Wheelock and describes the history of her relationship with May Sarton, with film, with literary scholarship, with her own sense of identity. Those who are familiar with her film, World of Light: A Portrait of May Sarton (Ishtar Films, Patterson, N.J.), will note in her style the same commitment to clarity and enlightenment that is the primary visual metaphor in the film.

The two essays by Louise DeSalvo and Sara Ruddick on Virginia Woolf provided me with an insight into the experience of those writer/scholars who spend years and years dealing with the life and works of one author, who seem to make another life the focal point of their own. I see how it is, now, that their perception of their subject is no more stagnant than they are; that they have, in fact, not a single focus, but a kind of binocular vision and a permanent guest in their hearts.

Over and over, the writers of these essays affirm the importance of their work in their lives, the strength they garner from the women they study, the incredible growth that goes on in themselves and in the relationship they establish with their subject as they focus on her. Their scholarly vision is a wonderful combination of four attributes: 1) they habitually consult with what is real in our own lives as so many of us learned to do in consciousness-raising groups; 2) they apply to their subjects the kinds of inter-personal skills, listening and observing skills that women are conditioned to cultivate in patriarchy for the

benefit of our oppressors instead of each other; 3) they expect that the relationship between scholar and subject will be vital instead of dead, will be dialogic instead of "objective," and will be mutually beneficial instead of exploitative of either one; and 4) the writers are aware of present political realities, are involved in and commited to a transformed social order, and they are able and willing to apply the lessons of today to history and vice versa.

Between Women validates in a remarkably moving way a woman's relationship to the subject of her work and her work itself, and a woman's relationship with her colleagues. Those are relationships of enormous significance in the lives of many of us, and yet neither in folklore, psychology, nor the popular imagination do such relationships receive appropriately serious attention, so far as I can tell.

This unbalanced attention to major relationships in women's lives explains in part, perhaps, one of the big problems with man-woman and mother-child relationships. When other important relationships, when, in fact, all non-biological and non- "romantic" relationships are denied existence, the biological ones become too important. They have to bear too much weight.

Editor's Note: Susan Koppelman is an OSU alumna and the editor of three collections of short stories: Between Mothers and Daughters: Stories Across a Generation, Old Maids: Short Stories by Nineteenth Century U.S. Women Writers, and The Other Woman: Stories of Two Women and a Man.

Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach. by Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna

(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985)

by Amy Shuman, Department of English, The Ohio State University

Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna argue that gender is a social construction, that gender characteristics are not grounded in biological or psychological absolutes, and that as members of contemporary western societies we take for granted our socially constructed dichotomous views in which we categorize everyone as either male or female. Throughout the book, Kessler and McKenna present examples of transsexualism, both in western and non- western societies, as evidence of the limitations of the dichotomous attribution of gender. Their discussion of the difference between sex and gender is precise; their exploration of biological and psychological arguments for dichotomous gender absolutes is thorough. Generally, they do an excellent job of uncovering the extent of the mythology of dichotomous gender attribution.

As the subtitle of the book indicates, the authors follow an ethnomethodological approach to their investigations, and the issue I would like to address here is the benefits and problems created by the ethnomethodological approach for this research and for feminist research in general.

Ethnomethodology begins with the idea that we construct our reality and that the terms we use to differentiate between our conceptual categories are clues for understanding how that reality is constructed, what is taken for granted, and what is granted attention. Built into the approach is the anthropological concept of cultural relativism and in the same case, particularly, the idea that social constructions can be investigated from a neutral position that neither praises nor criticizes particular social constructions

but that instead identifies a point of view. Of course, points of view are by definition limited, and ethnomethodological studies have been frequently used to demonstrate disparity; the present work includes an outright criticism of dichotomous views of gender that cannot account for overlaps, cross-overs, and mis-matches.

A key point in their discussion is the distinction between gender identity and gender attribution, concepts rarely differentiated in western social constructions, but essentially different as demonstrated by the contrast they present to transsexuals. In other words, western social constructions cannot accommodate the full range of available differentiations of gender, and the greatest problems arise with gender attribution, a concept the authors claim is often overlooked by psychologists studying gender. Since the "incorrigible position" or "natural attitude" (to use ethnomethodological terminology) in western society is that gender identity always corresponds to gender attribution, no discourse exists for talking about or naming varieties of discrepancy between the two categories. The authors have essentially embarked upon a project of investigating the foundation for missing categories. What they do is to demonstrate, both in their examination of scholarly literature and in their own experiments, that even when ambiguous gender attribution is presented, the "natural attitude" demands a choice between male or female attribution.

McKenna and Kessler's work is certainly important for gender studies; additionally, it may contribute to other identity/attribution classification problems. For example, studies of ethnicity also depend upon conformity between biological and social attribution, and both use the metaphor of "passing" for crossovers and criteria such as "comfortableness and success (at passing)." In both cases, the "natural attitude" of the culture assumes that attribution follows biology, and classification is only suspect, and only moves from the taken- for-granted social construction, when challenged by ambiguous cases. In both cases, things assumed to be natural turn out to be cultural, and the individuals who are trying to "pass" are essentially encountering a disparity between their natural and cultural identities.

As Kessler and McKenna's work demonstrates, the disparity between identity and attribution can be largely attributed to the insistence, on the part of both scholars and others, that gender is a "natural" rather than a socially constructed category. The problem with ethnomethodology is that all it can do is demonstrate that our categories are socially constructed. Like Levi-Strauss' structuralism, it shows us the pervasiveness of the nature/culture classification system. As an ahistorical science, it does not investigate the mechanisms of power through which categories are imposed, transformed, and subverted.

Halls of Jade, Walls of Stone: Women in China Today. by Stacey Peck

(New York: Franklin Watts, 1985)

Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China by Margery Wolf

(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985)

by Diane Dewhurst Belcher, Department of English, The Ohio State University

Those of us who have long wondered what life is really like for the women of modern mainland China, until very recently anonymous and seemingly sexless members of Mao's army of blue ants, have had a number of opportunities to satisfy our curiosity in the past few years. In 1983 Phyllis Andors' The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) and Elisabeth Croll's Chinese Women Since Mao (New York: M. E. Sharpe) were published. Now, with Stacey Peck's and Margery Wolf's books, we have two more rich sources of information. Both of these latter works are based on personal interviews with women in the People's Republic. Yet, because of the different training and interests of Peck and Wolf, their books open very different windows on the women of China.

Stacey Peck, formerly a columnist for the Los Angeles Times, spent two months in China interviewing forty-five extraordinary women in a variety of occupations. In fact, their occupations organize Peck's book, which includes chapters on political leaders, athletes, scientists, educators, writers, and artists. Almost all of the women to whom Peck introduces us are superachievers in their fields, women such as Huang Ganying, vice president of the All China Women's Federation; Sun Jinfang, captain of the number one ranked 1982 Chinese women's volleyball team; and Xie Xide, president of Fudan University and the only female head of any college or university in China.

Unlike Peck, Margery Wolf, who is an anthropologist and long time sinologist, deliberately avoided the most articulate and best educated women during her year in China. Wolf sought instead three hundred ordinary women. For example, when taken to a school in Beijing, Wolf insisted on meeting not just the teachers but the cook, the nurse's aide, the sweeper, the janitress, and the gatekeeper's wife. Because of her desire to interview a representative sample of Chinese women, two thirds of Wolf's respondents are what the Chinese themselves refer to as "peasants," that is, people from the countryside, where 80% of all Chinese live. Peck, on the other hand, interviewed only five rural women.

As one might expect from a journalist and a social scientist, Peck and Wolf differ as much in their presentation of their research results as they do in their choice of interviewees. Peck prudently chose to package most of her material as self-contained mini-autobiographies, a format which allows her, as a professional writer, to do what she does best – present some highly readable life stories. Peck does provide brief commentary in her prefaces to each chapter and interview, but these comments too often expose what Peck herself readily admits – that she is no expert on China. One of the most misleading of these remarks has to do with improvements in the lot of peasant women. Peck was much impressed by the prosperous rural communities she visited and by the latest agricultural production statistics. But Wolf and others have pointed out that the position of rural women in reality may well be deteriorating. While decollectivization is increasing the profit margins of rural families,

women are losing the safety net, the welfare and health care systems, furnished by the communes. Once again women are finding themselves dependent on the bounty of male household heads who control the family finances. Yet, despite Peck's limited familiarity with China, she does make some keen observations about the actual state of affairs. For instance, she notes that for all the concern expressed by one cotton mill director, her mostly female employees were exposed to dangerously high noise levels and dust-filled air. Peck also makes a real effort to counterbalance the rosy reports of job opportunities and supportive spouses given by most of her informants with more critical accounts of life in the P.R.C. from women who have temporarily or permanently left the country, e.g., Hu Na, the tennis player who defected in 1982. And Peck devotes her final chapter to Western expatriates in China, several of whom, such as Joan Hinton, remain enthusiastic about the People's Republic after three decades there but are realistic about its treatment of women. Hinton, a former nuclear physicist, remarks, "People [in China] always put Sid [her husband] first, and me second."

Much more analytical than Peck, Wolf's approach to her material results in a more thematically organized study, with chapters on marriage customs, domestic relations, the birth limitation program, etc. Throughout Wolf's book we see her sifting through her informants' replies, searching for the truths among often guarded and sometimes rehearsed responses. (There were always officials listening in.) Wolf shares with us such discoveries as the fact that the same women who asserted that their spouses were equal partners in household responsibilities, as the Party said they should be, would not think of leaving a baby in the care of their husbands, who would certainly never go near a dirty diaper. Wolf also seeks patterns among her data. Especially interesting are the differences she finds between urban and rural women. Surprisingly, the peasant women Wolf met were more likely than city women to have a positive self image, to view their own sex as smarter or more competent than men. As one rural resident put it, "Among farmers, women are more capable. They can do everything – both indoors and outdoors – but men can only do outdoor things." However, the overall picture of the condition of Chinese women that emerges in Wolf is much bleaker than that in Peck. This is partly because Wolf's focus is so much more on rural women than Peck's. Wolf has observed that while factories are sprouting up all over the newly wealthy countryside, the job openings are filled mostly by men. More and more the tedious and backbreaking field work is being left to women. Even when young rural women do manage to get the training needed for higher paying technical work, the still prevalent custom of women marrying outside their natal neighborhoods usually plants the skilled workers firmly back in the fields, the result of the discrimination they face as strangers in their husbands' villages. Most depressing of all are the statistics Wolf cites on the resurgence of female infanticide in some rural areas. In one county ten percent of the newborn girls appeared to be "missing."

In their final assessment of the condition of women in modern China, Wolf and Peck are not really so far apart. Both agree that although women's lives are materially better now than they were before Mao's revolution, Chinese women still have far to go before achieving equality with men. But, predictably, Wolf and Peck differ in their ultimate response to this situation. Wolf concludes her work by eloquently calling for another revolution in China, this time a feminist one. Peck is actually more pessimistic about the possibility of any kind of organized effort on the part of women in the P.R.C., given its political system. Yet Peck closes on an upbeat note, with simple praise for the "wonderful people" of China. In their very different ways both Wolf's and Peck's books assure us that the women of China are indeed wonderful.

The Religion of the Machine Age and The Dora Russell Reader: 57 Years of Writing and Journalism by Dora Russell

(Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985)

by Denise Weatherwax, School of Journalism, The Ohio State University

Dora Russell has been a writer, a journalist, a philosopher, and a thinker for 60 years. Cambridge-educated, once married to noted philosopher Bertrand Russell, she is an early voice for women's liberation and for the peace movement. Two newly-published works should bring her name more into the limelight. In her monumental book, The Religion of the Machine Age, she combines both purposes, feminism and pacifism. Her theme is that to listen to the voices of women, which have long been silent, is our only hope for peace.

The Dora Russell Reader contains many of her early writings. An advocate of such feminist rights as access to birth control, equal wages, and recognition of motherhood as a career, Russell has not been accorded the attention she deserves.

In The Religion of the Machine Age, Dora Russell attempts in 255 pages to trace the development of Western civilization from prehistoric hunting and gathering societies, through its Greek origin, the Renaissance, and the Industrial Revolution to modern society, which she calls "the Machine Age." It is the ideas and beliefs of men, she says, which have brought us across the centuries to a point where an insane quest for power has led to a worship of the machine and to where war, with the aid of the computer, can become the ultimate act resulting in destruction of the human race. "In the end," she says, "the great industrial empires, mind and body in service to the machine, stand embattled, armed as we used to say, cap-a-pie, poised ready to destroy their misguided worshippers and with them every particle of organic life and beauty on earth."

Of course, the assertion that society's view of the world is a man's view because the voice of woman has traditionally been silenced is not a new revelation. But Russell began this book in 1920, and has been espousing this position, which was only popularized in the 1970's, ever since. The range of knowledge and depth of thought which Russell brings to The Religion of the Machine Age is impressive and staggering in its breadth. She quotes liberally from Aristotle, Galileo, Descartes, George Bernard Shaw, and Bertrand Russell, as well as from many other noted writers and philosophers throughout the centuries.

Because the development of civilization and rational thought has been attributed solely to men, Russell unfortunately has few female sources to draw from. She bemoans that women are nearly absent from traditional recorded histories. In fact, she says that the first real attempt to write the history of the status of women occurred late, in 1928.

Many modern readers may take exception to her views on women. For example, even though Russell argues that women have similar aspirations as men, she implies that women's greatest strengths arise from motherhood. Elsewhere, she argues that it is "absurd" to equate male-female equality with service in the armed forces by both sexes. As a pacifist, Russell states that women should instead demand an end to war. While altogether a rational outlook, this appears to put her on the side of those politicians who claim nuclear war is a "women's issue," and thus far effectively trivialize it.

While The Religion of the Machine Age is undeniably Russell's most significant work, it is helpful to also examine The Dora Russell Reader. To read both books will help to clarify some of the views expressed in Machine Age and also put her ideas in the context of her era. One should also note that Russell's work is not without some major flaws. The chief problem is in sheer scope. It is unimaginable that even a knowledgeable and talented writer could cover the history of the world in such a short book. The growth of Western thought certainly requires a richer treatment than is accorded here. And many topics covered early in the book are only tangentially relevant to her thesis, and could easily have been left out. And of course, it is difficult to discuss the role and the history of women when most information is of necessity based on mere supposition. As previously mentioned, the lack of female sources is also unfortunate.

It is nonetheless surprising that we have not heard more from Dora Russell before. She is at once both ahead of her time and in some ways out of step with it. The reader may not always agree with the ideas presented, but Dora Russell's writings will challenge your thinking.

FILM REVIEWS

Agnes of God and Plenty

by Deirdre Neilen, Upstate Medical Center, State University of New York.

Neither Agnes Of God nor Plenty has fared well at the box office, yet each movie contains fine acting, above average dialogue, and dramatic situations. What happened? The obvious answer is to point out that neither movie possesses either shrieking teenagers whose hormones clearly have raged out of control or half-nude, gleaming male torsos whose owners proudly display extensive collections of killing implements. In fact, one very real reason for each movie's failure is that each concentrates almost exclusively on women, their emotions and conflicts, and sad to say, that means box- office suicide.

An interesting similarity that the two movies share is in their origins: both began life as stage plays written by men. John Pielmeier of Agnes and David Hare of Plenty are telling us that they find women not only intriguing, but also worthy of examination. To be aware of this fact as unusual, to be even grateful for it, is a sad but telling comment on our times. Perhaps because these movies were written by men, or perhaps in spite of it, ultimately they fail. But because they are nonetheless interesting failures, they deserve to be discussed.

Agnes of God would seem to be the more problematic movie for mass audiences; after all, how does one explain a menage-a- quatre when two of the three women are nuns and the only male is one of two possibilities – God or a field hand? Since neither male makes an appearance, the women are left to create his reality, and it is to Meg Tilly's credit that her Sister Agnes almost makes us believe in God's presence, both as tormentor and lover.

Pielmeier, however, is not really concerned with matters of faith and religion. Agnes and her murdered baby become the catalysts for more banal revelations from the court-appointed psychiatrist (Jane Fonda) and the Mother Superior (Anne Bancroft), the two who find themselves in a war to possess the mind and heart of Agnes. And in a drama as seemingly bizarre as this one, Pielmeier opts for the old, familiar, and boring villain: mother.

Yes, after much sparkling dialogue, after many beautiful close-ups of the ecstatic Agnes or the determined doctor, we are understandably puzzled, then annoyed to discover that everyone's problems can be blamed on an unfeeling, unforgiving, or sadistic mother. Agnes' mother burned the child's genitals with cigarettes and never permitted her to attend school because of her warped idea about salvation. Anne Bancroft's children (she was married before she entered the convent) have disowned her, and she, as Agnes's aunt, must also bear responsibility for the girl's tortured childhood. And Fonda's character, not to be left out, visits her senile mother in a nursing home where we realize that the mother has never loved her either.

This return to the land of Freud makes all of Agnes's stigmatas and hysteria ultimately much less believable. And Agnes's having killed her baby only makes the movie come full circle: all the women in it are or have been neurotic, murderous, and deceitful. Thus, our enthusiasm for the wonderful acting and the glowing photography (I'm thinking of the exuberant exchange between Bancroft and Fonda when they try to match saints with brands of cigarettes and the lonely lyricism of the nuns ice-skating or working in the barn) is tempered by our final disappointment that all of this was only and always leading up to the inevitable: mother the miscreant, author of all woe, Mommie Dearest in a new kind of drag.

Plenty is a frustrating failure of a different sort. David Hare is to be commended for positioning a woman as hero who is subject to the same traumas known by other male war heroes. But Hare is to be faulted for ultimately not believing that such experiences when suffered by a woman are as valid, insightful, and provocative. Susan Traherne, played admirably by Meryl Streep, instead appears selfish, spiteful, even mentally ill because she cannot escape her sense that people in post-war England lack the honesty, compassion, and yes, even heroism of their counterparts in WWII.

If Hare had chosen a male as his lead character, audiences and the playwright himself would have no trouble understanding and empathizing with his anger and contempt for both himself and everyone around him. Think for a moment (please, give it no further time) of Rambo. Here too we have a veteran of a war who seemingly cannot adjust to the banalities and corruption of his society. John Rambo obviously infuriates those members of the system whose lies and culpability he challenges, but just as obviously he delights both his audience and his creator who strongly identify with him.

Hare's script does not permit such identification with Traherne. Instead, we see her quest for the past as meaningless, her insistence upon its importance as selfish, designed only to avoid her responsibilities as a wife or as an employee. She changes jobs as easily as some change clothes, but we do not ever congratulate her for her aggressiveness; we pity her inability to get along. In a curious reversal, her husband appears to take the wonan's role: he compromises in every situation, telling her and us that the higher calling of diplomacy requires the petty subterfuges and weasle-like subordination. And again, audience response finds acceptable in the male what it would label reprehensible in the female. There are times when the husband acts like the male we know from other films: at one point, he and the doctors provide her with massive quantities of tranquilizing drugs so that Susan "enjoys" her married life for perhaps the first time.

To be sure, Susan Traherne treats her husband very badly. He is a decent sort of fellow, the kind England is so fond of producing. Susan is cruel to him at times and cruel as well to the lover she discards when he can't impregnate her. (Sting's acting deserves little notice, but the critics' reaction to his character's abandonment by Traherne does: can anyone not believe the double standard still exists?) The audience is of course relieved – what kind of monster mother would she have made?

Yet, Susan Traherne is questioning and damning the complacency, the materialism, the imperialism of the post-war world. She is a conscience, however damaged, and as such we should expect to give her some affirmation. The fact that we do not says something about the sexual stereotypes which still exist and hold us, writers and watchers, prisoner.

Plenty says we cannot have it both ways: we can have a woman protagonist, but we cannot also have moral imperatives. We do not feel comfortable listening to women who ask the hard questions and refuse the facile answers. We cannot accept as real the trauma a woman experiences in time of war. And we will not believe that the destruction she leaves in her wake comes from a personal agony, a vision of hell only she can see, rather than mere feminine pique.

Thus, these two movies may seem to advance us two steps forward in their willingness to feature female protagonists confronting moral dilemmas in which love and romance have no real part, yet sadly we must admit that when the final credits roll, we have stepped back one and a half steps. Still, it is thrilling to see women inhabiting the screen again, and we may hope that today's failures bring tomorrow's successes that much closer.

The Color Purple

by Sheila Thompson, The Ohio State University

In an unprecedented film which accentuates women's relationships and Black culture, Steven Spielberg makes his debut as a director of drama in the movie version of Alice Walker's The Color Purple. With the help of Alice Walker, Quincy Jones, and an exceptional cast including Ophra Winfrey and Danny Glover, Spielberg visually and musically recreates the intensely emotional story of Celie's life. Though many Alice Walker fans have feared the movie would exploit Black culture, reduce the importance of female bonding, or exclude Celie and Shug's lesbian relationship, Spielberg manages to keep most of the book's issues intact, albeit with a few changes.

Celie's thoughts are conveyed through the use of voice-over narration. The technique generally works well. Viewers familiar with the book will interpret this as Celie's letters to God, but other viewers will not fully appreciate Celie's extraordinary ability to use her limited vocabulary. Celie (Whoopie Goldberg) remains a victim and an observer throughout the first half of the film. Though Nettie (Akousa Busia) and Sophia (Ophra Winfrey) try to teach Celie to fight against Mister's abuse, Celie responds that she only knows how to survive. Though Celie envies and admires Sophia's strength, she does not have the same sisterly support on which Sophia depends in order to remove herself from Mister's "jail." Consequently Celie passively avoids Mister's wrath and sneaks the opportunity to laugh at Mister's hapless antics, such as his disastrous attempt at cooking Shug's first dinner at his house.

Shug's belligerant arrival is the first turning point in Celie's life. Spielberg frequently uses the weather and seasons as symbols throughout the film; in this case Shug enters Celie's life in the midst of a violent storm, which Spielberg obviously and perhaps melodramatically uses as an indicator of changes to come. Celie, mesmerized by Shug's beauty and independence, quickly tries to win Shug's attention by cooking for her, grooming her, and listening to her lamentations over her relationship with her father, the town preacher. Shug is so struck with Celie's lack of self-esteem and confidence that when she regains her strength, she dedicates a song to her in Harpo's Juke Joint called "Miss Celie's Blues." She sings, "I think I'm something, I hope you think you're something too." Later that night, Shug coaxes Celie to show her beautiful smile which Celie had covered with her hands as a result of her step-father's ridicule. In the subsequent scene, Celie soon realizes Shug's interest in her is not platonic when Shug tells Celie that she loves her. Shug and Celie exchange shy kisses which quickly become amorous embraces. However, this short scenario is the only time Spielberg allows their relationship to be unmistakenly lesbian. After Shug leaves Celie and Mister to tour the country with her band and later returns with a new husband (Grady), it appears Celie and Shug enjoy only a platonic friendship. Despite this serious omission, Spielberg arranges for Celie's personal growth to begin while Shug is away.

Having been influenced by Shug, Nettie, and Sophia, Celie realizes that she too can fight back and if she does not she will continue to be abused. Even though Sophia is forced to pay a price for her independence by being incarcerated for hitting the mayor, Celie learns that it is better to fight back and risk the consequences than to remain passive and let unequal relationships go unchanged. Though beaten and silenced from years as the mayor's maid, Sophia eventually returns to her old self during the fateful family reunion dinner.

After having found Nettie's hidden letters and learning that Mister had kept her from Nettie for years, Celie becomes angry enough with Mister to threaten to murder him at the family dinner. Celie proceeds to tell Mister in

no uncertain terms that he is a "low down dirty dog" and that she and Mary Agnes (Squeak) are going with Shug and Grady to Memphis. Though Celie's performance is sublime, the scene would have been better if Spielberg had focused on the women's reactions to Celie rather than the men's. Spielberg's concentration on the men's feelings is a recurrent problem in the film, in that he often ignores the women's emotions. Also, he inserts male characters into the film where none existed in the book, (i.e., Shug's father) and he deletes scenes from the book which should have remained in the film, i.e., the nature of Shug and Celie's relationship in Memphis.

However, Spielberg does add some characteristic touches to the film which add to its appeal. Together with Quincy Jones he uses sounds and images that provide wonderful transitions between scenes, especially in the African/American sequences. Jones' musical arrangement adds so much depth and culture to the story that the film almost could be considered a musical. Also, in several scenes, Spielberg positions the characters so that the dynamics of their relationship are magnified. For example, he seats Mister between Celie and Sophie in the juke joint to show their differences in personality as a result of male dominance. Sophia, who refuses to be abused or harrassed, flaunts her independence while Celie quietly hides herself under her hat, still a victim of Mister's aggression. Mister separates the two sisters both physically and psychologically. However, when Nettie and her family return from Africa, Mr. is left standing alone in the field while all of the women share Celie and Nettie's joy of reunion. Spielberg makes it clear that Mister must continue to pay for his heinous acts, whereas Walker forgave Mister at the end of her book.

While Spielberg gives great attention to character development, he sometimes allows events to happen so quickly that some situations become unbelievable or confusing. The relationship between Shug and her father is unclear until she finally embraces him in the gospel scene. Celie's transformation from a passive victim to an assertive survivor is too abrupt; in the book the change requires years, while in the film it only requires minutes. Perhaps the worst mistake Spielberg makes is in the portrayal of Shug and Celie's relationship. Spielberg consciously omits the most important part of Celie's life for the sale of the film's marketability. Though Celie and Shug have a brief physical interlude that marks the turning point of their lesbian relationship, Spielberg gives no additional insight into the future of this strong bond.

Overall, however, the film is extremely commendable and provides the opportunity for several exceptional Black actors to surface in a highly visible film. Ophra Winfrey is superb as Sophia, with Whoopi Goldberg and Danny Glover also turning in strong performances as Celie and Mister. Despite its frustrating omissions and periodic confusion, The Color Purple is a superior film.

Reference Books Reviewed:

Women in Particular: An Index to American Women. Compiled by Kali Herman. (Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx P, 1984.)

Susan Searing, Women's Studies Librarian, University of Wisconsin System.

Women in Particular: An Index to American Women is an ambitious source, with a broad sweep of subjects and time periods. Compiler Kali Herman's perspective is historical, although living women are included. Each entry provides all known names, birth and death dates, a few words describing the subject's career or field of achievement, and abbreviated references to information in standard biographical dictionaries. Some entries also note religious affiliation, place(s) of residence or work, disability (if any), and ethnicity. Sections I through IV index subjects by field and career, religion, ethnic or racial background, and geographical location. Each of these sections is appropriately sub-divided; within categories, women are listed chronologically by birth date. A fifth section lists women alphabetically. Full information is given at every point of entry. For example, Clara Endicott Sears, identified as "author, antiquarian, and cattle breeder," is listed four times in the Field and Career Index. She also appears in the Religious Affiliation Index and in the Geographical Index. Complete data, including citations, appears each time. This repetition may be handy, but it increases the volume's length, and therefore its cost. The usual format – providing complete information in an alphabetical listing, and keying other indexes to it – would have resulted in an equally useful tool. Considering the price, librarians should be aware that most of the entries in Women in Particular duplicate information found in the Biography and Genealogy Master Index. A sample of twenty entries from each source revealed only one name unique to Women in Particular, and only one more for which Herman provides an additional bibliographic lead. For libraries lacking the Master Index, or for those in which women-focused materials are heavily used, Women in Particular will be a useful acquisition.

(We extend our thanks to Feminist Collections for permission to reprint the above.)

Introduction to Library Research in Women's Studies. By Susan E. Searing (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1985.)

Adrienne Zahniser, Women's Studies Library, The Ohio State University

Searing's position as women's studies librarian-at-large for the Wisconsin higher Education system well qualifies her to give expert bibliographic advice in the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of women's studies. She has provided an invaluable resource book for students, undergraduate and graduate, doing research in women's studies, as well as the most useful guide to date for faculty and librarians who need systematic access to a large variety of bibliographic information in the field. A short introductory section summarizes basic general facts on the nature of women's studies, organization of libraries and their card catalogs, examples of research strategies, and guidelines for locating the right bibliographic sources. This helpful section is followed by the major portion of the book, a well-annotated bibliography of guides, bibliographies, indexes, catalogs, handbooks, directories, biographical dictionaries, and traditional reference aids. These are arranged from general guides to specific collections, divided by type of material (books, periodicals, microforms, newspapers, dissertations) and by special fields (from anthropology to sociology). Particularly helpful are the brief introductions to each chapter with explanations of sources or fields and provision of additional relevant subject headings. The volume is well indexed by author, title, and subject, with appendixes containing LC and Dewey classifications systems and a list of all the bibliographic review essays published in Signs, 1975-84. This is a must for academic libraries, lower-division undergraduate and up, and highly desirable for large public libraries.

(We extend our thanks to Choice for permission to reprint the above.)

Coming in the next issue of The Women's Studies Review:

Tania Ramalho on Nicaragua: The People Speak
Gordon J. De La Vars on Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman
Nancy Cox on The Things That Divide Us: Stories by Women
Letters to the Editor: May we hear from you?

Call for Reviews

The Women's Studies Review solicits reviews of works by, for, or about women in a variety of media including fiction, poetry, dramatic productions, films, art shows, exhibits, musical productions, and scholarly research in any field. Reviews will be published which focus on women's experiences and gender, or which advance feminist theory and consciousness.

Manuscripts should be no more than 10 double-spaced, typewritten pages in length and should be sent to The Editor, The Women's Studies Review, the Center for Women's Studies, 207 Dulles Hall, 230 West 17th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

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