

REVIEWS

CANADIAN FEMINISM

Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn, eds., *Feminism in Canada: From Pressure to Politics*. Black Rose Books, 1983.

To describe this book is a difficult task, perhaps more difficult than evaluating it. To begin with, the title is misleading, suggesting a survey of present feminist activity in Canada rather than the important collection of essays on feminist theory which we in fact find. Following a useful introduction by Angela Miles, Part one is about "Scholarship: Theory and Practice", and contains stimulating chapters questioning the underlying assumptions of the scientific method, of psychology, economics, history, anthropology, philosophy, and the helping professions. The part is introduced by an outstanding paper by Jill McCalla-Vickers, which opens up many of the basic questions regarding the relationship between the subject matter, political orientation, methodology, and the curious coincidence that traditional research methods will produce results that support patriarchal ends, constraining feminists to develop new methodology to deal with new material and to explore new concepts. In quite another context, a scientist recently remarked, "... when you enter a new domain of research with new ideas . . . you will need new measuring sticks . . . And so the imaginative scientist is somebody who enters a new domain, who realizes that in this domain new methods will have to be applied, and who applies them". (Dr. Paul Feyerabend, interviewed by Dr. Beth Savan, *Science and Deception*, CBC Ideas, 1982).

The second part of the book deals with "Politics: Theory and Practice" and is again challenging, revolutionary, well-reasoned and moderate. As in all anthologies, the quality of the pieces is variable, both in expression and content, though generally very high; I shall focus on the important themes, which I perceive to be the emergence of integrative feminism, the revolutionary nature of feminism, the rationale for and rejection of separatism, and the concept of specificity together with equality. Appropriately, a number of points of view are represented, but not the whole spectrum of feminist theory; the main thrust of the book favours integrative feminism. Integrative feminist theory challenges the dichotomies which mark traditional theory and methodology and which define our lives. The list of these dichotomies is long: included are private/public, personal/political, reproduction/production, means/end, leisure/work, practice/theory, commitment/objectivity, activist/academic, mental/manual, emotion/logic, intuition/reason and ultimately female/male. In the context of scholarship, integrative feminism offers a complex alternative methodology and content to the over-simplification and fragmentation of traditional scholarship, which has, for example, tended to determine the acceptability of subject matter not by its intrinsic interest and value but by its susceptibility to examination by so-called scientific methods. There is here no total dismissal of the "male" side of the equation; there is, however, an affirmation of long-suppressed "female" characteristics, and consequently of a more holistic society: "Long subordinated reproduction-related values and activities are affirmed as the organizing principle of an integrated non-alienated society in which the current deep

RECENSIONS

dualities of life in our fragmented society are overcome". (Miles, p. 13).

It is not only in the academic world that feminist theory is revolutionary. This book is all about change, about the taking of power, about how to change the dynamics of power, about what to aim for in a revised power structure. Revolutionary ideas do not come into the world full-grown. Feminists are insisting on taking time and space, away from men, to allow their ideas to grow and clarify. In this climate questions themselves are changed: we no longer ask, "Who should dominate?" but "How can we obviate domination?"; instead of asking, "How can we gain admission to the men's world?", we ask "How can we build a feminist world?". In spite of this emphasis on the need for time and space, and indeed for feminist autonomy, the authors reject feminist separatism as the long-term way forward. This is not the position of all feminists; it is not only utopian writers (beginning with Charlotte Perkins-Gilman in *Herland*) who have hypothesized the convenient disappearance of men and the equally convenient emergence of parthogenesis. The authors prefer to deal with the real world in which men are almost half the population, and the goal is clearly integration. Unfortunately, Patricia Hughes' discussion of "Separation or Integration" has serious weaknesses. Although she explains both the need for women to work out their ideas away from men, and the need and ethical imperative for working with men in political organizations, I find unacceptable and depressing the grudging and apologetic nature of the acceptance to be accorded to men. Much of this paper sounds horribly like the things men have written about women. Integrative feminism, as I understand it, has to be based on an experiential belief in the power of human beings to change (haven't most of us who are feminists changed quite radically in our lifetimes?). This experiential belief gains support from recent feminist anthropology which suggests that patriarchal domination may be less deeply engrained than we have been led to suppose.

Another controversial area confronted with insight is the very nature of women. The new feminism - and indeed first - wave feminism as well - has been bedeviled by the tension between the idea of "equal but unlike" and the idea of "equal because alike." The political pitfall in the former has been the separation of spheres, with women's sphere always coming out on the underside; the political pitfall in the latter has been the rejection of the feminine as a product of socialization, and hence the adoption of the masculine as the norm; to show we are as good as men we have had to do what men do. "Feminine" and "masculine" have been culturally defined, and are rightly suspect terms. The best resolution I have seen of this dilemma is contained in Angela Miles' essay on "Women's Specificity and Equality." Such an essay can only be understood in the context of revolutionary feminist theory, and it is revolutionary feminist theory which should save it from all fear of misunderstanding. What is being said by Miles and others in this anthology is no longer that women, by their nurturing natures, have a role to play in the perpetuation of the status quo, but that women must assert the importance of nurturance as a first principle, that life rather than death must inform politics. This has a direct bearing, as the authors perceive, on the process of the revolution, and on the contribution of women to the peace movement, and this is only a beginning. Women are not saying only that they

REVIEWS

will no longer meekly produce both cannons and cannon fodder, they are claiming that they have insights and values which could take away the need for cannons and cannon fodder, and they are demanding a primary place for these principles.

I hope to live to see the day when men ask for instruction in feminist theory and for training in feminist practice. Like most of the authors of this book, I do not want them excluded when that happens; for me, indeed, that will be the time to think about using the word humanism. Meanwhile, here is a book which makes a good starting point, flawed and incomplete as it may be. Male theorists are challenged to read it.

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FROM MARX TO MOTHERS

Issac D. Balbus, *Marxism and Domination: A Neo-Hegelian, Feminist, Psychoanalytic Theory of Sexual, Political and Technological Liberation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Feminist debates on the nature of female identity have recently turned to psychoanalytic theory in an effort to understand the psychological roots of oppression. In a recent article in *Signs*, Marianne Hirsch outlines current debates between feminist theorists working out of Neo-Freudian, Lacanian and Jungian traditions.¹ While theorists of each group share different assumptions, all are committed to developing a psychological understanding of male domination and to discovering possibilities for the eradication of patriarchal relationships. In North America, French feminists (of the Lacanian school) have been criticized for their reliance on what is considered a phallogocentric psychology and for their insistence on the structural definition of woman as "other", as "absence".² Feminists of the Neo-Freudian persuasion are less concerned with philosophical descriptions of female identity (or lack of identity) and more intent on explaining how it is that we assume this negative status in the first place.

Two theories which have initiated an important debate with traditional Freudian accounts of female psychology are those of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow.³ The central question addressed by both authors is, how can we account for women's collusion in their own oppression? While rejecting Juliet Mitchell's analysis (in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*) of the female's repressive submission to the power of the father, Dinnerstein and Chodorow contend the