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4. Mitchell Leaska, "Review of All That Summer She was Mad," The Virginia Woolf Miscellany, Spring, 1983.

10 YEARS LATER


The Women's Press published its first book, Women Unite!, in 1972. Today, that original publication, an anthology of writings on the Canadian women's movement, is something of a classic. In celebration of their tenth anniversary the Women's Press has published another anthology of essays, Still Ain't Satisfied!, a sequel to Women Unite! edited by Maureen FitzGerald, Margie Wolfe and Connie Guberman that traces the development of the women's movement during the last decade. Thus far, the Press has given us a wide variety of works such as Last Hired, First Fired, by Patricia Connelly; Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality, by Loreinne Clark and Debra Lewis; More Than a Labour of Love, by Meg Luxton; the novel Quilt, by Donna Smyth; books for children — most recently One Proud Summer by Marsha Hewitt and Claire Mackay — and the popular Everywoman's Almanac. With publications like these, it has made a name for itself that is synonymous with professionalism and high quality.

Still Ain't Satisfied! is an impressive anniversary offering. It leans toward the evaluative rather than the historical, but it is nonetheless packed with information; articles are minimally but adequately footnoted and are accompanied by a list of further readings. All except three of the articles were written specifically for this anthology. Authors were asked to focus on "major areas of women's activity and
participation, to pinpoint the current priorities and characteristics of the movement and also to provide a background for determining aims and strategies for the future" (p.14). Happily, this rather demanding request produced quite credible results. Readers will find a high degree of organization and guidance throughout and this has made for an integral and balanced whole. This effect is managed, it should be added, without losing any of the distinctive strains of its many individual voices. (I counted forty-two contributors not including a generous number in the acknowledgments.) For some readers the ideological diversity presented may be a weakness of the text rather than a strength, but most will likely agree that the differences accurately reflect the state of the women’s movement.

Introductory and concluding pieces frame the remainder of the essays. The opening essay by Naomi Wall (“The Last Ten Years: A Personal/Political View”) provides a familiar personal history that will ring true to women who began thinking about women’s issues in the late Sixties during the anti-war movement and shortly after started involving themselves in the issues of reproduction and sexuality. Wall rightly sees the movement originating with middle-class, university women and outlines the eventual emergence of three groups: socialist feminists, radical feminists, and reformists, this last group being seriously divided from the other two, who were themselves often in conflict. Although both the socialist feminists and the radical feminists felt the need for structural changes in society, the former advanced a class position and the latter insisted that the oppressive force of patriarchy cut across class lines. (Although Wall roots women’s oppression in class oppression, she believes that “feminism cannot be subsumed within the class struggle” p. 26). The developing feminist movement, Wall reminds us, gradually widened its perspective and started to move into the work force, political parties, pre-party groups, or —by the mid-Seventies — various feminist collectives. The need which Wall finally articulates for a more broadly-based movement that includes immigrant women, trade union women, poor women, native women, and lesbians is reiterated by others in the anthology.

The final essay, “What Are Our Options?,” completes the frame. The essay is a thoughtful discussion among five women who are members of the International Women’s Day Committee in Toronto coordinated by Nancy Adamson. The discussion format is intended to reflect the non-hierarchical character of the women’s movement and, in fact, the form of the piece does succeed in embodying in a dramatic way the state of a significant movement in progress. (It is unfortunate but perhaps inevitable that the anthology ends with yet one more Toronto-based article.)

Within the frame of the Wall and Adamson articles the anthology is divided into three sections. Section I, “Out of the Bedroom,” focuses on “women’s politicization of the personal” (p. 30), and, accordingly, deals with the issues of reproductive rights, violence against women (rape, pornography, and wife battering), heterosexuality and lesbianism, and feminist public services. Part II, “Into the Work Force,” includes articles on unionization, sexual harassment, health and safety, and women in non-traditional jobs. Part III, “Into the Streets,”
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deals with the practical issues of organization. It is in this somewhat “catch-all” section that the problems of reaching out to native and immigrant women are examined, along with the changing role of lesbians in the women’s movement, feminist writing and publishing, and feminist art.

Some readers may be particularly struck by the absence of any mention of the peace movement. The editors themselves list among the many issues not dealt with in the anthology “articles on Québécoises, the family, the right, microtechnology, the anti-nuclear and peace movements and the specific problems of welfare, older, adolescent and disabled women” (13). The book will not be all things to all women, then, but to my mind the omissions do not cut as wide a swath in the women’s movement as do the issues included, and their absence indicates more than anything else some judicious editing.

Part I includes articles by Myrna Kostash on pornography, Susan G. Cole on wife battering, Barbara James on rape laws, Eve Zaremba on lesbian sex and sexuality, and Jillian Ridington on the problems of funding and organizational structure in the social services, this last focussing specifically on The Women’s Health Collective, the Vancouver Transition House, and Rape Relief. But the two outstanding pieces are Joanne Kates’ “Once More With Feeling: Heterosexuality” and Kathleen McDonnell’s “Claim no Easy Victories: The Fight For Reproductive Rights.” Kates, writing in the first person, confronts the contradictory experiences of a heterosexual feminist whose relationship with one man proves a painful mixture of anger, love, and hate. The confessional style, far from being self-indulgent, gives a raw edge to the writing that makes it very genuine indeed.

Considerably less personal but equally absorbing is the work of McDonnell on the issue of reproductive rights. McDonnell explains that the major issue of the early Seventies, abortion, declined in importance in part because the women in the movement, having aged, became interested in child - and/or work-related issues such as midwifery, homebirthing, and equal pay for work of equal value. But the more subtle reasons for the decline of interest in abortion, she suggests, have to do with perplexing and never-resolved problems surrounding the moral dimensions of the issue. What do we think about the woman who wants to abort — or is pressured to abort — because she is carrying a child of the “wrong sex”? Is this abortion merely an issue of health? McDonnell argues perceptively and unblinkingly that this moral dimension must be faced and that abortion must be treated not as a single issue but along with all “other factors that affect our ability to control our reproductive capacity” (p. 40).

The most topical issues — those related to work — come under scrutiny in Part II. The importance of domestic labour and the need to eliminate the sexual division of labour in the home forms the basis of Meg Luxton’s “The Home: A Contested Terrain.” “Minding the Children,” by Pat Schulz, deals with the growing support for day care among trade unionists and New Democrats among others as the means by which women will gain equality in the work place. Two articles on women in non-traditional jobs, “Rosie the Riveter Meets the Sexual Division of Labour” by Debbie Field and “Women in Trades in British Columbia” by Kate Braid, look at our shifting notions of non-traditional work from the
professions to the trades and the consequent problems for women in the areas of seniority and training programs. Saskatchewan Working Women, an independent women's organization that functions as an educational and support group for unionized and non-unionized women, is discussed by Denise Kourin in "Getting Organized . . . in Saskatchewan Working Women." Marlene Kadar examines trade union resistance to the issue of sexual harassment in "Sexual Harassment as a Form of Social Control."

There are so many noteworthy essays in this section that it is difficult to single out only one or two. The most interesting articles grapple with the problem of whether or not women ought to support feminist unions, presumably militant and unified, or join already established unions that have access to big strike funds and professional staff. "Getting Organized . . . in the Feminist Unions," by Jackie Ainsworth, Ann Hutcheson, Susan Margaret, Michele Pujol, Sheila Perret, Mary Jean Rands, and Star Rosenthal (originally published in *Kinesis* in 1980) is an important assessment of the organizing struggles of the Association of University and College Employees (AUCE) and the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC), two independent feminist unions. Sue Vohanka's highly informative "Getting Organized . . . in the Confederation of Canadian Unions" (CCU) reviews the Puretex Knitting Company Strike (1978), the York University Staff Association "coffee grievance" (1979), and the Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers (CAIMAW) strike in B.C. (1980) and argues that the CCU has fought actively for women workers because it is controlled by the rank and file.

"Getting Organized . . . in the Canadian Labour Congress," by Deirdre Gallagher, complements the other articles on trade unions by suggesting the need for greater support for women's caucuses within the large unions. One is left believing that working women should in fact fight on many fronts, battling from within and without. Patricia J. Davitt's "When All the Secretaries Demand What They Are Worth" offers an evaluation of the civic workers strike in Vancouver in 1981 and its handling of the equal pay for work of equal value issue. (In this and other articles CUPE comes in for a good deal of criticism as a powerful and, when it comes to women's issues, not always friendly giant.) Finally, "Is Your Job Hazardous to Your Health," by Marianne Langton, examines the troublesome and complex issue of differential health and safety regulations for men and women.

Part III concentrates on organization. Two essays on immigrant women and native women, by Winnie Ng and Caroline Lachappelle respectively, touch on questions of class and race as well as sex and indicate how far the movement has to go to support these groups. "A message of Solidarity," written by Women Working With Immigrant Women and originally delivered as a speech, is the only piece in the anthology relating the women's movement in Canada to that in the Third World. Unfortunately its overly general rhetoric is probably better heard than read. Margie Wolfe's essay on feminist publishing is full of information and insights and comes complete with a list of English-language feminist book publishers, periodicals and newspapers. Sari Tudiver's "More Radical With Age" has some moderately interesting points to make about
women's studies, but little of it is new and not enough is specific. In fact, this third section of the anthology is unquestionably the weakest. The writing simply doesn't measure up to the rest. "But Is It Feminist Art?" by Daphne Read makes some quite good points about the artist's economic and social situation but is disappointing in its attempt to define the relation between politics and art. (Perhaps any such definition is doomed to cause discontent.) Finally, Amy Gottlieb's "Mothers, Sisters, Lovers, Listen," a lesbian-feminist critique of the women's movement, is the least impressive article of the lot. Many will not trouble to read past Gottlieb's patronizing remark that "Heterosexual women do not have to justify or legitimize their existence, which is given by virtue of their connection to a man" (p. 238).

Let me reiterate, despite these minor reservations about section three, that Still Ain't Satisfied is a superbly edited and useful book that should have a place in any feminist's library. Ten years of the women's movement in Canada has resulted in countless changes, and the most significant of these are dealt with in this book. In an important way it prepares us for the work ahead.

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FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM


Writing and "What's the difference?"¹

Sexual difference is too directly political
a problem now to admit of an imaginary abstraction.²

This collection of thirteen essays and four critical responses, originally published in Critical Inquiry, is more about literature than writing, feminism in academia, than sexual difference. The title, a play on Jacques Derrida's Writing and Difference doesn't deliver what it promises, that is, an extended critique of his deconstructive writings. The question remains whether the universalist presuppositions of a masculinist critical tradition are unexamined in Derrida's category "woman". Although the title may be misleading, a volume of feminist
literary criticism is especially significant at this moment in literary history. Critics have developed a fondness for feminism that has emerged in some of the latest post-structuralist writing in the form of a no-name feminist critic cited in a footnote or paragraph. Or, as in a lecture by Geoffrey Hartman, feminism is reduced to a single strategy where the feminist critic's attempt to "reverse patriarchy (and) search for the mother tongue, a true vernacular" is seen simply as part of a a broader critical move to decanonicalize literary studies. In the case of Jonathan Culler's recent discussion of "reading as a woman", politics disappear when feminism is reduced to simply mean female. His feminist critic offers a "critique of male chauvinism" bereft of any transformative strategy.

Elizabeth Abel introduces *Writing and Sexual Difference* with a thumbnail sketch of feminist literary criticism, which initially adopted the oppositional "women are just as good" strategy in examining images of women in male texts. The second wave of feminist critics recuperated the lost and underrated women writers of the past, maximizing the difference between male and female writing. Finally, the contemporary American feminist literary critic, as represented in this collection, develops a more complex perspective where gendered literature is marked by

interrelationship as well as opposition, difference *between* as well as difference *from* . . . Aware that women writers inevitably engage a literary history and system of conventions shaped primarily by men, feminist critics now often strive to elucidate the acts of revision, appropriation and subversion that constitute a female text (pp. 1-2).

This new critical perspective corresponds to the deconstructive project itself. Psychoanalytic critic, Barbara Johnson, whose work provides the epigraph to this collection, has written of deconstruction's challenge to the simple binary oppositions, including the male/female oppositions of structuralism:

Far from eliminating binary oppositions from the critical vocabulary, one can only show that binary difference does not function as one thinks it does and that certain subversions that seem to befall it in the critical narrative are logically prior to it.5

The relationship between the feminist critic and her writing is paradoxical. Jane Gallop's "critical response " describes how the feminist critic" in her inheritance from both feminism and criticism lives the at once enabling and disabling tension of a difference within" (p. 290). Abel addresses this tension between the traditions of feminist politics and mainstream academia in her discussion of the new "sophisticated readings" she includes in her collection. She anticipates accusations "that the concern with textuality augurs a return to formalism: that feminist critics have betrayed political commitments in pursuit of academic credibility" (p. 2). However, sophisticated theoretical writing is nothing for
feminist to become defensive about. During the past ten years, a necessarily complex and fruitful feminist theory has been developing in all disciplines to help us understand and act on a whole series of political issues. But, when Abel insists that her volume is not unified by a "single ideology" other accusations can be made. Abel notes "the celebrated pluralism of feminist criticism" (p. 2), and the reader should take note of the politics embodied in this apparent heterogeneity. While the textual methodologies in this collection may be multiple and include "psychoanalytic, deconstructive, historical, formalist, generic and biographical studies", the text is finally dominated by a liberal feminist academic discourse, which substitutes a canonical structure of female writings for the old masculine one. This new canon is "just as authoritarian and hierarchical".6 While several essays discuss the importance of non-traditional female forms of writing such as journals and letters, none of these is treated in detail. Nor is there an attempt to investigate more popular forms of writing by and/or for women. Aside from four essays on male writers, the majority treat the now familiar favorite feminist English and American women writers. (Margaret Atwood appears on this list.)

Annette Kolodny, who here and in earlier essays has championed the notion of pluralism, outlines the liberal feminist position. By "asking additional questions", feminist criticism is supplementary, not radically transformational; reformist, not revolutionary. In reading the eighteenth-century American narrative The Panther Captivity, she proposes a two-fold feminist strategy which examines woman as person and analyzes the symbolic significance of gender. She reads the representation of gender in The Panther Captivity as an allegory of oppositions "not so much between the civilized European association and the Indianized wilderness as between different ways of being in and relating to the vast American landscape." (p. 173). What she uncovers in her reading is the repression of a female narrative where the female cultivator is juxtaposed to the male hunter. Kolodny describes her critical method in modest finishing school terms where she seeks to "sharpen", "refine", and "correct" sex blind critical readings. However, her practical criticism is radically engaging precisely because she points to a startling blindness in the leading male Americanist interpretation of this literature — a blindness that develops from their understanding of their perspective as not so much "male", as "non-gendered". There is, as Maria Black and Rosalind Coward have pointed out, an imperative revelation for the male critic to experience. They write:

Men are sustained at the centre of the stage precisely because they can be "people" and do not have to represent their masculinity to themselves. They need never see themselves or their maleness as a problem. Our understanding of the effects of discursive practices leads us to suggest that men can never be displaced from the centre until they can be forced to recognize themselves as men and to take responsibility for this.7
Less apologetic to the male literary tradition than Kolodny, Susan Gubar is more unabashedly essentialist in her analysis of women's writing. Tracing the "pen penis writing on the virgin page" (p. 77) model of creativity from Ovid through Derrida, she proposes an alternative female creativity "which substitutes for the artistic object an act or a process." (p. 93). Unfortunately, by her own admission, she "persistently and perversely ignores history" (p. 92) and valorizes a reductive reproductive female creativity where "no woman is a blank page: every woman is author of the page and author of the page's author" (p. 90). What is welcome in Gubar's writing is a transition from a theory of woman as victim to a theory of woman's resistance and subversion.

Judith Kegan Gardiner's feminism is once again a "collaborative" enterprise. Basing her work on the American sociological theories of Nancy Chodorow, Gardiner turns difference into a universal female identity which she describes as "process" rather than lack. Her undifferentiated identity theory defeats itself in Gardiner's depoliticized reading of The Wide Sargasso Sea by Creole novelist Jean Rhys. Gardiner imagines the reader "enraged at the patriarchy" in the novel. Ignored is how Rhys' writing is overdetermined by another sphere of difference and domination. It is not only "patriarchy" but colonialism that accounts for the particularity of women's oppression in Rhys.

Mary Jacobus, in one of two essays included on George Eliot, suggests that since gender in writing, as in other means of representation, marginalizes as well as differentiates, critical attention to women's writing is by definition engaged. The questions remain: Engaged? How? In her symptomatic reading of a chapter of The Mill on the Floss, Jacobus uncovers a multi-dimensional focus of feminist criticism, moving in the direction of a "necessary utopianism" she finds in both Eliot and French feminist Luce Irigaray's gesture towards what cannot be said. A countermove, in feminist criticism, writes Jacobus, returns to the materiality of women's writing where the conditions of its "reproduction are the economic and educational disadvantages, the sexual and material organizations of society which, rather than biology, form the crucial determinants" (p. 39).

A number of the following essays discuss another series of differences in women's writing. Susan Gilbert considers female "identity", not as an autonomous whole, but in its differential relation to male writers. Two essays on lesbian writers foreground the difference between gender and sexuality. And Gayatri Spivak provides a lesson for the first world feminist critic who would universalize what is particular.

The literary representation of gender becomes ideology (my term) "dressed up" in Sandra M. Gilbert's "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature". She studies male and female modernist writers' attitudes to transvestism, observing that male writers, "nostalgic for the old days of uniforms", tend to view false costumes as "unsexed or wrongly sexed" (p. 195). Women like Virginia Woolf, however, with a more ironic view of costume, link female dress to women's oppression. Gilbert traces the transvestite scenario in three male writers. In Joyce's Ulysses she reads Bloom's behaviour in the Nighttown episode as his response to "the terrifying ascendency of women". (p. 200). In The Fox, Lawrence replaces the transvestite "disorder" of the lesbian
couple with the "hierarchical principle of order based upon male dominance/female submission" (p. 201). And Eliot's *The Waste Land* becomes "the fever dream of the hermaphrodite, the nightmare of gender disorder" (p. 205). Juxtaposed to this "ritual transvestism of the male modernists", Gilbert points out the "utopian ceremonial androgyny of the woman writer" (p. 214) where characters like Woolf's Orlando cross-dress as a sign of resistance.

If sexual difference is hierarchical in a male dominated society, the difference of lesbian sexuality in a heterosexist culture demands careful study. Two essays in this collection look not simply at gender difference, but at the lesbian in literature. Carolyn Burke writes a biographical study of Gertrude Stein's friendships with the Cone sisters and her love affair with Alice B. Toklas "in order to better understand how [Stein's] portraits participate in the reflexive interplay between self-discovery and writing" (p. 223). Burke suggests that these writings provided Stein with a therapeutic solution to "the painful puzzle of female relationships" (p. 223). Burke is less reductive in her use of biography, which becomes a counter text to Stein's writing. She advises the feminist critic to rethink the place of biography, often dismissed by critics as causally related to writing.

"The Lesbian Novel" by Catherine R. Stimpson is an overview of lesbian writers whom she defines with none of the breadth of Lillian Faderman's "female friendship", or Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum." To Stimpson "the lesbian — as writer, as character, as reader . . . represents a commitment of skin, blood, breast and bone" (p. 244). Her thematic approach identifies two narrative patterns in lesbian writing. "The dying fall, a narrative of damnation" and the more positive "enabling escape, a narration of the . . . lesbian's rebellion against social stigma and self-contempt" (p. 244). The essay contrasts Radcliffe Hall's "homosexuality is sickness" (p. 248), to "the lesbian romanticism" of Woolf's *Orlando* "the lesbian realism" of Stein's *Autobiography* and the "fusion of romanticism and realism" in McCarthy's *The Group* (p. 253). She concludes with a call for more and more sophisticated lesbian feminist criticism, quoting lesbian author Bertha Harris, who writes that the "feminist and lesbian press still lacks an informed criticism to mediate between texts and a large audience" (p. 258). Stimpson betrays a curiously patronizing concern for the lesbian reader who finds both community "and comfort in the ease of reading" (p. 251) and may be alienated from the more experimental formal innovations of contemporary lesbian writers. The major task for the lesbian feminist critic, writes Stimpson, is in listening for "why people wish to stigmatize, to dominate, to outlaw and to erase a particular longing for passion and love" (p. 259).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a feminist, Marxist deconstructivist, raises important issues about the international context of writing and sexual difference unmasking a totality where a multiplicity was intended. However, the only piece of work devoted to a non-white author is in the form, not of criticism, but in Spivak's introduction and translation to "Draupadi", a short story by Bengali writer Mahasveta Devi.

Spivak has defined textuality as "the inter-determination of differential representation", where "the economic, political and ideological can be
practically related". These three factors are primary in her deconstruction of the final moment in the story when, having endured a night of torture and rape, the defiant Draupadi refuses to clothe herself. She confronts the uncomprehending chief of police Senanayak, her body, a gaping wound, "and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid" (p. 282). Spivak identifies the complicity of Senanayak as "pluralist aesthete", and finds in him "the closest approximation to the first world scholar in search of the Third World." She continues, "In theory, Senanayak can identify with the enemy, but pluralist aesthetes of the First World are, willily nilly, participants in the production of an exploitative society" (p. 261).

Spivak’s writing and translation uncovers the scarcity in this collection of a combined treatment of “the economic, political and ideological” factors at work in women’s writing. Much feminist writing emerges from a feminist tradition which, while limited by claims of universality, has had both the privilege and the opportunity to problematize sexuality. Ellen Willis describes these contradictions:

That the mainstream of both reformist and radical feminist movements has been relatively privileged cuts two ways. White middle-class feminists have too often defined the movement’s priorities in ways that ignore or reinforce class and racial divisions. Yet precisely because we do not have to cope with three forms of oppression at once, we are freer to confront the sexual questions and explore their most radical implications. In that sense, the bourgeois impulse at the core of feminism is revolutionary.9

While Willis’s comments may explain a tendency in feminism, what she characterizes as “the bourgeois impulse” is too often assumed to represent feminism”. What then would an alternative volume of “writing and sexual difference” include? The first term of the title might be read with more attention to Derrida’s own category “writing”, which Spivak reminds us

is not simply identical with the production of prose and verse. It is the name of a “structure” which operates and fractures knowing (epistemology), being (ontology), doing (practice) history, politics, economics, institutions as such.10

The suggestive discussion in June Howard’s exploratory essay, “Toward a ‘Marxist-Feminist Cultural Analysis’”11 charts the movement from women’s literary studies to a broader category “writing”.

And the issue of sexual difference becomes complex and fruitful in “Freud and H.D. — bisexuality and a feminine discourse” where Claire Buck critiques the American feminist urge to establish a female identity and poetic that results in a female subject “outside the historical or symbolic dimension in which
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sexuality can be analysed as constructed."¹² For the moment, the feminist reader can take pleasure in the controversies and contradictions in this Writing and Sexual Difference.

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Notes

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