

Feminist Scholarship Review

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Feminist Scholarship Review



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Feminist Scholarship Review

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Letter From the Editor

Spring 1993

To the Recipients of Feminist Scholarship Review:

In this issue we are focusing on women's words. Of course, Feminist Scholarship Review always focuses on women's words, but this time we are going to devote our attention to women's words aloud.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to the campus of the University of Hartford to hear Michelle Cliff, from our own English Department, and Irena Klepfisz read excerpts from their works. Frankly, I went to hear Michelle and to support the idea of women's writing in the community. I wasn't thinking about "the experience".

I've heard many women read their work. And this reading differed little from other readings in format and style. The readers read well and had fine things to read. Irena Klepfisz read some poems that were written partly in Yiddish--now here were words I couldn't have even read with text in front of me. The particular music of those words in Yiddish was stunning. I had had a growing awareness all evening that something was different, that for me the evening had shifted.

What was different this time, I suppose, was me, the listener. I heard things differently. What I heard in between the words of those women writers, in back of their words, around and inside their words, was a lilt of voice, a uniqueness of intonation, a quiver of laughter, a trace of emphasis that I wouldn't have heard if I hadn't been there.

All this is to say that women's words aloud are decidedly and delightfully different from women's words as text. If you are there to hear it, what you will hear along with the words is worth much--inconvenience, cold, a staving off of fatigue after a long day. Trinity has, among other such opportunities, a series called "Rainbow Sounds". I encourage you to support this program with your attendance. I encourage you to find as many places as you can to hear women read what they have written. You'll hear things you never imagined, hiding inside those already wonderful words.

Hearing women read aloud is different. Listen!



---Deborah Rose O'Neal

Essence

Volume 23, Number 8. December, 1992.

Essence describes itself as a magazine for the "confident, contemporary Black woman." It is a commercial magazine, with everything that such a title means: advertisements for fashion and makeup, articles on beauty, marriage and food. Gender stereotypes are fostered, to be sure, since this is a magazine that reflects the culture as it exists and is not a vehicle for radical change. The women who model the clothes are young and beautiful, and always, always, they are smiling. But still, the images are different from mainstream commercial magazines. It is worth reading for this experience alone, no matter the race or gender of the reader.

The advantages of a magazine that directs its focus to a specific group of women within the larger category of gender is apparent. The magazine finds a way to responsibly address issues that apply to gender first, without losing the emphasis on Black women. For example, an article on osteoporosis outlines thoroughly the explanation for the condition and suggests preventative measures. It does not neglect, however, to point out that many African-Americans are lactose-intolerant which may lead to skipping the calcium-rich foods recommended for prevention. Nor does it fail to point out that, in fact, the large-boned nature of the majority of African-American women may actually protect this population against the worst effects of the disease. Advertisements include "Kenya: the beautiful hairstyling doll" which features a doll and a young model who are Black, ads which focus on mothering (everything from Tylenol to Instant Oatmeal) feature Black models of parents and children. Features include a short article on nourishing Black theater, and advice column which answers questions such as concerns about cultural differences in a dating situation in which one member of the couple is African and the other is African-American.

The articles in **Essence** apply at the deepest level to all women. The writings are informative and thoughtful, including pieces on life at fifty, what one mother learned philosophically and emotionally from her children ("When I discovered that my 16 - year-old daughter was eight months pregnant, I came face to face with my own shame and guilt." p. 32) In keeping with **Feminist Scholarship Review**'s focus on women's words aloud, is an interview of Maya Angelou called "Lessons in Living" (p. 49). Having heard Angelou speak aloud through the media, on various television programs, for example, many of us will be able to hear and see her as we read her quotations in this article. "Grace has to do with one's deliberate, chosen way of being in this world," she says. The photographs that accompany the article help enhance the impression of Angelou as a presence within her words. Her advice is worth not only reading, but also taking the time to listen to, in our imaginations, as though we hear her speaking directly to us.

"Everybody ought to take a day off...from everything and sit down and think, " Angelou advises. If that's something you can do, it wouldn't hurt to have this issue of **Essence** with you. It will give you something important and inspirational to think about.

Hot Wire

Volume 7, Number 3. September, 1991

Hot Wire claims to "specialize in woman-identified music and culture, primarily the performing arts, literature and film/video." (Inside cover). The philosophy of the magazine is that of a strong belief in "the power of the arts to affect social change" and a commitment to cover "women's groups who prioritize feminist and/or lesbian content and ideals in their creative products and events." (Inside cover). With that clear statement in mind, the only other question is, how well does **Hot Wire** do this?

The answer is clear: rather thoroughly. **Hot Wire** has a feature section which includes interviews with Karen Williams and The Indigo Girls, a review of a concert by Cris Williamson and more. A Music Festivals section covers festivals from the previous several months including the Southern Women's Music and Comedy Festival and the Third Annual East Coast Lesbian's Festival; photos give a feeling for the experience--lots of pictures of women speaking and singing their words. A third section of the magazine, the "Departments" section, includes an article on the basics and fine points of recording, an essay on "Female Buddy Videos" such as "Thelma and Louise; and "Feds", and "Soundsheets", which reviews single songs written by women. Attached to the cover is a sample record featuring the songs reviewed.

Nor does **Hot Wire** focus exclusively on recent efforts. An article on "Protest Songs of the Suffrage Era" is thoroughly researched and written for easy, enjoyable reading. Songs were written by men and women with a specific cause in mind. Once the vote for women was won, the songs "slipped into obscurity" (p.13), only to be revived as living words when we read about this genre today.

Hot Wire is a resource of a very specific nature. It certainly highlights, and rather thoroughly, women's words aloud.

ES

Laying Down the Weapons: Healing for Sisters With an Attitude

**Mary J. Blige,
Miki Howard
and Tonya
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ON THE COVER: Magnetic and magical, spring's newest mood on model Tu-ning. Photographer, Matthew Jordan Smith. "The Caribbean Look" hair hat by Caribbean International, N.Y.C. All makeup from Guerlain's Terracotta Color Collection. Terracotta Eyeshadow Trio No. 1 and Terracotta Lipstick No. 5. Makeup, Roxanna Floyd/Zoli Illusions, N.Y.C. Stylist, Elaine Wallace. Earrings, Roxanne Assoulin. **On this page:** Dress, Louis Dell'Olio for Anne Klein. Photographer, Randy Brooke.

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Women's Center: Additional Sources

SPRING 1993

VOLUME 18

NUMBER 3

SIGNS

JOURNAL OF WOMEN IN
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

SIGNS

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The Women's Review of Books

Vol. X, No. 7

April 1993

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Inside:



"Frances with a flower," a 1930s photograph by Consuelo Kanaga. Elsa Dorfman reviews the first published collection of this neglected photographer's work, p.15.

June Jordan's latest collection of essays portrays America as "noble and nurturing, brutal and malformed—often at the same time," as Adele Logan Alexander finds, p.6.

In the growing literature on incest, the stories of incest survivors' mothers have been absent: Susan J. Kraus reads two books that seek to fill this gap, p.24.

The figure of Jack the Ripper has been a catalyst for both Victorian and modern thinking about sex and its dangers: Marjorie Howes reads Judith Walkowitz's *Acts of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Violence in Late-Victorian London*, p.11.

Dorothy Dinnerstein, author of *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, who died last December, is remembered by her friends and colleagues, p.7.

and more...

She too had a dream

by Arlyn Diamond

This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer, by Kay Mills. New York: NYA Dutton, 1993. 300 pp., \$21.00. Hardcover.

This could be a very brief review: the subject is timely, the book is good, read it! As June Jordan, who herself wrote a children's biography of Fannie Lou Hamer, said in *Fire* more than a decade ago:

We need everybody and all that we are.
We need to know and make known the complete, constantly unfolding, complicated heritage that is our Black experience. We should absolutely resist the superstar, one-at-a-time mentality that threatens the varied and resilient, flexible wealth of our Black future, even as it shrinks and obliterates incalculable segments of our history.

Kay Mills, in writing the first full-length biography of this Mississippi sharecropper, has transformed her from something that is at most a faded symbol to a younger generation back into the powerful voice for justice she was in her lifetime. Based on extensive research, including a number of interviews with people who knew Hamer personally, this is a very accessible and useful book, one of the growing number of works on the civil rights movement. A journalist by profession, Mills has written a traditional biography (and I do not use "traditional" in a negative sense), chronologically organized and focused on Hamer as a public figure. The detailed historical and political context she provides also helps restore once again what seems to be a constantly repressed awareness of the struggles against racism in the 1960s.

The life Mills chronicles might at first appear to fall into a familiar pattern, that of the extraordinary individual who rises out of terrible deprivation and in so doing somehow justifies America's vision of itself as a land of opportunity. It is the myth of Booker T. Washington and Abraham Lincoln and

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The Women's Review of Books

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TRINITY WOMEN'S STUDIES THESES

There are many master's and senior theses which have been written at Trinity on topics of interest to Women's Studies. They cover a wide variety of topics and were done under the auspices of several different departments. They address women's activities from such different arenas as home, politics, economics or missionary work. Almost half deal with depictions of women in different art forms, novels, poetry, painting, film, and opera. It's not surprising several focus on Connecticut women but there are a significant number looking at women in different cultures, particularly China and Japan. The following is only a sample list of theses showing this diversity. For a more complete list search in the LUCT section of the catalog under k=thesis and trinity and wom? The theses are kept in the college archives, accessible through the Watkinson library.

Selected Trinity Senior Theses

White Women in Kenya: 1895-1951 by Sarah Jackson (1992)

Japanese Society as Reflected by the Writings of Heian Women by Lilia M. Mauricio (1991)

Mary Cassatt's Depictions of Women by Jennifer Read Kaplan (1991)

The Impact of Capitalist Industrialization on Third World Women: a Theoretical Analysis with Case Studies of Mexico and Singapore by Kathleen McGillis (1990)

Modern Indian Women: Religious Traditions and Changing Roles by Susan Donaldson (1990)

The Status of Women in Modern Japan by Louise van der Does (1990)

Out of Her Own Sphere: Themes of Alienation, Interiorization and Rebellion in Women's Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries by Tammy J. Banks (1983)

The Woman Question, Feminism, Marxism, Socialist-Feminism by Linda Colligan (1980)

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated: A Progressive Voice for Black Women Since 1913 by Karren M. Harris (1978)

The White Woman's Burden: British Women in the Age of Expansion, 1890-1914 by Margaret Mistretta (1978)

Working Women in America: Factors Which Influence Their Participation and Attachment to the Labor Force by Michael L. Smirlock (1978)

The Case for Women: India and the United States by Gray Gibson (1974)

Selected Trinity Master's Theses

Writing From Home: Survival and Frontier in the Novels of Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison by Margaret M. Murray (1991)

Women and Power in the Victorian Novel by Cheryl Ann Fenner (1988)

The 30's Woman in American Film by April L. Casali (1985)

Three Nineteenth Century American Women Novelists: a Study of Industrial Literature of Mills and Factories by Nancy Mynott Davis (1982)

Connecticut Colonial Women: Their Role in the Establishment of the Colony by Wanda Veronica Czarnojan (1981)

Willa Catha's Independent Women by Ester Terni Heffernan (1978)

Woman as the Protagonist in Selected Plays of the Golden Age by Judith Sema Sable (1976)

Women in the United States Congress, 1917-1973 by Sharlyn Ann Grigsby (1975)

Women, Real and Ideal in the Writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald by Barbara Castle McGrath (1973)

Woman's Liberation: an Existential Approach by Nancy Berson (1972)

Man - Woman Relationships in the Poetry of Robert Frost by Anne Mary Valentine (1971)

Two Generations of Italian Women Writers by Dorothy Ann Egan (1960)

PROMINENT WOMEN OF FICTION: 1960-1980

Margaret Atwood: The Circle Game (1966), Surfacing (1972), Dancing Girls (1977). Her breakthrough book, The Handmaid's Tale, was published in 1985.

Judy Blume: Are You There God? It's me Margaret (1970), Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (1972), Forever (1975).

Kay Boyle: Fifty Stories, (1980, an anthology of Boyle's work).

Anita Desai: Clear Light of Day (1980), In Custody (1984).

Joan Didion: Run River (1963), Play It As It Lays (1970), A Book of Common Prayer (1977). Her work of this period also included two books of essays: Slouching Toward Bethlehem (1968), The White Album (1979).

Annie Dillard: Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974, Pulitzer Prize).

Marguerite Duras: Since 1959, Duras has written over 15 novels, several screenplays and directed more than a dozen films. The Sailor from Gibraltar (tr. 1966), The Ravishing of Lol Stein (tr. 1966), The Vice-Consul (tr. 1968), Abahn Sabana David (1970).

Nadine Gordimer: Author of many novels and collections of short stories. The Conservationist (1974, Booker Prize joint winner).

Erica Jong: Fear of Flying (1973).

Ursula LeGuin: The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), The Dispossessed (1974), Earthsea (1977).

Doris Lessing: Golden Notebook (1962), Briefing for a Descent into Hell (early 1970's), The Summer Before Dark (early 1970's). Also wrote "Children of Violence" (1952-1969) and "Canopus in Argus: Archives" (1979-1981) series. Short story collections include The Habit of Loving (1958), African Stories (1965), The Stories of Doris Lessing (1978).

Mary McCarthy: The Group (1963). National Medal for Literature 1984.

Ngaio Marsh: Hand in Glove (1962), Black as He's Painted (1975), Photo Finish (1980). Author of innumerable deftly written mysteries.

Paule Marshall: Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969).

Toni Morrison: The Bluest Eye (1969), Sula (1973), Song of Solomon (1977). She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for Beloved.

Joyce Carol Oates: A Garden of Earthly Delights (1967), Expensive People (1968), Son of the Morning (1978), and Bellefleur (1980).

Grace Paley: The Little Disturbances of Man (1959), Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1974).

Marge Piercy: Going Down Fast (1969), Dance the Eagle to Sleep (1971), Small Changes (1973), Woman on the Edge of Time (1976), The High Cost of Living (1978) and Vida (1980).

Sylvia Plath: The Bell Jar (1963). Many works published posthumously.

Katherine Anne Porter: Ship of Fools (early 1960's). Collected Works (1965) won both a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award.

Susan Sontag: The Benefactor (1963), Death Kit (1967), I Etcetera (1978)

Alice Walker: The Third Life of George Grange (1970), In Love and Trouble (1973), Meridian (1976), You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down (1981). The Color Purple (1982) won a Pulitzer Prize.

Eudora Welty: Thirteen Stories (1965), Losing Battles (1970), The Optimist's Daughter (1972, Pulitzer Prize).

This list is by no means a complete or even comprehensive listing of the offerings at Gallows Hill. It suggests authors for a broad base of literary tastes, including some genre fiction. For more information, call ext. 5321.

--David Givens

Sherley Anne Williams' Dessa Rose is based on the true story of a slave woman who, in 1829, was executed after freeing herself and other slaves off a coffle. They planned to kill the traders and make their way to one of the maroon islands; one of the traders was indeed killed. However, the slaves were eventually captured. The woman, pregnant, was allowed to give birth to her child (for reasons of economy) and was publicly hanged. Williams chose to re-invent this story of that slave woman, embodied by Dessa Rose, and her co-conspirators, Harker, Nathan, and Cully. Yet, Dessa does not suffer the same fate as her nineteenth century foremother. Instead, Williams makes a success of Dessa's escape and uses her to explore the broader political ramifications of interracial friendships between black and white women. She also breaks one of the many silences inherent in stories of slavery: voluntary interracial sex.

Of course, readers of the Feminist Scholarship Review may have more invested in examining the friendship storyline. After all, the Women's Movement of the late sixties through the mid-seventies was notorious for excluding black women (and women of color) and their particular experiences. This absence of black women's stories from the "personal is political" credo seemingly precluded any meaningful coalitions between black and white women. Quite obviously the dynamics of slavery severely limit the possibilities of reconciliation between black and white women. Yet I believe it is precisely this reason that Williams chooses to resurrect a slave mother out of historical oblivion and place her in this twentieth century feminist context: Clearly, Williams wants to open up space for dialogue between black and white women.

Despite the historical limitations, Dessa and Miz Rufel form a coalition anyway. The agenda is certainly not women uniting because of a common oppression. Indeed, their goal is to procure money to secure their travel to the free territories of the West. Yet Dessa's distrust of Miz Rufel because she is a white woman and because she is a white woman involved sexually with a slave (Nathan), almost becomes an obstruction to the success of this plan. In order to execute the plan Dessa must make peace with her objections to Miz Rufel's relationship with Nathan.

I applaud Williams for her attempt but it should be noted that the relationship between Dessa and Miz Rufel is one-sided. It is Dessa who must transform herself in order to accept Miz Rufel. This process is not evident in Miz Rufel; we do not see such a transformation occurring in her. This is understandable since much of the story is presented from Dessa's perspective in first person. Therefore, Dessa would not be able to relate to her audience Miz Rufel's transformation. Perhaps Williams implies with this silence that it is up to white women to depict what the transformation process would entail for them to authentically form a multi-racial partnership.

The friendship formed between Dessa and Miz Rufel was by no means a romantic one where differences were sacrificed under the guise of women-bonding and this reveals Williams' astuteness in depicting these two women. To examine the possibilities of a partnership between black and white women is to examine those differences, not to discourage such a union but to reveal such a union as problematic. The fact that Dessa and Miz Rufel did become genuine friends suggests that Williams does not believe that pursuing coalitions, personal and political, is futile. Those of us who have invested in a feminist future must believe as well.

As the diamond comes into a knot of
flame

I am Black because I come from the
Earth's inside

now take my word for jewel in the
open light

--Audre Lorde
1934-1992