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Kathleen Cleaver,“ digital collage, 2015 by Elise R. Peterson
Dear Readers,

In 1983, when the *Women's Review of Books* was born, it was a 13-year-old girl in Fargo, North Dakota. I was your typical brace-faced, permed, acne-ridden, insecure, morose, and misunderstood teen—but also smart and ambitious. Three things saved me: theater (in retrospect, such a safe way to get attention and feel special); feminism (my mother had Ms. magazine on the coffee table always, which gave direction to my ambition and support for my intellect); and books.

I’ve returned to the last two saving graces many times. After college, I became an intern and then an editor at Ms. magazine in New York. From there I wrote for magazines like *The Nation*, *Glamour*, and *Harper’s* for many years and wrote six books about contemporary feminism, including *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future and Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics*. I directed and produced two documentaries, cofounded a feminist lecture bureau with Amy Richards called Soapbox, co-created Feminist Camp, toured the country talking about feminism in action, and became the publisher and executive director of the Feminist Press. I left FP in late 2017 to start an independent press called Dottir and to become the third editor in chief of this significant review.

The institutions of feminism are always important but they are especially critical now, in this moment of great upheaval, movement, and reckoning. Our institutions provide roots—ballast for the tall saplings of new feminist activism and vision.

As I went through the lists of writers kept meticulously by outgoing editor Amy Hoffman (and before her founding editor Linda Gardiner), I felt the scale of this root system. One thousand nine hundred and sixty-six names of contributors lined the pages, a roll call of luminaries, living and dead, such as Julia Alvarez, Patricia Bell Scott, Akasha Hull, Dorothy Allison, Susie Bright, Michelle Cliff, Rita Dove, Jo Freeman, Erica Jong, Jack Halberstam, Peggy McIntosh, Barbara Ransby, Adrienne Rich, Grace Paley, Ursula Le Guin.

So it is with great pride and humility that I take the helm of the *Women’s Review of Books*, with the support of WRB’s home at Wellesley Centers for Women (itself an awesome institution) and Old City Publishing. Together, we can continue to lift feminism, and the Future and the Future and the Future.
The words “Black Lives Matters” come together to form a simple, declarative phrase. It plainly states that Black life— which has been under siege in the wake of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and Trumpism, simply put—matters. Yet, since the hashtag burst into the public consciousness in the wake of the death of Mike Brown in 2014, the words have taken on an even more profound meaning. For some, Black Lives Matter is the clarion call for a new generation of organizers and activists to resist racism and police brutality. For some, Black Lives Matter rebukes lazy post-racial thinking in favor of a deliberate focus on the how far race relations still need to come. For some, Black Lives Matters elevates one race above all others, for shouldn’t “all lives matter”? For some, Black Lives Matter is the rallying cry for crazed, far left, anti-white “Black identity extremists” who are just as bad as the white nationalists on the alt-right. For some, “Black Lives Matter” reflects the sad state of contemporary activism, in which Black lives are not even seeking power but just basic recognition of their humanity.

For those invested in the phrase Black Lives Matter, it is neither a reflection of the anemic state of activism, nor an example of the violence of the “alt-left,” nor evidence of “reverse racism” (which is actually not a thing). Instead, the notion that Black Lives Matter rests on the assumption that if Black lives truly mattered in our society then all lives would, in fact, matter. For when the most historically marginalized people are recognized in the fullness of their humanity then all of us can truly be free.

Although, the term “Black Lives Matter” gained national momentum during the Ferguson protests, the phrase was coined in 2013 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of another unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin. Three Black women organizers, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Khan-Cullors joined forces in response to the seemingly never-ending cycle of state sanctioned violence against Black people. Since then, Black Lives Matter has become a full-fledged movement with chapters across North America. The Black Lives Matter network identifies itself as a global entity, a decentralized “chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.” This network is just one of over a dozen of grassroots organizations that also come together as the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of progressive groups devoted to supporting, protecting, and preserving Black life in the face of pervasive anti-Blackness and state violence.

In When They Call You a Terrorist, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, one of three Black women who founded the Black Lives Matter movement, traces her life her working class roots in southern California to the organizing and activism that characterizes her identity today. The memoir is in the tradition of Assata Shakur, Audre Lorde, Shirley Chisholm, Elaine Brown, Maya Angelou, and so many other Black women freedom fighters: it illustrates how the personal is in fact the political.

Khan-Cullors’s early life is characterized by a close-knit family beleaguered by poverty. Her mother works 16-hour days for low pay just to keep her family clothed and fed, her father figures fit in and out of her life as they navigate factory closures, addiction, and jail time all the while trying to parent.

While the recent Great Recession of 2008 plunged many American families into financial peril, Khan-Cullors’s memoir is a reminder that for many families of color the 1980s and 1990s were also a time of hyper-unemployment. As a child, one of her favorite forms of escaping this reality is watching the popular early 1990s drama Beverly Hills 90210, which is a sharp contrast to her Van Nues neighborhood, where the only grocery store is a 7-Eleven. Unlike the pristine white neighborhoods she watches on TV, police in her community “circle blocks or people... like hungry hyenas.”

Police surveillance and frequent arrests for petty crimes, such as tagging, or for actions that should not be deemed crimes—like standing in public while young, Black, and male—plague her family. Some of Khan-Cullors’s earliest memories involve the terrifying presence of the police patrolling her neighborhood, harassing residents, and targeting her neighbors. The men in her family—her brother Monte, in particular—are repeatedly terrorized by the police. Monte’s story becomes a touchstone in the memoir, as mental illness and the carceral state collide in his life again and again. Monte suffers from schizoaffective disorder, something he is not diagnosed with until he is well into his twenties and already has a rap sheet. Monte’s experiences illustrate the deep failings of the prison industry and mental health; Khan-Cullors notes that “there are more people with mental health disorders in prison than in all of the psychiatric hospitals in the United States added up.” Khan-Cullors’s memoir asks us what would happen if we as a nation focused on providing access to quality physical and mental health rather than the building of more prisons.

Throughout the book, Khan-Cullors explores what terrorism looks like. Despite the fact that neither she nor her comrades espouse or commit violence, they are frequently depicted as terrorists.

The book soars in its ability to make meaningful the phrase “the personal is political.” In her story, Khan-Cullors’s family history of poverty and incarceration is not about individual failings but about collective and systemic ways in which Black and Brown folk are set up to fail. And just as she shares the dark times that shaped her life, she also shares the times of love and laughter that spur her onwards. A progressive high school becomes the author’s lifeline, where she learns that even, or perhaps especially, as a youngster that she can make a difference. Her experiences as a queer woman navigating romantic and platonic love are poignant and unabashed. The prose, though heart-breaking at times, is also poetic and triumphant, formed by the deft hands of both Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, a noted writer and political advocate.

In many ways, the book reads not just as a memoir of Khan-Cullor’s own individual life but as an autobiography of the movement, as its subtitle “A Black Lives Matter Memoir” suggests. This is not because her life is not compelling but rather because Khan-Cullors so convincingly leads readers to understand how system oppression shape the lives of marginalized folk in similar ways. And the memoir also traces a trajectory to activism that although far from trite feels familiar (see the autobiographies of community organizers from Shirley Chisholm to Barack Obama and you’ll see some of the path that Khan-Cullors follows and blazes a trail for). And, undoubtedly, co-founders Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi could tell similar stories of their path to activism while living the complicated lives that Black women fighting to be free often do. Ultimately, When They Call You a Terrorist is a memoir that tells the story of both one incredible woman and of a generation.

Susana M. Morris is associate professor of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology. She is author of Close Kin and Distant Relations: The Paradox of Responsibility in Black Women’s Literature (UVA Press, 2014), and co-editor, with Brittany C. Cooper and Robin M. Boylorn, of The Crunk Feminist Collection (Feminist Press, 2017).
The Origins of Feminism

Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women

By Brittny C. Cooper


Reviewed by A. J. Verdelle

In Beyond Respectability, Brittny C. Cooper maps the expansive intellectual and historical territory around a whole cadre of “race women,” intellectuals who dedicated their time, their thinking, their teaching—their life’s work—to the uplift of African Americans. An assistant professor of women’s and gender studies at Rutgers University, Cooper unearths and foregrounds black women’s early activity and commitment as public intellectuals.

The book begins its recounting during Reconstruction, when black women were active, tenacious, and forceful as they joined in the din of debate over the understanding of race post-emancipation, post-war, and post-Emancipation. Race women believed that black women, in particular, were facing an acute crisis, as their very humanity was questioned, doubted, and misrepresented. Records of the race men of the era are plentiful. It’s the women’s intellectual work that has been essentially disappeared—often because their writings are seen as autobiographical or organizational records. The project of Beyond Respectability is to counteract this problematic erasure.

One strategy of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the important network of black women’s clubs founded in 1896, was to make lists of women engaged in racial uplift work, both to acknowledge them and to acquaint them with one another. In Beyond Respectability Cooper emulates the NACW by presenting a list of her own, which includes Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Pauli Murray, and Toni Cade Bambara. The women Cooper celebrates had access to public platforms and were generally middle class. Poor and working-class black women produced knowledge in other forms.

Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), who had a long career as a keen, observant, and above all, respectable public intellectual, believed that black women could raise, consider, and discuss the issues and advocate for themselves. However, even for her, “respectability” was not the only way to move the cause forward. Very early on, she was concerned with the intersection of class, gender, and race oppressions. Widowed after only two years of marriage, she went on to put in fifty years of activism. Her 1892 collection of speeches and essays, *A Voice from the South by a Woman from the South*, is often credited as the first full-length black feminist text. Brittny Cooper notes admiringly that “this 19th century Southern Black woman found the courage and the audacity to challenge the thinking of Black male preachers, white male philosophers, and early white women feminists,” and calls her own methodology “Anna Julia Cooperian,” implying that we should refer to race women’s theorizing just as we refer to that of canonical male theorists, whose thought is labeled Foucaultian, Kantian, Spinozian, etc.

Fannie Barrier Williams (1855–1944), writes Cooper, was “one of the most formidable thinkers of her generation.” A member of the elite of black Chicago and married to the prominent black lawyer S. Laing Williams, she pushed to have African Americans represented in the programming of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition. She herself was appointed Clerk in Charge of Colored Interests in the Department of Publicity and Promotions, and gave two major speeches during the exposition: “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation,” and “What Can Religion Further Do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?” She went on to publish in Booker T. Washington-owned publications, writing about the ways in which industrialization and urbanization were reshaping the lives of women—placing her among the first to analyze the intersection of gender and labor.

Race women’s organizing base, writes Cooper, was the women’s club movement, which Williams described as “organized anxiety.” In Williams’s article, “The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America” (1900), she characterized the movement, and its umbrella organization, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), as an outgrowth of black women’s recognition of their low social standing and their desire to change it. She credited the club movement with helping women build racial self-esteem, to believe that they were more than slaves and to “feel that [one is] a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization.” In opposition to the quintessential race man W.E.B. DuBois, who wanted women in the movement to focus primarily on children, the race women in the NACW took on national issues such as the convict-lease system in the South, which basically re-enslaved black people; the importance of kindergartens; and racial and sexual exploitation.

In Cooper’s discussion of the lengthy career of Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954), she aims to “recover” Terrell as a “critical theorist of 20th-century racial resistance efforts.” As the first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), Terrell helped craft and shape the ideas of respectability and racial uplift. She invented the notion of the “dignified agitator”—and performed as such well into her eighties. She believed in writing as a political act, and encouraged other women to take up the pen, criticizing the “pretty tendencies” of many women writers.

In this day and time, when everybody is too busy to read even the books and articles bearing directly upon their business, pretty writing will do no good. It is as much out of fashion as knee breeches and hoop skirts. ... [T]here is an imperative of strong, clear-headed writers who know how to present facts in a forceful, tactful, attractive manner so that sentiment may be created in behalf of the race.

In her own autobiography, composed around 1913, she recounted the combined struggles she faced as a woman oppressed by racism and a black person oppressed by sexism. Pauli Murray (1910–1985) was not only attracted to women but also felt that she was a man among men, and her life seems to have consisted of one sexual-intellectual-psychological-gender battle after another. In her writings, she detailed her negotiations with race, sex, and gender nonconformity. Through her work as a civil rights activist, attorney, Episcopal priest, poet, and writer, she participated in both antiracist and feminist struggles. Murray coined the term “Jane Crow” to describe the sex and race discrimination she experienced as a student. Traditionally, the top graduate of Howard University was offered a spot at Harvard Law School. But when Harv ard realized Murray was female, it denied her entry. She attended the University of California Boalt School of Law instead, and in 1951 published *States’ Laws on Race and Color*, which was praised by Thurgood Marshall as the “bible for civil rights lawyers.”

Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995) extended the NACW’s motto of “lifting as we climb” to “each one, teach one.” She compiled the stories of individual women in her influential anthology *The Black Woman* (1970), a collection that has only grown in importance since its original publication.

O bviously, there are many more race women than the five on whom Cooper focuses. Uncovering them from buried or incomplete indices and archives accounts for a good deal of the excitement and revelation of Beyond Respectability. So many activists, so many race women. In their time, people made lists of them in books, to preserve their stories, and to record innovation, action, and accomplishment. Beyond Respectability brings the names of African American women cultural workers forward from history, into the contemporary moment: the abolitionist Frances Watkins Harper (1825–1911); the journalist Gertrude Mosse1 (1855–1948); the educator Hallie Quinn Brown (1845–1949); the author/biographer and “list maker,” Sadie Iola Daniel (years unknown); the writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960); the intersectional and feminist activist Barbara Smith (b. 1946); the author Alice Walker (b. 1944); and the #BlackLivesMatter founders Patrisse Khan-Cullors (b. 1984), Alicia Garza (b. 1981), and Opal Tometi (b. 1984). Beyond Respectability presents a dense, deep roster of names of race women who worked to clear the past (and present) of the era's
The Gay Nineties

We Were Witches: A Novel
By Ariel Gore
New York: Feminist Press, 2017,
296 pp., $18.95 softcover

Stray City: A Novel
By Chelsey Johnson
New York: Custom House/
Harper Collins, 2018,
432 pp., $25.99 hardcover

Reviewed by Jessica Jernigan

Here are the questions a young Ariel Gore asks of her future self as she settles down to sleep on a park bench with her infant daughter, Maia:

Will we survive?
Can I be a mother and an artist?
Can I be a single mother and a writer?
Can I be a daughter still?

The Ariel narrating this story replies “Yes, yes of course. Follow me.” The book itself is an answer: We Would Witches if Ariel had not survived, if she had not become a writer and, in this instance, what is true for the character called “Ariel Gore” is also true for the author Ariel Gore.

The creator of the indie parenting zine Hip Mama and the author of two memoirs—Atlas of the Human Heart and The End of Eve—Gore will be a familiar figure to many readers. And, because of the very personal style of writing, readers will know that the narrative she presents here echoes her own biography. The decision to call this “a novel” allows Gore to include fantastic elements in her story, but it’s more just a license to write about talking birds and mermaids. By declaring that this story—her story—is fiction, Gore is asserting that it is art. She is insisting that, yes, women can make art, they can make art about themselves, and the creation of a child does not preclude other kinds of creation.

“The narrative she presents here echoes her own biography.”

A.J. Verdelle is the author of the novel The Good Negro. She teaches creative writing in the English Department at Morgan State University, and teaches fiction and revision in the Lesley University low-residency MFA program in Cambridge, MA.

A. J. Verdelle

oppressive obstacles. Cooper rescues or resuscitates some of these women’s names and legacies, just as in their own time, activist black clubwomen, listmakers, speakers, and authors galvanized to preserve and make records of their own and their contemporaries’ intellectual works. Many of the intellectual African American women of the past are known to us only because another activist published her name and activities in an annotated list. This angle on black women’s intellectual history is invigorating and timely. Beyond Respectability unrolls rosters of our foremothers and sisters, explains their club movement—a strong and “herstorically” entrenched methodology for organizing, and provides us with a flag to raise and march behind.

Beyond Respectability is a multifaceted and robust record of women’s important work. Stylistically, it includes all the nounifying and theorizing an academic could want—about American exceptionalism, gender policing, cultural disciplining, the politics of racial manhood, dissemblance, the exigencies of historical triage, and the annals of more. However, Beyond Respectability is not a boring academic tome. Black women’s activism, causes, and moments in history are presented in rich, fascinating detail—highlighting movement—a strong and “herstorically” entrenched methodology for another activist published her name and activities in an annotated list. This

This

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—Thomas McGuane, author of Crow Fair

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NEW FROM KNOF DUBLELDAY
Maia, it's not enough for Ariel to make art. She also has to be paid for her art, and We Were Witches is as much about Ariel's struggle to navigate patriarchal systems as it is about the evolution of a young writer.

When the novel begins, Ariel is an unwed, teenage mother in the very early 1990s. The bedtime stories she reads Maia are chapters from Adrienne Rich and Gloria Anzaldúa. These authors—and others; there's a reading list at the back of the book—help Ariel imagine a world in which she deserves the life that she wants for herself and her daughter. These authors give Ariel the strength to seek public assistance and pursue an education and invent an idea of motherhood that encompasses Ariel's reality as a young, queer, single mom and an artist.

Ariel also discovers magic. Magic here is both dramatic and pragmatic. It is intent made physical—a mirror on a windowsill to deflect the evil eye, Crown of Success powder sprinkled on a college application—and it is an assertion that the way things are is not the way things have to be. Of course, "witch" is a gendered term. Ariel's spells are her response to the voices she hears on conservative radio, men like Rush Limbaugh and Pat Robertson, people who want her to be ashamed of her body and her baby. Magic, for Ariel, is a form of self-determination, just like writing is.

Ariel endures humiliation at the hands of people who are supposed to help her, and she has to pretend to be something she isn't in order to get help. She must also find a way to maintain custody of her child. But she also finds the magic that helped to build.

Embodyed Politics

How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics: From Welfare Reform to Foreclosure to Trump

By Laura Briggs

Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017, 288 pp., $29.95, hardcover

Reproductive Justice: An Introduction

By Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger

Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017, 351 pp., $27.95, paperback

Reviewed by Felicia Kornbluh, Lila Hughes, and Meghan Letizia

Feminism in the Trump era is truly a mass movement. This seems normal to those of us who are undergraduates and shocks those who came up in the F'm-not-a-feminist-but 1980s and 1990s. It’s great to feel the love from Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Lena Dunham, and corporate honchach like Sheryl Sandberg. But today’s challenges are still mighty:

- How do we ensure that institutions built over years, such as the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its local affiliates, can survive when politicians are deriding and defunding abortion services and birth control?
- What will it take to ensure that all gender and sexual subordinates have an equal chance to set the feminist agenda? After all these years, why aren’t the most elite feminists embarrassed by the narrowness of their program for mostly wealthy, white, cis-gender, heterosexual women? When will all of us—trans* women, rural white welfare moms, Latinx migrants without legal documents, Deaf and disabled people, African American
Lesbian, genderqueers of every variety—get an equal chance to shape mobilizations for gender justice?

- How can we maintain the momentum of last year’s Women’s Marches, and everything that has happened since, while deepening a shared sense of the feminist agenda? How do we make feminist communities smarter, more strategic, and more nourishing of the people in them and the work we must do?

Lara Briggs’s How All Politics Became Reproduct-ive Politics offers some ideas about how to move forward on all of these questions as she examines late 20th and early 21st century US politics through the lens of reproductive justice. The book makes a contribution to the contemporary conversation that transcends the deep but narrow work of many academic historians. She is an ideal person to take on this task, a historian and gender studies scholar whose prior work focuses on the issues of gender, imperialism, and reproduction. She is an alum of the oft-mourned left periodical Gay Community News (GCN), and she uses the GCN archives and her own memories to tell stories that are often lost in queer histories.

How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics is the second volume in a new series on reproductive justice from the University of California Press, edited by the scholar-activists Loretta Ross, Rickie Solinger, Zakiya Luna, Ruby Tapia, and Khira Bridges. Ross, who led the organization SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective from 2005 to 2012, and Solinger, a historian and curator, inaugurated the series with their own volume, Reproductive Justice: An Introduction. Their aim, they write, is “an expansive explanation of reproductive justice so that readers”—scholars and activists alike—can learn about this creative vision for achieving human rights protections. The primer will also help readers understand how reproductive justice is significantly different from the pro-choice/antiabortion debates that have dominated the headlines and mainstream political conflict for so long.

The inauguration of this series is a major event for feminist readers—and for anyone who cares about pregnancy, parenting, racism, public benefits, or—in short, the rights of women. Briggs deserves a second-look, given that her book is part of a larger project that promises to offer scholars and activists a window into the heart of both books under consideration, Bridges’s book, and Ross and Solinger’s, present reproductive justice implicitly and explicitly as a recognition of the reproductive injustices facing women seeking to prevent pregnancy, to have children, and, explain Ross and Solinger, “to parent children in safe and healthy environments” [emphasis theirs].

Briggs’s book is not a primer but rather a provocation. Briggs argues that “there is no outside” to reproductive politics in the modern US. She covers issues that are easy to see as reproductive, such as infant mortality, and others that seem far afield, such as the foreclosure crisis, which she suggests had a reproductive dimension because families headed by women and lower-income, nonwhite families were the ones most likely to lose their homes. Interestingly, although in common parlance “reproductive rights” usually refers to legal birth control and abortion, none of Briggs’s chapters takes abortion or birth control as its centerpiece.

Briggs gives pride of place in her book to the welfare “reforms” of the middle 1990s, which she treats as paradigmatic and in some ways causal of what came afterward. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, drafted by a Republic- can Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton, at- tempted to change poor people’s sexual, romantic, and parenting behavior, and sustained gender and racial stereotypes. The law’s language (beginning with its title) suggested that poor people were responsible for their own poverty due to bad reproductive decisions, especially nonmarital parenting and teen sex. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) created by the law, mandated waged work but did not provide childcare or trans- portation for women leaving the rolls. Once they were working, many lost their Medicaid health insurance.

Briggs points out that in 1997, the year the law went into effect, Walmart became the largest private-sector employer in the US. Three-quarters of its workforce was female. Walmart encouraged employees to apply for government benefits, demonstrating that its wages and others in the “McJobs” economy didn’t come close to covering essential expenses such as food, rent, healthcare, and childcare.

Maintaining her expansive approach, Briggs delve into the histories of US imperialism and immigration, especially from Latin America. Empire and migration are inseparable from what Briggs terms “offshoring reproduction,” or what the sociologist Rhaezel Salazar Parrenas has termed the global “care chain.” Briggs argues that, as neoliberalism keeps wealthy white women from balancing careers and family, they appoint women of color, typically migrant women, to fulfill their socially assigned reproductive labor. Migrant careworkers in the United States face all sorts of potential reproductive injustices: the fear of deportation may keep undocumented women from claiming abortion and birth control; they may be unable to care for their own family members, who are thousands of miles away; and they may face assault and abuse in their domestic workplaces.

Ross and Solinger add to Briggs’s picture of cross-national reproductive labor by noting that the #MeToo movement regarding sexual harassment and violence is a reproductive justice effort when it implicates power relations in the workplace that shape the intimate lives of the most vulnerable workers.

Briggs and Ross and Solinger’s, present reproductive justice implicitly and explicitly as a recognition of the reproductive injustices facing women seeking to prevent pregnancy, to have children, and, explain Ross and Solinger, “to parent children in safe and healthy environments” [emphasis theirs].

Briggs concludes infant mortality and infertility as examples of reproductive issues that are plagued by racial disparities. In the wake of decreasing social supports and increasing financial instability, African American women, in particular, suffer from financial, emotional, and social distress—and, apparently as a result, infant and maternal mortality is much higher in black communities than in white ones. Giving in to their racial stereotypes, politicians and many citizens have focused on what these mothers were supposedly doing wrong, such as co-sleeping and smoking, instead of blaming the infant deaths on the structural determinants of reproductive experiences, such as poor or nonexistent medical care or daily stress. At the same time, upper-middle-class, white professionals are facing what Briggs calls “structural infertility”—an inability to conceive shaped by work stresses and mismatches between the best time during the life cycle to parent and the structure of professional careers.

Briggs includes in her exploration of reproductive politics a rich discussion of the battle for same-sex marriage. She differs from other radical queers who claim that same-sex marriage politics are inherently conservative. Briggs acknowledges ways in which campaigns for marriage participated in the privatization of reproductive and family functions. She notes that conservative reproductive politics, in the form of defending marriage for the sake of children, ultimately helped judges in appellate courts approve of same-sex unions. But she also emphasizes the injustices that preceded legal recognition of same-sex marriage, such as queer families’ financial instability and partners’ shaky legal access one another in times of crisis.

Regarding this issue, she restores the plight and activism of the lesbian partners Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson to the central historical place they deserve. Kowalski had become disabled in a
Krausian

After Kathy Acker
By Chris Kraus
South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2017, 345 pp., $24.95, hardcover

Reviewed by Laurie Stone

orge Luis Borges said that the writing of Franz Kafka was so original, it created its own precursors. It made us read Kierkegaard and the ninth-century Chinese writer Han Yu as Kafkaesque. Without Kafka, we would not notice their calm ability to make strangeness ordinary and the ordinary strange. The writing of Chris Kraus is so layered and witty, it is causing things to look Krausian. The best way to read the writing of Kathy Acker is as a precursor to the writing of Chris Kraus.

No one, including Kraus, claims to feel pleasure reading Acker. In a recent phone conversation, Kraus said that, as an aspiring, some-kind-of-artist in 1980s New York, she got high enough on Acker’s chutzpah to place her own subjectivity at the center of her sentences. That Acker does, as well as her menstrual blood, bad fucks, her ambition to be famous, torture porn, and rich-girl stealing from better writers to pay herself. On the phone, Kraus said, “I would see her at an art opening or a party, and my palms would get sweaty, and I’d be frozen.” Years later, Kraus reports in the autofiction I Love Dick (1997), she was browsing through the books of Sylvère Lotringer, whom she

would marry, and found a volume inscribed, “To Sylvère, The Best Fuck In The World (At Least To My Knowledge) Love, Kathy Acker.” So there is that link, too.

Acker died in a Tijuana alternative health facility in 1997, at age fifty, from breast cancer she chose not to treat with chemotherapy. Five or so years later, Kraus thought of writing a biography of Acker but hesitated, sensing she didn’t have the detachment she would need to find a story worth telling and a voice to tell it in. The story worth telling would not celebrate Acker’s artistry, although there is daring and invention in what she wrote. She was an avatar of the great Lower East Side, do-it-yourself art camp, where anyone could put on a show in a hole-in-the-wall café and anyone could be an artist with a patchwork of found objects. Acker spliced her letters and diary entries between slabs of appropriated texts from Charles Dickens, Sextus Propertius, Emily Bronte, and scads of others, producing surprising formal effects and willing her experience into the body of Literature. No detail of corporeal existence was out of bounds. She could be nude, occasionally funny, and stark. Sentences here and there jump out with simple truth and wit. “Intense sexual desire is the greatest thing in the world” (Eurydice in the Underworld [1997]).” “Murderers know nothing about fashion” (My Mother: Demonology [1993]).

Still, overall, Acker’s writing is dull in its sameness. The narrators look in, not out. They feel, feel, feel, but we do not see, see, see what they are looking at. Their pronunciations are melodramatic, their images overblown. They ask for love, a pat on the head for their erudition, and agreement with their analyses and summaries. It’s exhausting to keep having to say okay.

Wisely, Kraus turned her attention to the circus of Acker’s life and to her disciplined march to a place in the world. Wikipedia lists 26 published titles in Acker’s entry. By the time Acker was 32, she was the subject of a hour-long documentary as part of the prestigious British South Bank Show. She began by self-publishing and eventually formed a relationship with Grove Press. She became a literary superstar in 1980s England and in the US and elsewhere—a punk-glam luminary, performing on stage to large, appreciative crowds, marketing herself as a gender outlaw with her tattooed, pierced biker body and Comme des Garçons clothes.

She lived like a man, without pregnancy; she lived like a woman by putting her body at risk of pregnancy and having five abortions. She lived like a man by ignoring women; she lived like a woman

Briggs’s work is a great one to spur thinking. It may be less useful as a guide to policy. The solutions she proposes are breezy and brief. For example, the Fight for Fifteen movement, which Briggs endorses, runs into immediate problems when progressives want to implement it without making sure that low-income wage earners continue to receive Medicaid and other income-sensitive public benefits. Reproductive politics, considered as broadly as is by Briggs, is of great analytical value. However, for feminist activists in the current environment, an agenda that stretches (in the words of Briggs’s subtitle) “from welfare reform to foreclosure to Trump” may be too much to take on all at once.

Felicia Kornbluh is an associate professor of History and Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at the University of Vermont (UVM). She is a member of the board of directors of Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and co-author, with Gwendolyn Mink, of the forthcoming Ensuring Poverty: Welfare Reform in Feminist Perspective.

Lila Hughes is a senior at UVM majoring in Environmental Studies and minoring in Sustainable Landscape Horticulture.

Meghan Letizia is a junior at UVM majoring in Social Work and researching reproductive justice in the context of Latinx migration to the United States.
by focusing on men. She lived like a man by putting
work at the center of her life; she lived like a
woman by asking men to advance her career. She
was the smartest girl in any room, her hand darting
up to answer all the questions and nab all the
boyfriends. If you, too, were a cannibal, Kathy
would eat your friends and then eat you.

In After Kathy Acker, Kraus nails this persona as a
crafted calculation:

Just as the twenty-three-year-old Acker
trained herself to heighten the emotional
pitch of her diary by deleting conjunctions
and adjectives, throughout her life she
consistently sought situations that would
result in disruptive intensity for all parties
involved. Almost all the emotional tributes
and essays penned in the wake of her death
by friends speak of her “vulnerability.” Yet,
like most of the rest of her writing and life,
her vulnerability was highly strategic.
Pursuing a charged state of grace, Acker
knew, in some sense, exactly what she was
doing. To pretend otherwise is to discount
the crazed courage and breadth of her work.

After Kathy Acker is a brilliant meditation
on female ambition in the second half of the twentieth
century. Note to humans: do not stop writing, even
when you are suffering from an STD, recovering
from an abortion, pining for the most recent
schmenrik who, after that morning’s fuck, cast
dead eyes upon the space above your head. Kraus’s
book is fun, fun, fun. It reads like a performance
monologue you don’t want to end, layered with her
trademark descriptive powers, exhaustive research,
personal revelations, and gossipy eyewitness
accounts of the Downtown scene. Like Acker, Kraus
is interested in the female body and the female
mind in a world that reviles them. Like Acker,
Kraus is interested more generally in power
granted and power denied. And like Acker, Kraus
combines genres with anarchic flare—but where
Acker is pounding, abstract, and grandiose, Kraus
is comic, speculative, and compassionate.

With typical fluidity, Kraus sketches the
freewheeling dance scene of the 1970s and Acker’s
intersection with it:

Soon after arriving back in New York [in
1976], she discovered the open dance/
movement classes that were held in loft
studios with wood floors and huge rattling
windows, in apartments and theater spaces
rented on an hourly basis by soon-to-be-
legendary dancer/choreographers Simone
Forti, Trisha Brown, and Kenneth King. No
formal dance steps were taught.... King
shared Acker’s background in philosophy
and Latin. His “grid dances” must have
seemed to Acker like an embodied analogue
to her own texts.... Acker embraced the
community’s grueling regimen of back-to-
back classes preceded by two hours of yoga
and followed by marathon jams.

Most enjoyably, After Kathy Acker is a love letter
to all the sexually abject, bookish, hungry girls who
have ever looked for a way to get to the party, and it
invites them to the party they wish they had been
cool enough to attend. Kraus forms a bridge to
Acker, even arousing tenderness for a person who,
by all accounts, was as self-centered and
demanding in life as her narrators are on the page.

In I Love Dick, Kraus writes, “What happens
between women now is the most interesting
thing in the world because it’s least described.” Kraus
looks out. Acker tries to make an impression. In My
Mother: Demonology, Acker creates a mash-up of her
personal writing and Emily Bronte’s Wuthering
Heights (1847), taking on the role of the brooding,
sadistic Heathcliff, who has been abused as a child.
Kraus, in contrast, echoes the rebellion at the heart
of Emily’s sister Charlotte’s Jane Eyre (1847). When
Charlotte’s sisters Emily and Anne warned her that
no one would read a book about a heroine who was
plain, Charlotte said, in effect, Just watch me.
Kraus, too. (In reality, she is quite attractive, but her
narrators call themselves “hags.”) We feel what we
feel about our bodies.

Acker strove to be singular and to become a star.
When she controls the narrative of her life, we see
cartoons, meat, and pain. The power of Kraus’s
book is in the way it looks at Acker as an example
of a collective condition. By focusing on Acker’s
desires—whether fulfilled or thwarted—Kraus is in
her element, and Acker becomes human.

Suppose, Kraus invites us to imagine, you are a
waity Jewish girl who does not think she is pretty
and whom other kids think has cooties and smells
bad—and does smell bad because her parents don’t
notice how often she bathes and do not trouble
themselves to buy her nice clothes. Suppose you are
a girl who reads all the time and carries her books
spines out so everyone can see she is devouring
Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Turgenev. Suppose your
mother does not love you, and your father has left
before you were born. Your mother commits
suicide in a hotel rather than learn to spend less
money on clothes and food. Suppose you mistake
sexual desire for interest in you and discover you
like sex, or at least seducing people, because it
makes you feel connected and powerful in a way
you will never put your finger on. Suppose you feel
rejected almost as soon as sex is over, and you
become a student of abjection, turning the subject
this way and that in various lights. Suppose you
find a voice by combining your love of books with
the subject of sexual abjection, and suppose you
observe that males have power. You situate yourself
with them, identify with them, get them to teach
you, introduce you to people with jobs, money,
places to stay, because males have been trained to
say yes to almost anything a female asks if he
thinks he will get laid.

In Kraus’s rich account, the story of Acker is also
the story of Kraus and the story of all females who
will continue to scratch at the gate until the gate has
been burned down. For all Acker’s punk stylings,
she comes off as a throwback to women writers
such as Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, who
wanted to be glittering exceptions rather than
runners in a pack. Everywhere in Acker’s surround,
the women’s movement was rethinking how
women are represented and how women represent
themselves. Acker did not engage in activism. She
wound up inventing fire in her own small room
while outside crowds had already built a bonfire.

What makes a book? Both Kraus and Acker
believe it’s whatever wakes up desire—and not
necessarily romance. Kraus has turned the idiom of
Fatal Attraction (1987) on its head. In the movie,
Alix, the opera-loving predator, is a monster. In the
literature of Kraus and Acker, the fevered,
infatuated stalker/lover is the hero, and every man
is at risk of finding the family bunny cooked in a
pot. And why not? Who wants to wait to be chosen
when it is never going to happen?

Laurie Stone is the author of My Life as an Animal:
Stories (2016). Her forthcoming book is The Love of
Strangers, a collage of hybrid narratives. Her
website is lauriestonewriter.com.
Spotty

The H-Spot:
The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness

By Jill Filipovic

New York: Nation Books, 2017, 320 pp., $27.00, hardcover

Reviewed by Emily Toth

The title is cheesy. I figure The H-Spot is supposed to make us titter, as we think about the G-Spot, but it didn't make me feel warm and fuzzy. According to Jill Filipovic, the H-Spot is that which makes women happy. But I'd prefer a dignified title, or at least an attention grabber like Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch (1970). I don't like the sense that someone slapped a title on a series of disparate musings. I want energy. Hear me roar.

I came of age reading passionate feminist books, ones with a piercing vision of women's suppressed lives. At an impressionable age I read The Feminine Mystique (1963), with Betty Friedan's angry dissection of "The Happy Housewife Heroin" and "The Problem That Has No Name." Friedan's book explained why my witty, eccentric mother hated being immersed in the suburbs and dreamed of murdering the vacuum cleaner.

I went on to read Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949), Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970), and many more writings full of anger, gossip, new information, and savage wit. I read about suppressed artists in Alice Walker's In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983) and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929).

A strong feminist book ought to poke and provoke us right away, as Beauvoir did: "For a long time I hesitated to write a book on woman," she wrote. "The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new." Shulamith Firestone, in The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (1970) told us how oblivious we were, writing, "Sex class is so deep as to be invisible." And Susan Brownmiller crashed open the doors to what the "experts" were keeping from us. The first sentence of her Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (1975) still fills me with fury: "Krafft-Ebing, who pioneered in the study of sexual disorders, had little to say about rape."

Jill Filipovic starts out in a much smaller world: "For three years of my midtwenties, the happiest I felt was in the backseat of a car late at night, driving down the FDR on the east side of Manhattan." The H-Spot is about pleasure—the H stands for Happiness—but it's not about zest or exuberance or a defiant entry into forbidden knowledge. It's personal, not political.

The best chapter in the second: "Summer Sisters: Women and the Power of Friendship." Filipovic gives us principles: friends make us happy "and they can also make us more radical." She salutes the lifelong friendship of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and she describes the most poignant memory of any girl's childhood: the loss of a best friend. We never lose the wistfulness and regret, she writes. Filipovic ends the chapter brightly, by celebrating her mother's circle of friends. None of the other chapters has this kind of arc or sense of purpose. Rather, what Filipovic often presents is, well, trite rather than insightful. A friend finds a soulmate and says, "I can't imagine my life without her."

Sometimes the history is under-researched, more like the work of a deadline journalist than a passionate seeker for the whole truth. The historian Stephanie Coontz, for instance, is represented not by her books but by quotes from a short, bland interview: "[Y]ou need to give credit to the woman's movement itself, which insisted that the laws be changed." We don't get any of the flavor of Coontz's writings, especially her myth-shattering The Way We Never Were (1992) about the seemingly bucolic 1950s.

Often Filipovic seems to be telling us what we already know, as in, "Part of being a woman in America has always involved giving yourself over to others and defining yourself in relation to them." The tradition of women's self-sacrifice goes back much longer, of course, and much deeper. It may be so deep as to be, sometimes, invisible—as Firestone points out. Filipovic fills out her book with historical research or blind anecdotes, but The H-Spot is mostly one woman's chronicle—a white woman, raised in middle-class comfort, who hated being a lawyer but loves New York.

We don't hear much about the boyfriend, and that's another peculiarity of blogs. Boyfriends often don't have last names (are bloggers afraid of lawsuits?) Blogs tend to be short on characterization. If the prime audience for a blog is you and your friends, how much do you need to describe or explain? You might be better off writing up rituals of comic self-hatred, as in Helen Fielding's novel Bridget Jones's Diary (1999) and knocking yourself out with your own wit.

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My women’s book club agreed to read this book with me because we wanted to learn to be happy. We served wine. But as activists, mostly boomers or second wavers, we weren’t sure we even agreed with Filipovic’s opening quote from Germaine Greer: “Ultimately the greatest service a woman can do to her community is to be happy.” But we still want to change the world. Complete personal happiness is a goody mostly available only to people with white privilege—which Filipovic has. She’s educated and literate and moves to Kenya with her boyfriend, she writes, “because I can.”

She says little about sexual harassment or poverty, and even less about violence, beyond general statements like this: “Depressingly, sexual force and coercion are common aspects of women’s sex lives.” There’s little or nothing about disability.

My book clubbers were puzzled by Filipovic’s repetitiveness. We learn, many times, that she grew up in suburban Seattle, moved East to attend New York University, and then lived happily in Brooklyn until the move to Africa with her boyfriend, for his job. Filipovic worries about whether to have children, whether to get married, whether to change her name. She worries obsessively, turning the questions over and over.

I hope her next book will be full of passionate commitment, juicy language, and shocking discoveries.

And so I admit that I may not be the ideal reader for The H-Spot. I went through youthful angst a long time ago—and nowadays the problems of rich thirty-somethings mostly don’t amount to a hill of beans in my world. I know much more women’s history than I did as a young woman. And I’ve known all my adult life that we won’t be free until we love and cherish and appreciate women of all ages.

Yet I honor and praise Jill Filipovic for her efforts to integrate her experiences, the words of women she interviews, and the women’s history she is learning. To me her book is more frustrating than enhancing, but that could be her youth and my cantankerousness. I hope her next book will be full of passionate commitment, juicy language, and shocking discoveries.

I also hope she’ll crack a joke or two, or throw us a bit of snark. In our barbarous times, I yearn for reading pleasure.

Emily Toth is the author of eleven published books, including biographies of Kate Chopin and Grace Metalious, and two tomes of academic advice by her alter ego, Ms. Mentor. She lives and teaches by her wits in Louisiana.
I wrote this review during the first cold spell of winter. One night, when I checked my AccuWeather app as I prepared to walk home, the temperature was 19 degrees, RealFeel® five. I was warm enough in my Capilene long underwear, fleece-lined hat, and down-stuffed nylon parka, but my thoughts still turned, as they inevitably do in harsh winter moments, to Laura Ingalls Wilder and her autobiographical novel The Long Winter (1940), the sixth of her Little House on the Prairie books. I recalled her characters Laura and Mary waking up in their uninsulated attic room to snow so deep on the quilt that Pa had to shovel it off; Pa and Laura braiding hay to burn for cooking and warmth; daily life in the frozen isolation of a snowed-in 1880s prairie town. Like millions of other readers across decades and the world, I marvelled at the Ingalls’ resourceful resilience, compared my own technology-coddled modern existence to theirs, and wondered if I would have had it in me.

Although Wilder, who churned her own butter well into the 1940s and didn’t fly on an airplane until 1954, would probably have had little interest in my iPhone, she certainly would have been pleased with my thinking. The eight Little House books published between 1932 and 1943 had a triple purpose: to generate income for Wilder and her collaborator and only daughter Rose Wilder Lane; to provide Wilder with a vehicle for capturing the memories of her peripatetic pioneer youth; and to remind Americans buffeted by the Great Depression and Great War of their independent, self-sufficient, freedom-loving roots—a more purposefully political endeavor than its initial readers may have realized. My frozen thinking reflected the triple crown of Wilder’s achievement: the millions of books she sold, the thinking reflected the triple crown of Wilder’s lifetime. But as biographers became more interested in her later life, their portraits became more complex. In Zochert’s version, Wilder wrote her books solo and there is no mention of politics. But in Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography (1992), long-time Wilder scholar and aficionado William Anderson acknowledges, sanguinely, that Laura and Rose [Wilder Lane] often consulted each other about their work. When Rose started writing pioneer stories, Laura shared tales that were then used in her daughter’s work. Laura relied on Rose’s suggestions and advice in her own work … Both Manly [Wilder’s husband, Almanzo Wilder] and Laura remained keenly interested in politics and world events.

The story took a more scathing turn for the revisionist in The Ghost in the Little House (1993), William Holtz’s biography of Lane, which functions simultaneously as an attack on her mother. Holtz astutely points to the mythic nature of Wilder’s frontier vision, explicates the rightwing libertarian politics that wove in and out of both women’s writing, praises Lane eulogistically, and condemns Wilder for keeping her daughter in “bondage” and perpetuating “harrowing domestic drama.” He also makes the stunning accusation, backed up by an appendix of carefully chosen passages, that Lane essentially wrote her mother’s books, thus seemingly debunking Wilder’s personal myth as well.

Subsequent biographers maintained the focus on Wilder’s adulthood and relationship with her daughter. In Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder (2006), John E. Miller added to the record significant new information about the six decades after Wilder, her husband, and the seven-year-old Rose arrived in Mansfield, Missouri, where Wilder spent the rest of her life. Meanwhile, Pamela Smith Hill further explored the Wilder-Lane relationship in Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer’s Life (2007), using Pioneer Girl and the mother-daughter correspondence to argue that Lane was not a ghost writer, but rather the editor of an effective author.

W With such a corpus already in place, one might think the Wilder biographical project complete. And yet, 150 years after Wilder’s birth, Caroline Fraser’s Prairie Fires rewrites Wilder’s story yet again, in a compassionate, illuminating, expansively researched, fiercely argued biography for our time. Rooting Wilder’s “adult story of poverty, struggle, and reinvention” firmly in its historical context, Fraser synthesizes the scholarship on the “epic movements[,] … economic depression and environmental disaster” of Wilder’s lifetime with the “unpublished manuscripts, letters, and documents” that detail her story. The Little House myth of intrepid agency and self-sufficiency, Fraser argues, in fact masked not just the ongoing economic struggles of the Ingalls family but the near-impossibility of success on the far frontier. With Lane’s insistence—and sometimes overbearing—encouragement and support, Wilder rewrote that past to serve the historical and political exigencies of her adulthood.

The Homestead Act of 1862 is a staple both of Wilder biographies and accounts of white settlement of the West. But Fraser begins Prairie Fires not with the Act, but with the Dakota Indians, who occupied the land given away by the Act, and for whom 1862 was marked by the Dakota War, which ended in their defeat and banishment. With this opening, Prairie Fires aligns firmly with contemporary progressive historiographies, ideologies, and politics.

Indeed, the historic specificity of Prairie Fires repeatedly evokes current events. The prairie fires and Great Chicago Fire of 1871, for instance, “were human-caused,” explains Fraser, a consequence of “decades of intensive logging” that not only left stumps and brush ripe for the flames but changed the climate for the hotter. The fires affected the economy, but “globalization was already a major factor” in the Depression of 1874. Throughout the 1870s, as well, “a severe El Niño event… disrupted climate around the globe.” Jumping decades ahead to the 1920s and 1930s, we encounter political scandals, underwater mortgages, and conflicts over relief for the poor. If Fraser is arguing that we need to consider Wilder in the context of her times, she is also suggesting that in important ways those times may not be so different from ours.

Fraser sees Wilder’s life as “a great American drama in three acts.” She structures her biography accordingly in three relatively equal parts: “The Pioneer” (the Little House years); “The Exile” (adulthood in Mansfield); and “The Dream” (Wilder’s late-blooming literary career). “The Pioneer” begins with Wilder’s forebears, establishing the multigenerational persistence of...
two key themes in her childhood: ongoing poverty, necessitating frequent moves to hopefully greener pastures, and “the belief in self-reliance as an absolute sacrament.” If the events of that childhood are relatively familiar from the Little House books, their interpretations often shift in the hard light of fact. To take just one example, Wilder’s Pa and Fraser’s Charles Ingalls both play the violin, labor unceasingly, and move frequently, but where the sometime mischievous Pa is always heroic, Fraser’s historically reconstructed Charles Ingalls is morally ambiguous.

Having avoided fighting in the Civil War, he was not above trying to profit from it … he did not hesitate to put a young and growing family in harm’s way. His dealings with Indians and implicit reliance on the government … were self-serving.

The real Ingalls repeatedly moved his family—and took breaks from farming to work for cash—not just to escape encroaching civilization, but in search of a basic economic stability that was elusive in the face of droughts, locusts, debt, and more.

One point Fraser returns to again and again is how the settlers could not escape—indeed, were ever emboldened within and not infrequently duped by—the complex network of institutional forces that has been the flip side of our much-vaunted American independence. Government dictats gave white settlers access to Indian lands; railroad advertising convinced them that the frigid Dakotas could be viable for family farms (they weren’t); and church relief societies bailed up through the Little House books, it may come as surprising public reception that turned the Little House books into iconic Americana.

The First Four Years ends, with the young couple and their daughter leaving the Dakotas and their families in search of a new life, eventually ending up in Mansfield, where they bought another farm and finally worked their way into economic security (which required living and working in town for several years). These early Mansfield decades are also a tale of community, as Wilder took a leading role in numerous local organizations, and made her initial forays into journalism.

The adult Lane is integral to this part of the book, surely in part because she left a much larger paper record than her mother. It is thus easier to see directly into the development of her writing career before and alongside her mother’s; her world travels; her increasingly conservative, libertarian politics (a sometimes odd counterpart to her bohemian lifestyle); and her wildly fluctuating moods, which sometimes seem to border on mental illness. Fraser clearly sets out to repudiate Holtz’s account of the relationship, and in so doing she sometimes appears as much a Wilder partisan as he is a Lane defender. Still, Wilder, whose own temperament is described more than displayed, sometimes seems a bit remote, a figure of activity rather than interiority.

To those who know Wilder only as the feisty, brown-haired girl and young woman who grows up through the Little House books, it may come as a shock to learn in “The Dream,” Prairie Fire’s third part, that the author of those books was a white-haired sexagenarian living far away from the prairies she described. It may also come as a shock that she was a Republican who stood fiercely and vocally against Roosevelt and the New Deal. But these details are crucial to Fraser’s painstaking effort to situate the novels at the intersection of the 1870s and 1880s they depict, and the 1930s and 1940s when they were written and published.

This intersection makes it clear that the Ingalls ideology was as much partisan construction as autobiographical representation, a purposeful salvo against the New Deal policies and projects that Wilder and Lane saw as unacceptable encroachments upon the libertarian ethos of personal freedom they wholeheartedly embraced (Lane with increasing stridency and public clout). Prairie Fire evenhandedly represents Wilder and Lane’s close collaborative relationship, but Fraser makes clear her belief that Wilder’s work was increasingly and ultimately her own creation. Finally, along with its skillful navigation of these fraught political and personal topics, the book carefully traces the uniformly rapturous public reception that turned the Little House books into iconic Americana.

Many of the details in Prairie Fires have appeared in other Wilder biographies, but Fraser’s vast background research, incisive analysis and interpretation, and commanding argumentation make it nonetheless indispensable. Future generations will surely come up with their own versions of Laura Ingalls Wilder, but Prairie Fires will stand, not only as our version, but as a model of biographical rigor and power, staying with its readers as a simultaneous celebration of and corrective to the Little House books that have accompanied so many of us through our lives.

Rebecca Steinitz is a literacy consultant, writer, and editor in Boston. She is the author of Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diarist (2011), a relic of her previous life as an English professor. Sandra Hume, the editor and founder of The Homesteader newsletter, founding board member of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Legacy and Research Association, and author of Land of Laura: Insider Travel Guide to Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little Towns (2016), provided invaluable assistance in the writing of this review.

Epistolary Autobiography

The Book of Emma Reyes: A Memoir

By Emma Reyes, translated and with an introduction by Daniel Alarcón


Reviewed by Marjorie Agosín

Although I teach Latin American literature, when I was asked to review The Book of Emma Reyes, I had no idea who Emma Reyes was. I wondered about the title, and decided that The Book of Emma Reyes must be a historical novel about a Latin American heroine. I wanted to get to know her.

The book itself is beautiful. It is slim and elegant, with a colorful, abstract design on the cover, elegant type, and sepia-colored pages. In the age of digital books, it is a joy to hold a real, physical book.

Once I started The Book of Emma Reyes I could not put it down. It is not a historical novel but rather an autobiography in letters, like no other I have read in Latin American literature. Reyes’s story of a horrific and abusive childhood is infused with lyricism, humor, and beauty.

As translator Daniel Alarcón explains in his introduction, the publication of this book is a miracle. He has done a superb job of introducing an international audience to Emma Reyes—and perhaps interest in her life and work will awaken interest in other women artists of her time, such as Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington, who settled in Mexico during the late 1930s and lived in relative obscurity until the 1980s, when art historians began to take interest in their work. Like Reyes, Varo and Carrington were painters as well as writers who
wrote unconventional autobiographies—Vazo in the form of a cookbook of dreams, and Carrington in the fantasy, The Hearing Trumpet (1976). Like theirs, The Book of Emma Reyes will become a classic.

The Book of Emma Reyes was originally published in Spanish as Memoria por encargo (1967) and became an instant bestseller. It consists of 23 letters written over eighteen years to Reyes’s friend Germán Arciniegas, a historian and journalist. Although Reyes meant the letters to be confidential, Arciniegas showed them to the Columbian author Gabriel García Márquez. Reyes stopped all communication with Arciniegas, but later resumed the friendship and the correspondence. According to Alarcón, Arciniegas encouraged Reyes to write her autobiography, but she decided to let the letters become her autobiography.

The letters are not dated, but there is an internal order to them. In the first half of the book, we enter into the sordid conditions and physical and emotional decay of Reyes’s harrowing childhood. She and her sister were imprisoned in rooms without toilets; Reyes describes a door with “three locks, two large padlocks, one chair and two thick wooden bars ... that separated us from the world.” There, they would wait until dark, when an abusive adult would come to feed them. Their story may remind readers of Oliver Twist, but it is told without sentimentality or self-pity. Instead, Reyes’s vivid descriptions of the traumatic events of her life are full of lyricism and even humor—an inspiration to readers to live with hope under the circumstances.

Reyes’s later vocation as a painter may have begun in the convent, where she learned to draw in cloth. (Unfortunately, the book does not cover Reyes’s career as a Latin American painter living in Europe.) After I completed reading this intense and brief collection of letters, which have such a sense of immediacy, I realized they were written by a woman who was illiterate as a child and only learned to write at age fifteen. Because Reyes is so tenacious and determined to learn, she is able to turn her somber experiences around and begin a new life as a painter.

The Mother Superior and Sor Carmelita decided I would be the one to make a robe for the Pope. The only quality the nuns recognized in me was that I was the best embroiderer, perhaps because they trained me so young and I knew the secrets of each kind of cloth, each kind of stitching for each thread.

Because of the ups and downs of Reyes’s life, I often thought that this book could fall into the category of the picaresque novel. Her last letter is particularly moving, as she tells of an encounter between two worlds. From her captivity at the convent, she sees the milk man on the other side of the fence. The person who has the keys to the convent fails asleep while praying and thus Reyes is able to escape—although her visionary tenacity has always made her free.

After reading Reyes’s letters I was filled with questions: what happened after her escape? When did she decide to paint? We learn from Alarcón’s introduction that she became a world traveler and befriended the writer Alberto Moravia, the filmmaker Federico Fellini, and other artists, and that she became a kind of godmother to Latin American artists and intellectuals living in Europe, but I wanted to know more. I hope that soon, someone will write a comprehensive biography of Reyes.

This is an important book by a relatively unknown artist who deserves to be better known. It will hold a special place in my heart, as it reveals the persistence of the hope for a better life. Reyes succeeded in her quest, and in turn I have become richer by reading and knowing her. Each of her letters is an act of courage as well as of transformation.

Marjorie Agosín is a poet and human rights activist. She teaches at Wellesley College. Her most recent book is Las Islas Blancas (2016).

Sweet Charity

Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy and the Women’s Movement, 1870 – 1967

By Joan Marie Johnson

Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017, 320 pp., $39.95, hardcover

The role of women in philanthropy is getting a lot of play lately; because women are a fast-rising force in philanthropy. Powerful, wealthy women in US philanthropy include Melinda Gates, who is married to Microsoft founder Bill Gates; Priscilla Chan, who is married to Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg; Jennifer Buffett, who is married to investor Warren Buffett’s son Peter; Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple founder Steve Jobs, and Pam Omidyar, who is married to eBay founder Pierre Omidyar. Such women are often the foundresses of earlier women philanthropists who inherited large sums of money from their families or husbands, including Smith College founder Sophia Smith; labor activist and suffrage campaigner Mary Dreier; educational and social justice funder Ellen Scripps; birth-control advocate Katharine Dreier McCormick; Jane Stanford, co-founder of Stanford University; and Phoebe Apperson Hearst, the suffragist and mother of William Randolph Hearst.

Johnson argues that suffrage was won only when rich women began to give large contributions, including a million-dollar bequest by Mrs. Frank (Miriam) Leslie. Some educational institutions welcomed women only when they were “coerced” into it by restricted giving. And access to birth control expanded only with money and legitimacy from society leaders. Although they had limited political power, these women understood how to use their money to gain clout.

In general, individual giving to women’s and girl’s causes has been understood, although women have a long, though unappreciated, history of using their financial donations to advance social change. This why Johnson’s book is such a welcome addition to the field. Although there are often significant women philanthropists of color, Johnson does not discuss them. A historian at Northwestern University, Johnson conducted extensive research in archives including those at Smith College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, University of California at Berkeley, Newcomb College, Tulane University, and the Library of Congress. Using organizational records, correspondence; newspapers, and other sources, she demonstrates that the trajectory and successes of the early women’s movement were powered by the donations of women with significant wealth.

While Johnson touches on how the efforts of these women had limitations, particularly across race and class, she mainly studies how affluent white women advanced their priorities. These often left out women of color, particularly in education.

Johnson devotes two chapters to the role of women’s philanthropy in establishing women’s access to higher education. For example, Smith College was founded by Sophia Smith with a bequest totaling just over $395,000 and a statement about the power of education to change women’s lives. Women donors also succeeded in bringing about change in existing schools, either by encouraging them to become coeducational or by improving the campus experience for women at already coeducational schools.
Phoebe Hearst was one of the most important of these funders. The daughter of farmers who struggled to make a living, she married George Hearst, who had made his fortune in mining, oil, real estate, and publishing. When he died, she inherited his estate of $18 million (about $500 million in today's dollars). She helped to develop and fund the kindergarten movement in San Francisco and around the country, and was one of few white funders at the time who used her money to benefit African Americans, establishing two kindergartens in Washington, DC, for black children, and the Phoebe Hearst Kindergarten Training School for African American teachers. In 1897, she become the first female regent of the University of California.

In contrast, some white women donors tried to ensure that the colleges they founded would exclude women of color. Josephine Louise Newcomb left money to found Newcomb College for white women at Tulane University, while Indiana Fletcher Williams specified in her will that Sweet Briar College was for white women only.

In better news, *Funding Feminism* highlights the little-known story of Mary Garrett. After the death of her parents in 1883, she inherited the B&O Railroad fortune, which made her one of the wealthiest women in the country. Discovering the power of restricted donations, she agreed to give to Johns Hopkins University Medical School only if it agreed to admit women on completely equal footing with men. (Other donors made similar attempts to break down gender barriers at Harvard Medical School, but they were unsuccessful. In 1879, the faculty voted against admitting women, despite the promise of large donations.)

Noting this resistance to admitting women, Katharine Dexter McCormick tried another strategy: enticing schools to be more welcoming to women on campus through funding for women's dormitories, women's buildings, and women's scholarships. With a degree in biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, McCormick was particularly passionate about women in science. She insisted that a women's dormitory at the school be located on Memorial Drive, near the center of the campus.

Many of these early donors understood that even with access to educational opportunities, women's equality would be incomplete without control over reproduction and—a radical notion for the time—a right to sexual pleasure. Birth-control campaigner Margaret Sanger surrounded herself with a network of wealthy women who were integral to the success of her movement, not only because of their dollars but also because of their ideas. They advocated for birth control on the basis of women's independence and freedom, rather than to limit family size or prevent overpopulation. Sanger supporters, whether or not they called themselves feminists, articulated a radical vision of women's lives.

Today, money remains an effective and necessary tool for creating social change. Yet, as Johnson reminds us, the tensions over wealth and power that persist today have deep historical roots. For example, because early women philanthropists often tied restrictions to their giving, demanding input on tactics, strategies, and personnel, they engendered resentment in suffrage organizations, which jeopardized the groups' ability to establish cross-class coalitions.

The underfunding of women's rights remains a stubborn problem, despite the growth of women's economic power, employment opportunities, access to education, and reproductive rights. While women donors and women's foundations play essential roles in global philanthropic and social change, many challenges remain. Even as contemporary headlines decry the unfairness of “old boys clubs” from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, it is not only the business sector where women are held back. Women are underrepresented in positions of public leadership, earn less than men, experience disproportionate discrimination and gender-based violence, and struggle to find adequate healthcare. Our hard-won rights to abortion and contraception are under assault. The disparities are compounded for women of color, and for lesbians and transgender women. Thus, there is still an enormous need for women and feminist men to fund movements that advance a gender equity grounded in racial and economic justice.

As Johnson shows, women are both more likely than men to give to women's and girl's causes, and more likely to give larger amounts to these causes—often because of their own experiences with discrimination. They also believe that giving to women and girls provides the best social justice return.

However, even though women control more than $13 trillion of wealth in North America alone, the total giving aimed at advancing gender equity remains very low. In the 1970s, only one percent of all foundation dollars went specifically to women's and girls' causes. Shockingly, even four decades later, with women's foundations active around the country, only four percent of all US foundation support goes specifically to women and girls.

Things could change. Several key forces are aligning: research shows that women's wealth, leadership, and role in philanthropy are growing. For one thing, women are the recipients of a massive transfer of wealth. Forty-five percent of millionaires are now women, and 28 percent of estates worth more than $5 million are now controlled by women. By some estimates, as much as two-thirds of all wealth in the US will be controlled by women by 2030.

Another important development is the increasing coordination of women's foundations across the country. Prosperity Together is an important example of an initiative that includes 32 women's foundations across the country. In 2015, the network announced its commitment to giving $100 million to women and girls over the next five years. And, although most of the giving to advance gender equity comes from women, men are increasingly giving to the cause.

As Johnson concludes in *Funding Feminism*, women's philanthropy, nestled in a long history dating back to at least the mid-nineteenth century, is as crucial today as ever.

Surina Khan is CEO of the Women's Foundation of California.

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**Progress and Persistence**

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

By Arundhati Roy

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017, 444 pp., $27.95, hardcover

Reviewed by Marthine Sattris

A rundhati Roy made an international splash when she won the 1997 Booker prize for *The God of Small Things*, her debut novel about family dysfunction and the poison of caste in the backwaters of Kerala. India’s elites celebrated her win as part of the largest democracy’s arrival on the world stage. This same society then dismissed Roy when she used her fame and fortune to support the oppressed and exploited people of her country, who were ground down by India’s tigerish transformation under globalization.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy continues to embrace society’s castoffs: the poor, the untouched—able, the tribal, the gender nonconforming, the unmarried—all those who question or run afoul of the mainsteam. The cast of the novel is a mix of the high and the low, with two particular groups at its heart. One is the band of misfits gathered around Anjum, who was born a hermaphrodite in Old Delhi and ran full speed toward the theatrical femininity of India’s hijra—transgender—community. The other is a band of college chums who end up on opposing sides of the sectarian battle in Kashmir between Kashmiri Muslim insurgents and Indian occupying forces.
S. Tilotamma, or Tilo, is the only woman in the group—the child of a cross-caste and cross-religious love affair. Tilo is vulnerable because she belongs nowhere, yet she is also free from expectations of conformity—just as Anjum claims freedom at the intersection of male and female.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is a novel built of intersections like those Tilo and Anjum embody. The book begins with Anjum’s birth into a loving Muslim family and follows her in fairly chronological fashion through her decades as a hijra—until the night she visits Jantar Mantar, the site of an ancient sundial and observatory. It has become a protest site because it is the only place in New Delhi where peaceable assembly is not limited to groups of four or fewer. Tilo is also present that night, and when a foundling “the color of night” appears, both Anjum and Tilo immediately act to protect her. Anjum stands up to the crowd while Tilo whisks the baby away.

With this moment, the book hinges, and shifts shape. In an interview on Democracy Now (June 20, 2017), Roy describes the protests in Jantar Mantar as the book’s “nerve center.” After the baby girl is found, the book splits into puzzle pieces that together form the history of Tilo’s involvement with Kashmir. These include satirical test questions for Kashmiri children, police reports from California, a drunken confession back in the posh part of New Delhi, and Tilo’s mother’s dementia-added rants in Kerala, to name but a few.

Tilo marries a college chum, a journalist who plays both sides of the Kashmiri conflict, but she always holds a flame for their mutual friend Musa, who is Kashmiri and Muslim. Tilo, we learn, has been drawn into Musa’s insurrection against the Indian military occupation. After he’s reported dead, Tilo saves his archive of evidence against the Indian authorities—scraps containing the stories of Kashmiri children, police reports from California, a drunken confession back in the posh part of New Delhi, and Tilo’s mother’s dementia-added rants in Kerala, to name but a few.

Yet Anjum’s irrepressible spirit leads her to create a haven in the graveyard, which she christens the Jannat (Paradise) Guest House. She is no longer walled off in the hijra enclave, but gathers other castoffs to her motherly bosom. These include a man of the “untouchable” chamar caste, traditionally tanners of animal skins, who, sick of Hindu hypocrisy, has renamed himself Saddam Hussein. Tilo and the founding, re-christened Miss Jebeen the Second, in honor of a murdered Kashmiri girl, eventually join Anjum’s unorthodox family and Anjum becomes the baby’s second mother.

Twice Roy describes the three mother figures of the found baby (one biological, two adoptive) as “stitched together by threads of light,” and the same could also be said of the book’s narrative structure. Roy records individuals’ intersection with the flow of history and the way their relationships are embedded in societal systems and structures. She writes as much about the collective as about individuals like Anjum and Tilo, defying, in the process, the limited perspective of much contemporary fiction.

In both scope and tone, Roy’s novel employs the best elements of James Joyce and Salman Rushdie. Her expressive experiments capture the messiness of interwoven, urban lives, bringing the current heteroglossia of spam texts, activist manifestos, and asylum claims into the novel. Roy, like Rushdie, alchemizes the political with the absurd and allegorical: the mobs of Hindu extremists become “safron parakeets,” and the prime minister defeated by Modi receives the moniker Timid Rabbit. In Utmost Happiness, she describes the horror of the Gujarat massacres in this offhand way: “Two months later, when the murdering had grown sporadic and was more or less tailing off....” This depiction of the extraordinary as ordinary is what lures us into thinking of Rushdie and Roy as magical realists. Yet, in an interview with Outlook India (June 3, 2017), Roy says that to call her work magical “Things would turn out all right in the end. They would, because they had to.” Despite all her critiques, Roy remains a believer in progress—not economic progress, but human progress.

Marthine Satria is an editor and literary critic in Oakland, California. She received her PhD in English from UC Santa Barbara.
Isadora Kosofsky (b.1993) has an eye for intimacy most of us fail to see. A multiple award winning photographer and filmmaker based in Los Angeles, Kosofsky has photographed passion between the elderly and mentally disabled, the struggles of girls locked up, and the bond between brothers pulled apart by arrests and court dates. Through her lens, we see not only the humanity of people overlooked. We see our society. We see ourselves.

Kosofsky was 14 when she began to make photographs and 18 when she first began to document the lives of the children within juvenile detention. Now 24, she has created a body of work that captures not simply life inside correctional facilities, but the way in which the criminal justice system weaves itself into families, sometimes for generations.

The latest chapter takes place in Florida. Kosofsky boarded buses run by the non-profit Children of Inmates to document quarterly “bonding” visits between parents and children at twelve Florida prisons. An estimated ten million children in the United States have had a parent incarcerated at some point in their childhoods. Kosofsky shows us what that statistic looks like up close.

A father nuzzling his son’s neck. A mother comforting her crying daughter. A child exploring a father’s face, making a memory. For many families, these moments are so common as to go forgotten. But in prison, where tenderness defies most protocol, touch is precious. At the end of the day, mothers and fathers return to their cells, children to their relatives and adopted families and foster homes. They will write, talk by phone, and wait—for months and sometimes years—for the next visit. For those who endure years of separation, these visits grow harder. Children recoil and parents stiffen and the distance between them can leave love strained. In the meantime, these are the memories they hold.

Lisa Riordan Seville is a writer and producer based in Brooklyn, New York.

Isadora Kosofsky is a documentary photographer and filmmaker based in Los Angeles. She is a 2018 TED fellow, a recipient of the Inge Morath Award from the Magnum Foundation, and the recipient of a 2017 Getty Instagram grant. Her work has been featured in The New York Times, VICE, The Guardian, and Paris Match, among many other venues. More about Ms. Kosofsky and her work can be found at www.isadorakosofsky.com.
Boys play in the hallway of Homestead Correctional Institution for women before being escorted to the room where they will be searched.

A girl embraces her grandmother during a visit.

Tashanika sits outside an ice skating rink with her two sons, Rohandrick and Rodarion, after a visit with their father.
Unhealthy Relationships

Women of the Street: How the Criminal Justice-Social Services Alliance Fails Women in Prostitution

By Susan Dewey and Tonia St. Germain

New York: New York University Press, 2016, 274 pp., $30.00 paperback

Reviewed by Marianne Wesson

The authors of this excellent study capture their core insight in a single eloquent sentence near the beginning of their book. They suggest that the prostitutes, law enforcement officers, social workers, therapists, counselors, lawyers, and judges who in their various roles populate the world of sex work have one thing in common:

As with all people caught in wars not of their own making, they do their best to care for themselves and their loved ones while making a living by following rules and engaging in behaviors that they do not always agree with or feel good about.

The metaphor of conscription into a field of endless conflict not only explains nearly all of what their close observations reveal to us about this world; it also generates our empathy for its beleaguered combatants, however antagonistic they may be to one another. In addition, it prepares us for the conclusion that the authors reveal at the end of the book—one that the reader, at that point exhausted by the hopeless sorrows she has encountered, has little motivation to resist.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Susan Dewey, a trained anthropologist, undertook a remarkable project: she immersed herself in the world of the street-level sex trade for a year by living as an unpaid staff member at a Denver, Colorado, facility that provides transitional housing for women who wish to leave sex work. She conducted one hundred interviews, many of them with women who were staying in the facility and struggling to comply with the demands of its regulations imposed. She also talked with women who were not seeking to leave the sex trade, who pursued in the pursuit of their work to talk on the sidewalk or in a dingy rented hotel room with Dewey and her informal research partner, Leelee. Leelee had had extensive experience trading sex for money in the East Colfax Street neighborhood where most of Dewey’s research took place, and her presence seems to have encouraged frank disclosures by many interviewees who might otherwise have been reluctant to communicate with an academic asking questions about illegal activities. It must also be said, however, that Dewey is an uncommonly engaging and empathic person to have learned as much as she has about the lives of women who work the streets.

Dewey also spent time talking with police officers and lawyers whose professions are to surveil, arrest, prosecute, or represent women in the sex trade. And perhaps most usefully, she talked, sympathized, and hung out with many “helping professionals” whose roles—as counselors, housing providers, substance-abuse therapists and the like—embodied them in various notionally therapeutic alternatives to the punishment regime represented by the criminal justice system. The book refers to these professionals as a group, together with some of those who work in criminal justice, as the Alliance. Dewey’s clear-eyed vision and intellectual acumen, coupled with that of co-author and legal scholar Tania St. Germain, produces an astonishing amount of illumination.

There is not space here to rehearse, or even to inventory, the various insights the participant-observation project enabled, but perhaps one example will illustrate. In Dewey’s many and various interactions with Alliance professionals, she perceived that not all of them brought the same orientation to their work. Instead, they demonstrated four distinct dispositions toward their clients, their institutions, and their roles:

- **Idealists** saw themselves as facilitators of progress, enablers of betterment, and sources of compassion for their clients; often they were young, and many had difficulty hanging on to this orientation if they remained in their professions for many years.
- **Enforcers** shared with idealists a faith in the essential virtue of the institutions they served, but favored a regime of strict rules and clear boundaries, believing that only stringent regulation would promote public safety and individual rehabilitation.
- **Transgressors** harbored deep skepticism about their employers and the rules they were expected to enforce and observe, rules they disregarded when they could get away with it. They identified more with their clients than with their institutions, and rationalized their participation in the Alliance as an essential counterweight to what they saw as its punitive and authoritarian features. (Dewey observes that transgressors, although exasperating to supervise and frequently disruptive, are valuable interpreters and ambassadors between the streets and the various Alliance institutions.)
- **Bureaucrats** generally harbored a priori neither sympathy nor antipathy toward their clients, but considered their work to be chiefly a matter of labor and compensation; in their work lives they most valued absence of difficulty and orderly administration.

Of course, this useful categorical approach is not sufficient to convey the mixed orientations of many Alliance members, nor the likelihood that they will move among and between the categories during their careers. Indeed, a career of any length in the Alliance would seem to require (except, perhaps, for the bureaucrats) an ability to shift orientations, temporarily or for long periods, as a way of coping with the stress of work that is challenging, often dispirit- ing, and shockingly underpaid. Dewey describes an occasion when she went out for cocktails with several social workers who were celebrating their agency’s receipt of an important grant. The good news apparently encouraged a degree of intoxication. After a few rounds, the women entertained each other by role-playing themselves in a group counseling session, mocking the language (“you need to confront your own issues”) and the concepts (“unhealthy relationships”) that their Enforcer selves must have invoked hundreds of times with their clients. Their disinhibited selves were more transgressive, and perhaps more insightful, than their daytime professional presentations permitted.

But what of the women whose lives form the object of the Alliance’s attentions? For them as well, Dewey offers a taxonomy: old-school cougars, intergenerational caregivers, bonded women, frequent flyers, and underpaid sex workers. The degree of category blending and permeability over time for street-involved women is even greater, perhaps, than for Alliance professionals, but the groupings are distinct enough to enable a certain amount of useful generalization. Caregivers, for example, labor at sex work to provide for others, often children, with whom they live, accordingly, the possibility of accommodation in a transitional housing facility while they pursue alternatives to street work is neither attractive nor helpful. But what all of these women share is vulnerability to a number of hazards, of which arrest and incarceration are some of the most severe (although by no means the only) risks.

The authors propose that the institutions that concern themselves with sex work have undergone a transformation over time. At a past moment in our civic discourse, prostitution was universally regarded as a crime, to which the only appropriate response was arrest, trial (or more often, of course, a plea of guilty), and punishment. Although this paradigm may still prevail in law-enforcement and prosecution circles, it is obvious that centuries of crime-suppression have not effected much of a reduction in commercialized sexual activity. Some in law enforcement recognize this circumstance by redirecting their efforts to containment rather than extinction—to making strategic policing and prosecution decisions aimed at confining visible prostitution transactions to neighborhoods where they provoke little citizen irritation or complaint. But for others, including many of those who form the Alliance, a different strategy has developed: recasting the identity of the sex worker from criminal to victim. In this narrative, sex workers find themselves imprisoned in their humiliating and dangerous occupation because they have been damaged by trauma. The origins of the trauma may be various—childhood abuse or neglect, family dysfunction, domestic violence, addiction—but according to this paradigm, the prostitute is helpless to extricate herself from her circumstances. Consequently, the Alliance must intervene to provide services that will allow her to recover from her past traumas, and support of the sort that will allow her to leave sex work behind in
favor of a better life. This “trauma-informed” approach has gained wide currency within service-provision circles in the twenty-first century.

No doubt this is a more compassionate narrative than the easy relegation of prostitutes to the category of criminals, but the authors doubt that it is significantly less harsh in its effects. In its desire to promote long-term changes in its client’s lives, the Alliance—institutionally, even if some of its members would prefer to wield less duress—insists that they surrender control over their own choices and submit to regimes of varying severity, designed to rescue them from their addictions and predicaments. Characterizing it as a “continuum of coercion,” Dewey proposes that the condition of trauma-informed “rescue” often create an even more confining environment than arrest and incarceration.

When asked directly what their most urgent needs were, Dewey’s interviewees identified housing, safety (“bodyguards” said one respondent succinctly), access to mental and physical health services, substance-abuse treatment, and opportunities for legal employment. With the partial exception of access to health services, none of these identified needs rests altogether on the urgency of recovering from trauma; most are practical requirements for surviving in a harsh labor economy. It is not that the Alliance has no interest in assisting with housing, decent employment, and healthcare. But Alliance professionals condition the provision of these benefits on their clients’ compliance with a variety of demands, including what Dewey calls “complete surveillance” of their bodies and minds, and an embrace of the narrative of victimhood and trauma.

Dewey read the autobiographies that women were required to compose when applying for admission to the transitional housing facility where she worked; she was struck by how thoroughly these accounts accepted the notion of their authors’ victimhood and the vocabulary of trauma theory: She wondered, though, whether these narratives reflected the writers’ genuine belief that the circumstances they narrated accounted for their predicaments, or rather their rational calculation of the best way to gain access to a necessary benefit. In Dewey’s interviews with street-involved women, she found that they often preferred life on the street, with all of its hazards, to the surveillance and loss of autonomy that came with Alliance services. Only genuine desperation drove the women to seek out such services, and their willingness to surrender their personal agency to the Alliance’s demands often lasted only as long as their desperation. Even the opportunity to work at a legal occupation—which one might think is the Holy Grail of services for women seeking to leave the life—often failed to provide an attractive alternative to the street. Low pay, erratic schedules, vulnerability to workplace harassment, and the absence of reasonable transportation make most of the jobs the Alliance can find for their clients unreasonable. In connection with this important recommendation, however, I would have liked to see more discussion of two issues that are addressed only in passing: the role of addiction in the lives of women in the sex trade, and the matter of trafficking.

The authors do not provide a figure for the proportion of street-involved women who use or are addicted to drugs, but they give the impression that it is nearly all. They report that half of the women are polysubstance users, who ingest a drug of choice together with a second substance that either mitigates or exacerbates the undesirable effects of the first or enhances its pleasure; the remainder are single-substance users. The most popular drug in both groups is cocaine; among single-substance users it is more popular than all other substances combined. (No breakdown is documented between crack and powder cocaine.) Some of the women Dewey interviewed identified substance-abuse counseling as a need—yet none of them, when asked what sort of help she wished for most urgently, mentioned such support. Is this because the women do not understand their own predicament? Or because they are not physically addicted, but use drugs to cope with the humiliation and pain of their work? (And if the latter, how does this explanation square with the proposition that sex work is less humiliating and difficult than low-wage, legal employment?)

Marianne (Mimi) Wesson is Professor of Law emerita and President’s Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado. Her most recent work of creative nonfiction, A Death At Crooked Creek: The Case Of The Cowboy, The Cigarmaker, And The Love Letter, was published in 2013. She lives in northern Colorado and is working on a new novel, The Gate Code, and learning to play the hammered dulcimer.
Hermitesses

The Ladies of Llangollen: Desire, Indeterminacy, and the Legacies of Criticism

By Fiona Brideoake

Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2017, $110.00 hardcover

Reviewed by Lisa L. Moore

R emember Lynne Cheney? A prominent figure in the culture wars of the 1980s, Cheney served as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities under Reagan and Bush I, and became Second Lady in the Bush II era, when Dick Cheney became vice president. In both jobs, she attacked queer and feminist art and black cultural forms, seeking to censor rap albums and video games in the name of conservative family values.

But get this—in 1981, Lynne Cheney published a novel entitled Sisters, a Western set in nineteenth-century Wyoming, in which the protagonist, Sophie, returns home to Cheyenne after her sister Helen’s death, only to meet Helen’s beloved Amy. Watching Amy walk arm-in-arm with a new companion, Sophie feels “curiously moved, curiously envious of them … she saw that the women in the cart had a passionate, loving intimacy forever closed to her. How strong it made them. What comfort it gave.” The book, apparently inspired in part by the story of the Ladies of Llangollen, is now out of print, and in 2004 Cheney refused permission to have it republished, claiming it “was not her best work.” In 2007, Lynne’s daughter Mary Cheney, then working on her father’s Republican election campaign, came out as a lesbian.

You can’t make this stuff up, but Fiona Brideoake has brought it all together in her remarkable new book, The Ladies of Llangollen. Incredibly, the story of two Irish spinsters, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler, who eloped together in 1777 and made their home in a Welsh cottage for the next fifty years, has never been the subject of a full-length academic study, although their story and writings are now well known to scholars of LGBTQ history and theory, eighteenth-century studies, and Romanticism. Brideoake’s ambition in this book, however, is not (or not merely) to construct an accurate portrayal of the lives and influence of Ponsonby and Butler that draws on the last fifty-odd years of scholarship in queer studies. She wants also to describe the “queer revenants” produced by those who have hijacked the Butler and Ponsonby story for their own various purposes since the women first arrived in the dirty little highway town of Llangollen in North Wales, looking for a home. The Ladies of Llangollen, Brideoake shows, meant many things to many people, starting first and foremost with themselves.

For example, Brideoake traces the emergence of the sobriquet “the Ladies of Llangollen” to describe the couple, pointing out that it did not appear in print until after both women were dead, in John Hicklin’s 1847 collection, The Ladies of Llangollen, as Sketched by Many Hands. In their lifetime, they were more often known, or called themselves, “two Fugitive Ladies,” “the two Hermit Ladies,” “Hermitesses,” “the recluse ladies.” The nickname emerged as they became more famous, and their fame was made possible in part by the nickname. As Brideoake writes, “their collective designation ‘the Ladies of Llangollen’ elides their individual names, masking the disparity between their powerful families and their anomalous social situation, and displacing their exiled status with the identity of landed locals.” The nickname served the interests of both the women themselves and their admirers, Brideoake argues, contributing to “their refashioning from exiled Irish spinsters to indigenous elements of the Welsh cultural and geographical landscape.”

Although the couple was celebrated for having forsaken fashionable society for a rural retreat where they could live as they liked, unfettered by the society marriages their families had chosen for them, Llangollen was no backwater. They had originally hoped to settle in England, but the modest incomes their families allowed them made the lower cost of living in Wales more practical. Llangollen was an important staging post on the Holyhead Road, which carried travelers from London to Dublin via ferry and stagecoach. Plas Newydd, their stylishly refurbished “cottage,” provided a welcome alternative to the town inn for the stream of fashionable travelers who broke their journeys there. They were able to maintain relationships with wealthy gentry families and celebrities such as Edmund Burke and William Wordsworth without the expense of maintaining a carriage—which Brideoake tells us, would have been the eighteenth-century equivalent of purchasing a helicopter. Llangollen, Brideoake writes, both suggested virtuous retirement and provided Ponsonby and Butler with “as numerous and distinguished a social set—if not more so, given the comparative cost of living—that they could have enjoyed in London or Bath.”

This kind of careful image management is also what made it possible for the couple to serve as both an emblem of chaste female friends, women who avoided sexuality by avoiding marriage, and as sexually suspect outsiders whose masculine dress and intimate habits were the subject of newspaper attacks and gossip. Wordsworth wrote them a sonnet extolling their virtue; Byron, in contrast, assumed they were queer kin, writing that his passion for a choirboy would “put Lady E. Butler, & Miss Ponsonby to the blush.” The argument that the sexuality of the Ladies was viewed in seemingly opposite ways is not new—I’m among those who have made it before, in my 1997 book Dangerous Intimacies—but Brideoake gives us a richly detailed account of its material foundations. For example, in renovating their house, Butler and Ponsonby applied carved oak finishes and details onto every interior and exterior surface that could hold them. As a symbol of British loyalty, carved by local Welsh artisans, the heavy ornaments served to literally anchor the “Ladies” in “Llangollen” as members of the local landed gentry, although their pedigrees were Irish (Butler’s was even more suspect, being Catholic) and their home a rental until well into their middle age. The landscaping of their small holding also mimicked that of estates hundreds of times its size and the rise of the Welsh cultural revival and picturesque tourism in the late eighteenth century made their assertion of Welshness fashionable.

Their suspected sapphism made the couple the target of attacks, true—but it also served as an inspiration for many self-avowed female lovers of their own sex, both in the lifetime of the Ladies of Llangollen and in the centuries since. Brideoake devotes a fascinating chapter to the revival of interest in them among modernists, in the context of postwar suffragist feminism and interest in same-sex desire. In 1930, a Butler descendant published papers and correspondence of the Ladies that had remained in private hands until then, under the title The Hangover Papers. Virginia Woolf’s 1928 Orlando was also inspired in part by their story. She wrote of her new plans for the novel, “It is to be written as I write this, at the top of my speed, on the Ladies of Llangollen on Mrs. Fladgate: on people passing…Sapphism is to be suggested.” In 1936, Mary Gordon, one of the first female physicians to qualify in Britain, published a book entitled Chase of the Wild Goose, which described how Butler and Ponsonby visited her in spirit form and demanded that she make their lives known in a new era which could finally appreciate them as, Brideoake summarizes, “spiritual progenitors of the emancipated women of the twentieth century.” And Valentine Ackland, the lover of the novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner, presented Warner with an ivory toothpick box with a lock of hair framed in the lid, of which Warner wrote, “We decided on no evidence that Sarah Ponsonby gave it to Eleanor Butler.” Also on no evidence, the couple decided the hair had belonged to Sarah Ponsonby.

Brideoake concludes with the toothpick-box anecdote as a synecdoche for her larger argument, which demonstrates “the vexed status of evidence within the history of sexuality.” We don’t ask if childless married heterosexuals of the past “really” loved each other, even though there’s usually no concrete evidence that they actually had sex. But in the case of same-sex love, terms like the ones Ponsonby and Butler used for one another—“beloved,” “heart’s companion,” “dear one”—are often dismissed or misread as meaning something other than what they plainly say. Fiona Brideoake’s book is a rich and fascinating story of one such history of misreading, and of the queer counter-readings that have always existed alongside it.

Lisa L. Moore is the author of Sister Arts: The Erotics of Lesbian Landscapes (2011), which won Lambda Literary Award. She is Archibald A. Hill Professor of English and Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.
Fear, Hunger, and Fear

Lioness: Golda Meir and the Nation of Israel
By Francine Klagsbrun

New York: Schocken Books, 2017, 856 pp., $40.00, hardcover

Reviewed by Eleanor Roffman

“Peace will come when the Arabs love their children more than they hate us.”

“When peace comes, we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons.”

—Golda Meir

Francine Klagsbrun’s extensive biography of Golda Meir, Lioness, is a conventional, laudatory telling of Meir’s life, which almost literally leaves no stone unturned. Klagsbrun delves into the details of Meir’s life from birth to death, from Russia to the United States. She covers Meir’s adoption of Zionism, her emigration to Israel, and her role in the development of the Israeli state. Klagsbrun’s previous works, The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day (2002) and Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce (1985) reveal a conservative point of view regarding religion and politics, which is also evident in Lioness. Klagsbrun edited Marlo Thomas’s feminist children’s book Free to Be You and Me (1975), writes for the Jewish Week, is a contributing editor of the Jewish feminist magazine Lilith, and sits on the editorial board of Hadassah magazine. It is clear from her writings and affiliations that she shares Meir’s belief in Zionism. Her sources do not include critiques of Zionism, its eurocentric, nationalistic roots, or its role in Israeli expansionism and the occupation of Palestinian territories. Although she has much to say about Meir’s life—from her many affairs, failed marriage, and ideological struggles and leadership. Although she was neither a man-hater nor a lesbian, Meir was a “queen bee,” Pogrebin says: “a woman who climbs to the top, then pulls the ladder up behind her,” whose unwillingness to embrace women’s issues is disappointing.

Klagsbrun notes that Meir was aware of the gendered aspect of her struggles, yet never aligned with feminists. Like many women from the nineteenth century to the present, Meir feared being thought of as a man-hater—in other words, a lesbian. Klagsbrun does not question such fears, although they arise from heterosexist, male-supremacist thinking, which labels women who bond with each other as sexually suspect. Of course, Meir was neither a man-hater nor a lesbian, as Klagsbrun demonstrates, chronicling Meir’s many affairs, failed marriage, and ideological alignment with men who were Zionist nationalists.

Described her early traumatic life in Russia as one of “fear, hunger, and fear.” This traumatic period, writes Klagsbrun, was the impetus for her political and ideological development.

She immigrated to the US in 1906, when she was eight. She was introduced to Zionist activism in Denver, Colorado, where she lived briefly with her sister and brother-in-law, and it was in Denver where she met her future husband, Morris Myerson, an internationalist and anarchist. After the couple moved to Palestine in 1921, their relationship became distant.

Klagsbrun explains that between the two world wars, politically minded European Jews were divided between Bundists, Jewish socialists who believed socialism would cure anti-Semitism, and Zionists, who insisted that the only way to combat anti-Semitism was for Jews to establish their own homeland in Palestine—never mind the more than 700,000 indigenous Palestinians who had lived there for generations. Thus, as an Israeli nationalist, Meir claimed that there were “no Palestinians, but Arabs who lived in the region,” and that “nobody heard of a Palestinian entity before 1967.” Famously, she insisted, “It was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself Palestinian and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.” Although Klagsbrun rarely explores or challenges Meir’s Zionism, she does explain that Meir backtracked on these claims, asserting that what she meant was that there was no Palestinian state before 1967. Meir—and Klagsbrun—do not believe that the Palestinians’ claim to the land is as legitimate as the Zionists’.

Meir herself exemplified this colonialist mentality. After emigrating to Palestine she assumed the role of fundraiser extraordinaire, as she traveled back to the US to raise millions from American Jews. She was a passionate and mesmerizing speaker, able to move large crowds with her pleas to support Jews in Palestine. During this period she struggled with the conflict between her roles as mother and activist, although according to Klagsbrun, Meir did not make the connection between this conflict and the social constructs that created it.

What Klagsbrun does explore in depth are the machinations of the early Zionists to establish their state, the role that Meir played as Israeli ambassador to the USSR (1948–1949), the internal politics of Israel, and Meir’s political struggles and leadership. Although she was not religious, the plight of Soviet Jews, who were discriminated against yet forbidden to emigrate, softened her resistance to right-wing and religious groups. She was an architect of the “right of return,” an Israeli law that gives any Jew (at least, as determined by the Orthodox rabbinate) the right to emigrate to Israel and become a citizen. She was also the major proponent of Israeli bonds, urging Americans to invest in them to subsidize the state of Israel.

Meir served as minister of labor from 1949 to 1956. In this position, she was ahead of her time. She supported increased housing, strengthening infrastructure, and developing the National Insurance Act, which, Klagsbrun points out, “supported widows and orphans benefits, industrial accident insurance, maternity protection. These were first steps. Later she introduced health insurance, unemployment insurance, disability and other aspects of social insurance.” However, although these social benefits were ostensibly for all residents, discrimination denied non-Ashkenazi Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians many of these advantages. In 1956, under the leadership of David
Ben-Gurion during his second term as prime minister (1955–1963), Meir became foreign minister. She was asked then, as were all members of the foreign service, to Hebraicize her name. This is when Golda Meyerson became Golda Meir—but she preferred to be known simply as Golda.

In 1968, after much turmoil, controversy, and political infighting, Meir was elected secretary general of the newly established Labor Party, the result of a merger among several leftist parties. However, she resigned six months later due to internal conflict and political differences. In 1969, Levi Eshkol, the Labor prime minister, died, and Meir replaced him.

During Meir’s second term, in 1973, the Yom Kippur War devastated the country, and the Labor Party blamed her for the losses. Right-wing and political infighting, Meir was elected secretary general of the party. A widely praised collection of essays edited by Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle Fine, Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust (2010), called attention to the rapes, forced prostitution, and other forms of sexual abuses suffered by Jewish women, thereby recovering the facts of their gruesome ordeal. Steinem’s words, Linda Stein’s project, on the other hand, uncovers the biological response that explains “why the human race survives.” But empathy alone does not spark action—examples do.

The themes of empathy and empowerment are further developed in Stein’s essay, which opens with a series of questions that dramatically present to her readers the life and death situations and moral dilemmas that people were confronted with at the time. This is not only a powerful way to empathize with both victims and potential rescuers, but also to plunge into the artist’s state of mind as she developed her project. Stein’s Spoon to Shell series, for example, resulted from reading the story of a woman who was offered a spoon in exchange for sexual favors. In a concentration camp, an ordinary household item like a spoon became a most precious object for which one could lose oneself. Stein found in the shell a counter-image to the spoon—a metaphor for the protective shell one would need to wear to resist such attacks on the self, but also a symbol of the protection an empathic bystander could bestow on a victim.

I could not get images of the spoon and shell from my mind. They haunted me. I finally had to physically gather as many of them as I could obtain, in order to express my visual and visceral response to the heinous and grotesque crimes committed during the time of the Holocaust.

Amidst all the horrific stories, there were some bright moments: stories of courage and generosity, such as that of Nancy Wake, whom the Germans dubbed the “White Mouse.” Wake’s story is even more empowering since the pretty socialite was not an obvious candidate for becoming a highly decorated resistance fighter. Having witnessed the rise of the Nazis in Germany, she resolved to “do anything, however big or small, stupid or dangerous, to try and make things more difficult for their rotten party,” and she did. Along with Wake, Stein researched other brave women who had used their power to fight, resist, and rescue, and selected ten as exemplars. The next essay, by Eva Fogelman, author of Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust (1994), examines what motivated some people to stand up. Fogelman first challenges the notion that men and women are different when it comes to empathy and courage. She explains how beliefs about male and female psychology have led to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of women’s actions during the War:

The stereotype of women being relegated to the kitchen would have us believe that the actions of women in rescue situations was limited to saving one or a few Jews in their home and that men were engaged in more active missions outside the home.

Based on the ten figures Stein selected, depicted together in the tapestry pictured on the front cover, Fogelman shows how, on the contrary, women acted fearlessly outside their homes. She concludes by stressing the importance of learning about the actions of these courageous females because, as Albert Schweitzer once explained, “example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.”

And so follow ten essays on ten fierce females: Anne Frank, Ruth Gruber, Vítka Kempner, Noor Inayat Khan, Zivia Lubetkin, Gertrud Luckner, Nadezda Popova, Hadassah Bimko Rosensaft, Hannah Senesh, and Nancy Wake. Though written from different perspectives and with different voices (son, friend, activist, scholar, etc.), these short texts follow a similar structure, providing a biography of each woman spanning her entire life—not just the time of the Holocaust—along with a welcome list for further readings. What makes these stories particularly effective is that the authors do not present them as extraordinary women, but rather as normal women who, under extraordinary circumstances, made heroic choices.

The essays are illustrated with the individual tapestries Stein created for each woman. For these, Stein combined archival photographs, documents,
All Museums Are Sex Museums

Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display
By Jennifer Tyburczy
Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016,
286 pp., $37.50, paperback

Reviewed by Patricia G. Berman

Critical museum studies have, since the late 1980s, analyzed the institutional, ideological, and political dimensions of the museum, as well as examining curatorship as a form of social justice and activism. Museums, argues Svetlana Alpers (in her essay in Exhibiting Cultures [1991]) “are a way of seeing.” They are frames for the shaping of memory, history, taste, and social hierarchy. Jennifer Tyburczy adds significantly to this body of literature through her study of sex and eroticism as displayed in museums in her important book Sex Museums, the first of its kind. “All museums are sex museums,” she proposes in her introduction and conclusion: “Sex has never been outside the scope of the museum’s representational field.... Especially when it comes to display... museums have played a pivotal but often overlooked role in how we talk, think, and represent sex.”

Enlisting archival research, art and film analysis, performance studies, interviews, and elements of thing theory (as defined by literary theorist Bill Brown), Tyburczy aligns her arguments with Michel Foucault’s notion that institutions discipline and delimit understanding and subjectivity. Museums, she argues, are instruments of heteronormativity: persuasive environments in which sex and sexual identities are codified as “normal” or “perverse” through the mechanisms of taxonomy and display. At the same time, museums have assisted in the ongoing disruption of sexual binaries. Tyburczy, an assistant professor of Feminist Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has worked as a curator, a position that has given her a unique perspective as a kind of participant-observer in the museum cultures that she analyzes. In particular, she discusses her work as the archivist and director of programming at the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago. She also curated Irreverent: A Celebration of Censorship at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York in 2015. Her work demonstrates, she writes, “how museums participate in the production of emotions and ideas about the people who inhabit the margins of citizenship and about the parameters of acceptable speech.”

Through a rigorously crafted sequence of case studies and theoretical framings, Tyburczy reveals the ways in which the display of sex and the erotic in both specialized “sex museums,” and in general museums and galleries paradoxically contains and delimits definitions of sexuality. She states her objective as four-fold: the book entangles the development of the museum in the nineteenth century with the cultural and “scientific” codification of modern sexual subjectivities as “normal” or marginalized; it analyzes the ways in which sex is defined by the displays and pedagogical strategies in museums that are explicitly called “sex museums”; it examines the complex “pleasures and dangers” of exhibiting marginalized sexual subjects; and it proposes that all museums are explicitly or implicitly sex museums. Merging examinations of institutional history, curatorial selection, visitor observations, political commentary, architecture and soundscapes, pedagogical materials, sexual tourism, and the phenomenology of touch, Tyburczy takes the reader on a tour of how and where meanings are made and insculpted.

Early in the book, Tyburczy lays out the terms of display as theoretical and phenomenological, using the well-known case of Gustave Courbet’s L’origine du monde (1866), the representation of a recumbent woman’s vulva, as an object of sexual performance: Its earliest display, engineered by its commissioner, involved the ritualized removal of fabric that hung before the painting, engendering mystery.
anticipation, and desire, “the quintessential example of showing sex,” writes Tyburczy. In the twentieth century, the painting was owned by the psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, who likewise kept it hidden behind a sliding panel bearing an abstracted linear representation of the painting by André Masson. Tyburczy traces the history of the painting’s ownership and of sexual showmanship both to secure her analysis of display as sexual theatricality and to speculate that Lacan’s psychoanalytic work was committed proximate to this “prosthetic extension of elite heterosexual masculinity.” The strength of this book lies, in many regards, in the ways in which Tyburczy then circles around and disrupts the theatricality of, and the individual responses to, display. She is acutely attuned to differences in spectatorial experience and to the historical trap of universalizing the viewer. She also introduces display as a multisensory experience in which bodies, objects, sound, smell, and space interact—something that is often lost in the analysis of sexual display.

Tyburczy prefaces the book with an analysis of the removal of David Wojnarowicz’s film, A Fire in My Belly (1986–1987), from the National Portrait Gallery’s 2010 exhibition Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture. A four-minute edit of an unfinished film by the artist, A Fire in My Belly includes content that was stigmatized by some ranking members of Congress as “an assault on the sensibilities of Christians,” an abrogation of community standards, and a misplaced use of taxpayer’s money. In other words, the film was labeled anti-Christian and anti-American (read: deviant). Such allegations, and the Smithsonian’s censorship of the film, prompted a repeat of late twentieth-century culture-war controversies around public funding, freedom of expression, and institutional responsibility. Tyburczy makes the case that the controversy over A Fire in My Belly was about sexual identities, religion, and national identity. Thus, she sets up the argument of her book with the notion that museum displays are “culture war theaters [that] illuminate the quieter but always ubiquitous battles surrounding sexual display.” Such controversies in the arts are rarely about art per se. They surface, rather, as displaced cultural anxieties. Displays of sexuality, or of bodies, are particular magnets for anxiety. Tyburczy presents several famous cases of sexual display that were subjected to violence, including that of the women’s rights activist Mary Richardson, who slashed Velasquez’s Toilet of Venus (the so-called Rokeby Venus) in 1914. Richardson did so to call attention to the misplaced veneration the British accorded Velasquez’s mythological representation of a woman, while Emmeline Pankhurst, whom Richardson called “the most beautiful character in modern history,” was unjustly imprisoned. Here I wish that Tyburczy had offered greater analysis of the idealization of white, well-formed, available female flesh in art, and the politics of replacement (of living women, of political women), rather than her tentative conclusion that Richardson was in love with Pankhurst as much as she was in despair over British politics. Tyburczy also discusses the 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition, staged in National Socialist Germany, the organization of which was both nourished by and contributed to that regime’s march toward genocide. She in turn linked these and other violence against artists and art objects with the economic strangulation of such projects as A Fire in My Belly, while honoring the complexity and dynamics of each of her cases.

For Tyburczy, importantly, the sexual subject is always intersectional: national, physical, gendered, and ethnic. She traces the history of sex in museum display, for example, to the theatricality of nineteenth-century freak shows and anatomical museums, “two sexual architectures,” she writes, “that created acceptable forms of public sexual consumption.” These displays, she argues, allied the sexual with the medical, helping to forge the notion of white heterosexuality as normative and the historical Greco-Roman (female) body as the measure against which others were, in Tyburczy’s word, “monstrous.” Such performances helped to concretize “normal” sexed bodies as biological and immutable, an understanding that undergirds museum display in general. Depictions of bodies
outside of this system of signification are understood to be marginal.

One fascinating case study is the Museo del Sexo (MuseXo) in Mexico City, curated and designed almost entirely out of popular cultural artifacts and sex toys, most of which flooded Mexican market in the wake of NAFTA. Describing in detail the physical experience of transecting the museum (pleasure, amusement, fantasy, desire, theatrically solicited disgust), and noting its celebration of gay and queer sexualities, she observes that the mannequins that populate the exhibition space are white in skin tone and the music that filled the galleries is largely North American. Thus, in a site that laudably “aimed to reconfigure the traditional, transnational stereotype of Mexico as a nation of macho men and passive women,” the whiteness displayed throughout the gallery maintains a semiotic of North American hegemony. She also notes that the museum narrative traces an evolution of lesbian and gay liberation and happiness, essentializing the complex identities and political circumstances of community.

Several case studies in the book are of museums that are explicitly about sex—including the Museum of Sex in New York City, the World Erotic Art Museum in Miami, the Museo del Sexo in Mexico City, and the Leather Archives and Museum in Chicago. These provide affective environments in which bodies interact with objects and popular culture studies. Such signs are often posted by museum professionals who are committed to the display of content. Such signs are often posted to any museum visitor: almost all of us have encountered signage that warns of potentially offensive “troubling” images and objects, has the effect of marginalizing the intended subject of visibility by identifying it as in some way offensive. For example, the 1994 exhibition at the New York Public Library, “Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall: an Exhibition on the History of New York’s Lesbian and Gay Communities,” was introduced with the sign “WARNING: SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT” in order to safeguard a section on cruising and SM. Tyburczy brilliantly interprets this (now) mainstream committed museum practice as creating binary viewing experiences, the “normal” and the “deviant.” It also creates a range of anticipatory responses, from the anxious to the lubricious, that in turn define the viewer experience, and it has the effect of silencing ambitious efforts to disrupt sexual hierarchies. Tyburczy here focuses on the signage as a mechanism that marginalizes LGBTQ identities and tabuis as pornography, citing the culture wars of the late 1980s and ’90s over works by artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, and Annie Sprinkle. She also notes that such “trigger alerts” are implicitly motivated by religion and nationalism, a further marginalization of gender and sexual identities as “other.”

Sex Museums, in the end, argues for strategies to recognize museums as sites of embedded persuasion and therefore as potentially utopic: as Tyburczy states in an interview in Artforum,

The heartening message here is that we shouldn’t assume that people will be shocked and turned off by displays of diverse sexual cultures and people. Museum visitors are smart and savvy, and ready and willing to have that experience. My work makes an argument for the emotional and sexual intelligence of a viewer.

Patricia G. Berman is the Theodora L. and Stanley H. Feldberg Professor of Art at Wellesley College.

The Infidel

Ernestine Rose

The Rabbi's Atheist Daughter: Ernestine Rose, International Feminist Pioneer

By Bonnie S. Anderson

New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 264 pp., $34.95, hardcover

Review by Joyce Antler

The remarkable Ernestine Rose’s speechnizing and organizing on behalf of women’s suffrage stretched from the 1830s through the 1870s. Yet despite periodic attempts by biographers to tell her story, she does not figure prominently in either scholarly or popular accounts of the history of suffrage. This is the case regarding both the US movement and more international histories. Rose’s absence from the historical record has been noted by a series of biographers, from Yuri Suhl, who wrote the first biography of Rose, Ernestine L. Rose and the Battle for Human Rights (1959) as well as a children’s book, Eloquent Crusader: Ernestine Rose (1970), to, more recently, Carol Kolmerten in The American Life of Ernestine Rose (1999). Paula Doress-Worters, the editor of Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women’s Rights Leader (2008), also comments on the mystery of Rose’s general absence from the historical record and helps to create a documentary voice for her in this compilation.

Even when Rose has been present in standard accounts of suffrage, her voice has been more

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muted than it should be, since she was a "formidable and provocative member of the first generation of American women's rights activists," in the view of the historian Ellen Carol DuBois. In "Emestine Rose's Jewish Origins and the Varieties of Euro-American Emancipation in 1848" (in Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation, edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer [2007]), DuBois attributes Rose's distinctive, internationalist contribution to the antislavery movement to her Jewish origins and distance from Protestantism.

In The Rabbi's Atheist Daughter, the latest addition to the growing library of works about the elusive Rose, author Bonnie Anderson picks up on both Rose's Jewishness and her transnational approach to the suffrage campaign, to provide a major reinterpretation of Rose's place in the history of the women's movement. For Anderson, it was not only Rose's Jewishness that made her a unique figure in suffrage history, although that was unusual enough in the early nineteenth-century movement. Rose's atheism was even more distinctive. Her status as an immigrant also differentiated her, and she was never able to shake the label of "foreigner." Amid the Christian reformers who populated abolition and its sister movement, the women's movement, Rose stood out: "the only female freethinker among both the feminists and the abolitionists," writes Anderson, "and ... the sole foreigner in this host of native-born Americans." Although she moved in the upper ranks of the movement, Rose was a puzzling outsider as well as a respected insider. In Rose's own view, she comprised a "minority of one." Yet her powerful oratory, the boldness and careful logic of her positions, and her uncompromising vision made her more famous than either Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony in her day.

Rose combined feminism and freethinking in entirely unusual and provocative ways: for her, the two were a single cause, with antislavery a third plank in her unitary vision of essential reforms. No other suffragist challenged the biblical basis of the nineteenth-century struggle for human rights as ferociously and consistently as Rose. Freethinking was a central tenet of her feminist program, but freethinking was a radical idea, with declining support over the course of her lifetime. Often stigmatized as "infidelism," Anderson explains, the women who espoused it drew even more opprobrium than male proponents. Opposing religious authority of any kind as well as male supremacy, Rose did not follow the normative script either of female domesticity or moral reform.

Although most of her friendships were with other freethinkers, not feminists, Rose formed a strong bond with Susan B. Anthony, who called her the "bravest and [most] fearless of all women." Rose shared many traits with another major suffrage leader and ally of Anthony's, Elizabeth Cady Stanton: passionate eloquence, biting wit, and a tendency to swim "against the mainstream." Yet as Anderson points out, there is a great distance between Stanton's elite background and her social and racial biases, and Rose's humbler origins and more common beliefs. The two did not become particularly close. Over time, Stanton's Christian identification, in contrast to what Anderson calls Rose's "militant atheism," led to Stanton's eclipse of Rose as a movement leader.

The suffrage leader Lucy Stone wrote to Anthony that '[Rose]'s face is so essentially Jewish, that the people remarked the likeness and feared her." Stone also complained about Rose's avuncular style on the lecture trail. Anderson doesn't hesitate to name these attitudes anti-semitic. Rose also contended with anti-semitism within the free-thinking movement, where its incidence increased during the Civil War, even in theInfidel, the newspaper Rose enjoyed and to which she was a frequent contributor. In 1864, the Infidel published a debate between Rose and the paper's editor, her friend Horace Seaver, which marked the only time Rose addressed contemporary Judaism, which she attempted to defend despite her distance from it. Rose soon desisted from the effort, and Seaver went on to publish what Anderson describes as "antisemitic diatribes." The episode reveals the degree to which anti-Judaism penetrated radical movements at the time.

Rose's status as the only "foreigner" in the women's movement was also off-putting to some allies, but it had advantages: she had more contacts with Europeans and a wider and more international perspective than her co-workers. For Anderson, Rose's "European background, her contacts and her principles made her an internationalist. She believed that the causes she supported could only succeed if they crossed national boundaries and had universal appeal." While Kolmerten emphasizes Rose's "American life," Anderson focuses on Rose as an "international feminist pioneer" who was convinced that the goal of the women's movement was to "meet the wants not of America only, but of the whole world."

Because of ill health and perhaps the reversal of her British-born husband's fortunes by the 1870s, Rose spent her last years in England, distancing herself from the US suffrage movement. William Rose's support of his wife and her causes, both emotional and financial, and her return of his affection and devotion, suggest a meaningful and rewarding relationship, perhaps even more egalitarian than those of other antislavery and women's rights reformers.

Anderson is not without criticism of Rose, whose chief defense against her outsider status was the habit of insisting that she was right. For Anderson, such "moralism" easily shifted into "self-righteousness." Yet this attribute steeled her resolve and no doubt contributed to her willingness to keep up the fight despite the calumnies directed toward her and her allies.

Anderson makes the most of the historical information available about Rose's life, using Doress-Worters's collection of her speeches and letters, articles written by three nineteenth century journalists, and feminist print materials and atheist newspapers to good effect. The existing materials are not extensive, and Rose herself wrote little that was personal. Nevertheless, Anderson succeeds in fashioning a portrait of Rose that reveals a great deal about the facts of her geographical and personal journeys, suggesting the influences, relationships, networks, and biographical impulses that came together to create Rose's distinctive politics and persona. Anderson's is a feminist biography of a great feminist, according to Rachel Gutierrez's definition in "What Is a Feminist Biography?" (in All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography, edited by Teresa Iles [1992]): she is "true to the facts of both the individual life and the condition of women in history."

What I find most intriguing in this slim but insightful work is the connection made among all of Rose's identity markers—woman, Jew, immigrant, freethinker. By itself, none of these can explain Rose's impact, the originality of her vision, and her impassioned voice. Her difference must be seen as intersectional. It is telling in this regard that Anderson frames her book around the concept of Rose as the atheist, feminist, internationalist daughter of a Polish rabbi. As Rose's life as a gender rebel unfolded, she distanced herself from her destiny as a female and from her Jewish birth. Although she had grown up worshipping her father, she considered his religion retrograde and oppressive—mere superstition. Her alienation from Judaism, and from Christianity as well, would color the entire trajectory of her life, although Anderson hints that she abhorred the latter more than the former (like a later Russian-Jewish immigrant, Emma Goldman).

Anderson uses an often-told story about Rose's rebelliousness as the centerpiece of her narrative. After Rose's painful break with her father over religion, he betrothed her against her will to a man of his choosing. Only seventeen, Rose challenged the engagement in a Polish state court of law. If she had lost, she would have had to sacrifice the inheritance that her mother, who had recently died, left her. But Rose won: her first battle against injustice and male hegemony. Throughout her life, she would refer to this triumph as proof of what women could accomplish. She left home and did not look back.

The unity that Rose believed existed among her causes—free-thinking, antislavery, and feminism—ultimately proved chimerical. Women's rights advocates shunned her because of her atheism. Freethinkers rejected antislavery because of its Christian influences, and antislavery reformers found atheism anathema. Nor were American and international interests always aligned. In placing Rose on the transnational stage where she belongs and exploring her multiple standpoints and intersecting causes, Anderson demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, as in the twenty-first, coalescence was a difficult goal.

Joyce Antler is the Samuel J. Lane Professor Emerita of American Jewish History and Culture and Professor Emerita of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Brandeis University. Her latest book is Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement (2018).
Frank recounts crucial details of the more familiar incrementalist episodes from the last several years that the casual observer might have overlooked but that deserve to be highlighted. For instance, Frank devotes a whole chapter to Edie Windsor—who brought forward the case that overturned DOMA—and also carefully tracks the Obama administration’s evolving commitment to supporting marriage equality. He captures the giddy excitement that accompanied many of the steps to success in gaining marriage equality—and some of the book’s best sections follow less familiar, more local battles. His story of the passage of marriage equality through the New York legislature becomes an unlikely page turner. That and other case studies detail the various pieces that activists had to put into place to gain success: local media, fundraising, grassroots organization, and political support were crucial, even when the fate of marriage equality rested with state court systems. Social science research was another important tool; using it, marriage equality activists eventually determined that the language of love and commitment was more effective in convincing straight people than the language of rights.

In the end, incrementalism won. The Supreme Court granted marriage equality to gay and lesbian couples across the United States in its 2015 decision in Obergefell v. Hodges.

Frank’s account of incrementalism as a legal and political strategy is extremely useful for historians trying to parse the divisions that rocked the LGBTQ community during the marriage equality battle. Frank demonstrates that many actors, such as Freedom to Marry founder Evan Wolfson and Massachusetts attorney Mary Bonauto, were highly conscious of the conflicts in the moment, and they directed their public relations efforts toward explaining the incrementalist strategy. However, complicating the picture, equal-marriage opponents used incrementalism also, in state referendum campaigns and efforts to repeal marriage equality laws.

Frank compares the incrementalist strategy of the marriage-equality advocates to that for interracial marriage, and it is easy to understand why. The right of interracial couples to marry, established in the Supreme Court’s 1967 Loving v. Virginia decision, was a crucial political and legal touchstone for same-sex marriage advocates. Yet, the example of Roe v. Wade would also have been helpful. As Frank does point out, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg believes that deciding Roe v. Wade in 1973, before states had laid the groundwork of acceptance, led to the increasingly fraught position abortion rights advocates find themselves in today. Like Baehr, Roe v. Wade might have been a crucial cautionary case. Yet, based on Frank’s account, we must assume that equal-marriage activists rarely cited Roe. What should we make of this omission?

Another issue of particular relevance to women’s historians is when and why gender dropped out of marriage debates. Feminists as far back as the suffrage movement and certainly in the 1970s criticized the institution of marriage as oppressive to women. More recently, Peggy Pascoe and Mary Anne Case have argued that the desire to maintain gender hierarchies oppressed gay men and lesbians as well. In “Sex, Gender, and Same-Sex Marriage,” (in Is Academic Feminism Dead?: Theory in Practice [2000]), Pascoe notes that states across the
US rewrote their marriage laws in the 1970s to define marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman when the Equal Rights Amendment threatened to open up the possibility of gay marriage. Case, in “Marriage Licenses” (Minnesota Law Review, 2005), argues that the first gay marriage case, Baker v. Nelson, in 1971, failed in part because Minnesota judges ruled that the state’s marriage law dictated distinct roles for husbands and wives. Frank alludes to how intertwined the questions of gender and marriage were for some time, particularly since Baker was decided on the basis of Hawaii’s equal rights amendment. But he does not explain when or why gender gradually dropped out of the story.

Thus, why the two formerly intertwined issues came to diverge so sharply remains a pressing historical question. The political and legal implications of the divergence are also unclear. Perhaps the split between gender and sexuality was useful when it came to the marriage equality battle; perhaps less so in regard to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA, which would outlaw workplace discrimination against LGBT people). It is difficult to tell from Frank’s account. Nonetheless his narrative opens this question for future study.

Alison Lefkovitz is an assistant professor in the Federated History Department at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers University-Newark.

Displaced Lives

The Women in the Castle
By Jessica Shattuck

Reviewed by Valerie Miner

Jessica Shattuck’s third novel, The Women in the Castle, offers a compelling triptych of three women suffering through World War II in Germany, then surfacing to unimaginable postwar lives. The opulently detailed narrative shifts back and forth in time and place, relating the story of German resistance workers protecting Jews and conspiring to assassinate Hitler. Partially provoked by Shattuck’s family history, the novel also reveals comprehensive research as she braids the lives of Marianne, Benita, and Ania. Her first chapter sets a lively stage.

Despite the imminence of war in November 1938, Marianne is hosting the elegant annual harvest party at Burg Lingenfels.

“All the more cause to gather reasonable people here at the castle, away from the madness!” Marianne had argued. . . . The party had become famous for its anarchic, unGerman atmosphere. It was known as an outpost of liberal bohemian culture in the heart of the proper aristocracy.

Marianne, a savvy, determined, witty mother of three is married to the upright, staid Albrecht von Lingenfels. Albrecht is the nephew of the invalid and marriage were for some time, particularly since Baker was decided on the basis of Hawaii’s equal rights amendment. But he does not explain when or why gender gradually dropped out of the story.

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In flashbacks, we realize how torturous the war years were for both women. Marianne, the educated wife of a well-liked aristocrat, was allowed to remain in town, albeit without most comforts of nobility. Benita, the daughter of plainer folk, was evicted, torn from her young son Martin, forced to live in poverty and endure a string of sexually abusive soldiers. She’s haunted by the memory of “[e]very man who had ever pummeled and beaten and clawed his way into her with stinking breath and rancid sweat and rage about things for which her body had no responsibility.”

Benita received news of Martin’s death and fell into deep despair. She had no way of knowing that he was actually alive, and that Marianne, scrabbling to keep her promise, rescued him from a militarized “children’s home.” Of course Benita is overjoyed to see Martin. Her reunion with Marianne is strained. Weak and exhausted from years of terror and privation, Benita struggles to leave her bed in the decrepit castle, although she is luckier than many wretched refugees.

For the most part, people on this journey do not share. They do not establish camaraderie in their misery—their supplies are too meager, the mood too grim. They are fleeing from not to, and the uncertainty of their destination renders them mute.

Among the countless displaced people wandering the country are many penurious Poles, and soon Ania Grabarek, with her two sons, is absorbed into the castle. Ania, a hard worker with abundant domestic skills and an even temper, helps Marianne transform the skeletal mansion to a relatively safe, almost comfortable haven. “She knew how to turn coarse meal into palatable porridge, how to boil syrup from sugar beets, how to bargain shrewdly on the black market. She would return home from town with real wheat flour for baking, sugar, and even black tea.”

Although Germany has surrendered, peace is a mirage. Desperate Russian prisoners of war descend upon the castle.

Their approach was eerily silent, a collection of dark figures climbing the hillside. Three of them fanned out like scouts in front of a platoon—but they were not a platoon. Though maybe they once had been. Now they were a kind of human wreckage: gaunt, tattered, hungry-eyed.

Marianne and Ania manage to appease the intruders with food and to persuade an old local farmer, Herr Kellerman, to sacrifice his horse to feed the starving men. Shattuck affectingly evokes a child’s experience of war through Martin’s astonishment at the happy preparations for Christmas.
Martin was especially interested in the parties—so many people coming together in celebration, rather than fear. The only large gatherings he could remember took place in bomb shelters or rallies or on crowded, terror-filled streets.

Thus Burg Lingenfels becomes a home again, as the women and their children settle into their joint and individual lives. Throughout the novel, Shattuck flashes back and forth to the different wars each woman experienced. Consequently, each character imagines a distinct future for herself and her family. Ania marries Herr Kellerman, partly to bury a terrible secret and partly to insure that her sons will inherit his farm. Benita falls in love with a former Nazi soldier. Marianne moves to the coast of Maine and writes about the resistance.

Shattuck empathizes with each woman’s regret, grief, and courage, telling their stories with brisk, suspenseful language. Yet sometimes the phrasing is anachronistic or hackneyed, as when Benita thinks, “[I]t was better to keep a low profile.” Occasional observations verge on the naively sentimental, such as Ania’s gratitude for her daughter’s acceptance, “This is why people have children, even when they believe the world is going to hell, even when life is nothing but uncertainty. In hopes of being understood.”

During the 1950s, the mothers and children are widely scattered. The castle is abandoned. Shattuck does a credible job of tying everything together in the last fifty pages. At a surprising 1991 reunion, destinies are revealed. Octogenarians Marianne and Ania talk through their flaws, mistakes and transgressions, moving toward forgiveness and a personal détente. Many readers will find in this historical novel resonance about contemporary refugees and conflicts. The Women in the Castle is a stirring examination of agency, conscience, resilience and survival.

Valerie Miner is the award-winning author of fourteen books, including Traveling with Spirits (2013). She teaches at Stanford University, where she is also artist-in-residence at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research. Visit her website, www.valerieminer.com.

The Tenure Tightrope

Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure

By Marilyn Buck

San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012, 128 pp., $13.95, paperback

In an essay for the Washington Post (September 23, 2016), I wrote about the lack of faculty of color in our colleges and universities, claiming that the reason we have so few is because we simply do not want faculty of color. We know how to recruit and retain them, but we do not have the will. Because of the essay, I received more than 7,000 email messages and hundreds of phone calls. The article was shared on Facebook and Twitter at an incredible rate. But I did not say anything that people of color have not been saying for decades. The only aspect of the article that was different was that I am a white woman faculty member at an Ivy League institution. My race and my institution’s prestige made my message palatable to many of the same people who had ignored the voices of people of color.

With these factors in mind, it was a true pleasure to review Written/Unwritten, edited by Patricia A. Matthew, an associate professor of English at Montclair State University who usually focuses on British Romanticism and British abolitionist literature. She decided to pull together Written/Unwritten after navigating a difficult tenure process, during which her provost objected to granting her tenure. Matthew was supported by her department and school but ran into trouble at the provost’s level because several of her publications were forthcoming rather than already published—a distinction that was not made clear to her at any time during the tenure process. As Matthew worked on her appeal of the provost’s decision, she learned that many black women and people of color had experiences similar to hers. Eventually, the president of the university overturned the provost’s decision, and Matthew was awarded tenure. Regardless, she felt the need to share her story and to provide a platform for other scholars of color to share theirs. This need and desire resulted in a beautiful book of vivid and gut-wrenching stories told by those who had lived and endured them.

As you read this book, it is important to understand that if you have a soul, it will tug at it, and if you are a white faculty member, you may not be able to move forward in your career without changing the way you think and act around issues that your colleagues of color regularly face. If you can move forward with no change, I beg you to pursue another profession, as academe does not need you anymore.

Written/Unwritten is organized into six sections: “Foundations,” “Navigations,” “Identities,” “Manifestos,” “Hierarchies,” and “Activism.” An introduction and conclusion bookend these sections. Of note, the overwhelming majority of the authors are women of color. Matthew places the voices of these women center stage, where they belong.

Matthew has structured the collection to lead the reader through the lived experiences of the authors. At the same time, readers discover how they can make change—that is, if they are willing to take on the difficult work of pushing against the status quo in the academy.

“Foundations” features interviews with two important African American scholars, Houston A. Baker Jr. and Cheryl A. Wall, about race and gender in the academy. Most important to me were their accounts of how the academy has changed—or not—over time. Despite shifts in the student bodies at most colleges and universities, the professoriate has remained overwhelmingly white and male. Faculty are not prepared for or comfortable with teaching the next generation of students and are often too stubborn to realize they need guidance from others who are more expert than they. Moreover, although the academy has moved toward using the language of diversity in faculty search and tenure processes, it has not learned to be truly inclusive and continues to force faculty of color to operate according to rules that preserve white patriarchy. What surprised me most about the interviews is that even though Baker and Wall have lived through decades of racialized experiences, they are still hopeful about the potential of the academy, mainly because of the young scholars entering it.

“Navigations” focuses on the experiences of two women of color, one Asian American and the other Latina. Leslie Bow’s essay, “Difference Without Grievance,” tells the story of the limbo she often finds herself in as an Asian American woman: she is considered a minority by some but not by others.
Asian Americans, she explains, are both visible and invisible within the academy—used when convenient to showcase diversity, but otherwise left out. Lisa Sanchez González demonstrates the damage that the academy can do to Latinas, noting the way that senior faculty often sabotage the lives of young faculty of color. However, she also discusses the way these same faculty of color can succeed despite the damage, sharing the story of her own success after sabotage.

Two of the many decisions faculty of color must make as they navigate the professoriate is whether they want to embrace their identity (or identities), and how they will cope with the ramifications of doing so. In “Identities,” the authors discuss the intersections of language and sexuality that some faculty of color confront in the academy. They argue that issues of language are juxtaposed with the securing of tenure, because the granting of tenure is not merit based but deeply rooted in issues of race, class, language, sexuality, and nationality. Queer faculty of color may find themselves taking on additional responsibilities of advising and mentoring both students and other faculty members of color.

The “Manifesto” section of Written/Unwritten is perhaps my favorite, as it is wholeheartedly unapologetic and documents the lack of safety that faculty of color continually feel in both the formal and informal spaces of the tenure process. Sarita Echavez See, for example, discusses the ramifications of not attending a dinner at a senior faculty member’s home. Although attending social events has nothing to do with one’s qualifications for tenure, it somehow factors into the evaluation process, and skipping a dinner with a powerful faculty member can be detrimental to one’s career. Although the academy claims to be a meritocracy built on hard work and intellect, it often requires genuflecting to the powerful.

In “Hierarchies,” the authors critique the false notion that all are equal in faculty governance. Even when African American faculty are invited to the table, they end up eating in the kitchen. In other words, they may be counted in the diversity numbers, but when they ask to be fully included in the college or university community, they are often ignored—or worse, their requests are viewed as out of line, even if they are simply asking for what they deserve as full colleagues. Similarly, although adjuncts—who are often people of color—make up the majority of most faculties in 2017, they continue to receive minuscule salaries, no benefits, and no job security. They are not allowed to vote on governance decisions. The situation creates a caste system within the faculty.

The final section of the book focuses on activism. Because the academy was not set up for faculty of color, many become activists for the sake of their students, their communities, and each other. They may suffer for their activism if their white colleagues start to feel uncomfortable. For most faculty of color, their research is part of their activism, even when the research seems to have nothing to do with the activism. For example, faculty of color working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields often consider their research activist because their very presence can make a difference in the lives of people of color and motivate others. Moreover, it pushes against stereotypes about people of color and their abilities in various disciplines.

Matthew ends the book with a chapter on the risks of tweeting about diversity. Many faculty of color have taken to social media to discuss diversity and to push against racism, white supremacy, and prejudice in the academy. However, turning to social media can be risky, especially for untenured and adjunct faculty. Tweets and posts last forever, even when deleted, given screenshots and glitches in technology. Moreover, these forms of communication can be taken out of context and used against faculty during tenure and promotion processes. Recently, adjunct, tenure-track, and even tenured faculty have been fired for their comments on social media.

Written/Unwritten is an important book. It should be read by anyone considering the professoriate, whether or not they are a person of color and no matter what their discipline, not only to gain a full understanding of the experiences of faculty of color, but to understand whites’ role. Attempts to defuse academic hierarchies and systems are not generally welcomed, and administrations and faculty who want to uphold the status quo often retaliate. For the academy to become a place that welcomes all voices, we must be willing to dismantle the elements of it that leave so many ostracized, left out, and erased.

Marybeth Gasman is the Judy and Howard Berkowitz Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She serves as the director of the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions.
for this column, two short but incredibly powerful books rose to the surface from the stacks and stacks sent to me by *Women's Review of Books* departing editor-in-chief Amy Hoffman. It’s been an honor to work with Amy and to be a regular presence in this smart and necessary publication.

The Hunger Saint by Olivia Kate Cerrone is a thin volume—one page shy of a hundred pages—but Cerrone’s writing is so unflichning and the subject matter so troubling that it feels like a larger tome. Cerrone based the novella on research of her ancestral Sicily, including oral histories of miners who worked in the sulfur mines of the Valguarnera Canopeco region. Her story chronicles the life of Ntoni, a young boy forced to work as a *caruso*, similar to an apprentice to an older miner, in order to support his family and pay off his father’s *soccorsa morto*, a loan to his family based on the promise of his labor.

It’s 1948. Ntoni is twelve. The term of his labor has been set at seven years. The work is brutally physical and dirty. In one of the opening passages, Ntoni struggles to transport a basket full of sulfur ore but can only lift it a few inches before his arms begin to throb, he breaks out in a sweat and becomes dizzy. The story’s beginings couldn’t be more grim. It opens: “The miners draped their bodies over the race of old Miscui and continued to work.”

This is the reality of the mines.

Miscui is an older miner who died, most likely, of inhaling poisonous gases that had seeped into the pit where he was working. The possibility that the rest of them might be continuing to breathe such vapors does not escape Ntoni. Miscui’s death makes Ntoni think of his own father, who died after an acetone lamp exploded.

Ntoni imagines that his father’s ghost haunts the mine, as Miscui’s ghost will now. He imagines the mine, with its low ceilings and maze of narrow, winding corridors, as the purgatory described to him by the priest after his father died. According to the priest, Ntoni’s father had “sent himself to purgatory” because of his unwillingness to attend church on a regular basis. The priest means this in a worst possible way, but his words give Ntoni hope. He thinks: “Somewhere, close by perhaps, his father’s ghost waited.”

Ntoni feels it is his task to free his father’s soul, and he searches for him at night, breaking the rules by descending into the mine shafts after hours, bringing his weathered prayer card of Saint Calogero, his town’s patron saint. One night he witnesses an incomprehensible encounter between an older miner and a *caruso* like himself: A miner pushed himself against a boy. Ntoni froze. He didn’t understand what he saw. Two nude bodies, one dwarfed by the other in size. Their movements violent and slow. The boy’s face pressed against the wall, as if to merge his flesh into rock, and he whimpered.

Ntoni makes one friend at the mines, an old mechanic named Ziu Peppi, whose cool terracotta workshop offers relief from the sweltering mines. Ntoni is intrigued by the array of tools, machinery, and hardware that litter the shop, “their metal glinting in the sunlight like rows of silver and gemstones.” Ziu Peppi collects rare minerals from the mine and asks Ntoni to keep his eye out for them, in particular for “their metal glittering in the sunlight like rows of silver and gemstones.” Ziu Peppi keeps these, along with stones. Ziu Peppi collects rare minerals from the mine and asks Ntoni to keep his eye out for them, in particular for *celestina* stones. Ziu Peppi keeps these, along with collections of books and antiques, in a secret basement beneath the workshop. Ntoni learns that for a fee, Ziu Peppi will arrange paperwork for the illiterate miners to leave Sicily for jobs in mines in France or America. Ziu Peppi says he has money that Ntoni’s father had given him to arrange for his own departure, and he will use it to help Ntoni if he wishes to leave. The news that his father had been planning to leave comes as a shock to Ntoni. He experiences it first as betrayal but that is soon replaced by the dream of his own escape, a dream that fuels the plot of the novella.

Rikki Ducornet’s *Brightfellow* is one of the oddest books I’ve ever read. At roughly 150 pages, this, too, is more of a novella than a novel, though the cover identifies it as the latter. In the book’s first pages, the main character, a boy named Stub, plays alone in his kitchen, jumping square to square on the linoleum floor:

He cautiously steps from one island to the next. Cautionly! His feet are bare and small. Sometimes he considers them with curiosity. He doesn’t know he’s beautiful. He doesn’t know he’s lonely and that his fear is not of his making, that it will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Stub leads an odd and constricted life. His father is a traveling seed salesman who is gone much of the time, and his mother is a radio host who is often away at night. Stub spends much of his time with Jenny, a live-in nanny of sorts, who has recently been let out of the madhouse up the road. Stub is fond of Jenny’s dreamy countenance and her habit of feeding the ants that live under the porch. When the two of them get snowed in during a storm, they build a city, fashioning houses and stores and a hotel for insomniacs (Jenny’s suggestion) out of stiff paper and glue. Jenny reads to him from a book by a local recluse named Vermer Vanderloon.

A book with pictures as strange as the strangest thing you can think of. A small book bound in green leather, almost black, with silver letters pressed into the cover. Stub rubs a finger over them and with Jenny’s help reads: *Ancient Roots and Ways*. I stole it, Jenny whispers, from the Half Way House.

After Stub’s mother leaves them, his father takes up plumbing in order to stay closer to home. Among his father’s jobs is fixing things at the nearby college campus, which Stub decides to explore. He meets the college librarian, who gives him a library card and access to more of Vanderloon’s work: as it turns out he’d been a professor at the college.

Even before his father’s death, Stub takes up residence on the college campus, sleeping in “duck blinds, under a canoe, in an abandoned truck.” He masters “the art of invisibility” and successfully steals food and clothing from the student dorms and faculty houses. Emboldened, he sneaks into the gym to shower and winters over in the biology lab, sleeping in a filched sleeping bag in a deep cabinet under the bottled specimens. “In this way the years pass. He is a recluse, a scholar. He is a dissembler. When in a tight spot, he invents identities. He is strange.”

When he is 20, Stub notices a “faculty brat” (his father’s term), a little girl with the unlikely name Asthma, and becomes obsessed with her. He begins to keep a journal in which he writes:

The night sky has a child’s color; it is the color of her hair … the twilight is the color of her eyes, the earth is the color of her mood, and I can hear her almost imperceptible wheezing in the breeze; her perfume is the perfume caught among the thorns of the blackberry bushes that line the path. And I think as I approach the Night Library that she is all things to me: star, astral light, perfume of bramble, moonlight, and secrecy: life itself, Asthma.

Though Stub’s fascination never manifests as overtly sexual, it grows to become a creepy obsession. When a professor named Billy tries to befriend Stub, inviting him to come live at his house, he risks being exposed as the petty thief he’s become, because the extra bedroom offered to him looks out into Asthma’s yard. He steals a pair of binoculars, the better to observe her. It is Asthma who gives him the name in the book’s title. She either misunderstands or willfully misinterprets his alibi—he has taken to saying he is
a visiting student, a Fulbright scholar—and calls him “Brightfellow.”

Stub finds himself drawn uncomfortably out of his secretive, feral world and into the increasingly complicated world of human interaction. The book’s ending is a mad, almost feverish sequence of events that reads like a rendering of a bizarre dream.

Trish Crapo is a writer and photographer who lives in Leyden, Massachusetts. She has published two books of photos and interviews with her fellow townspeople: The Leyden Portrait Project (2010) and The Leyden Portrait Project, Too! (2012). Another book, Dune Shack (2015), was prompted by a 2013 artist’s residency in the wild dunes of the Cape Cod National Seashore.

Late Spring

Winter’s bone-gray fingers refused spring to Vermont, holding April under icy mud despite a few dedicated robins, cardinals’ urging and occasional young chickadee training for anticipated mating rites ahead. Throughout the day’s drive to southern PA rolling hills morphed to vibrant green, redbud vivid through white blossomed clouds, all shades of renewal surging across both roadside and hill. Arriving in late afternoon sun to my sister’s, my eyes accustomed to such brilliance searched to find her emerge from darkened room, resolute smile cracking the façade of her bony frame barely balanced advancing to hug. Our shared animation belied her slow gait, her slight weight unknown since childhood angled sharp in my arms. Throughout the week, we weeded the bygone from closet and heart; plotted and planted her deck-edge garden, its blooms feeding her like the fragrant food and rollicking laughter that plumped her cheeks; then dressed her in bright colors from shawl to skirt, a second spring emerged from the dark of before.

Early Spring

February 12. Last week’s inch of snow melted as fast as it came. Already crocus poke curious heads above ground, wondering at the rain that might be snow further north where we came from. This early spring no more expected than your own early departure. Not young, you nonetheless might have lived to savor another spring, your garden leaf, bloom, spread like the roots you left at each home you planted, and those well tended in the hearts of offspring and sibling tending you this early spring day.

— Sarah Bartlett

Sarah Bartlett’s poetry and prose have appeared in Adanna, the Aurorean, Minerva Rising, PoemMemoirStory, Mom Egg Review, Ars Medica, and in anthologies including the award-winning Women on Poetry (2012). In 2010, she created Writing Inside VT (www.writinginsideVT.com) for Vermont’s incarcerated women, to encourage personal and social change within a supportive community. The collected writings of sixty of the women appear in HEAR ME, SEE ME: Incarcerated Women Write (2013).

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More Poetry

Late Spring
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