

life." She refers to her blind daughter's "misery," and states that "it must be terrible for a blind child to cross even the quietest of streets." Clearly, Lawson has not accepted her daughter's blindness and does not respect her child's ability to function competently in the world. This article is legitimate as one woman's perceptions, but it could have been balanced by a piece reflecting a healthier view. As it is, it reinforces stereotypes about disability as tragedy, stereotypes which are blessedly absent in the rest of the anthology.

Two articles by Karen A. Blackford examine the experiences of mothers who have disabilities. In "Why Chronically Ill Women Say to Their Temporarily Able-Bodied Sisters, Thanks But No Thanks," Blackford reports on a study of the feelings of mothers with MS and lupus toward the friends and relatives who assist them with homemaking tasks. To varying degrees, nearly all of the women expressed resentment and frustration, sharing the sense that these helping persons deprived them of their role within the family. In "The Baby Crib and Other Moral Regulators of Mothers with Disabilities," Blackford looks at widely-held assumptions about "good" and "bad" mothers. She demonstrates that these assumptions can brand a woman with a disability as a moral failure for having and attempting to raise a child. Both of these pieces are dense with sociological terms and references which may discourage some readers. But they are definitely worth the extra effort.

Within the framework of this book, the exploration of diversity and sameness enhances our understanding of disability. Conversely, disability becomes a vehicle for probing more global issues around difference and conformity. Within this context, even Elizabeth R. Epperly's concluding article on children's author L.M. Montgomery, "The Restraints of Romance," has much to say that is relevant. In examining the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, Epperly shows how Anne finally yields up her vibrant individuality and accepts the conventions prescribed for young girls of her time. She opts to "pass," to subvert her true self in order to win social acceptance, as do the women with disabilities interviewed by Todoroff and Lewis. Yet, Epperly points out, Anne's

real romance is not with the young man who wins her love, but "with her own voice and with imaginings, perceptions, and self-discoveries." The richness of each individual's unique voice resonates through the diverse essays in this anthology, drawing them together in a startling harmony.

DOUBLE THE TROUBLE, TWICE THE FUN

Pratibha Parmar, filmmaker. V-Tape, 1992.

by *Shelley Tremain*

In an article which appears in *FUSE Magazine* ("Blasted Categories: Observations on *Desh Pardesh* and Recent South Asian Film and Video" Vol. XVI, No.4, May/June 1993), Ian Rashid observes that film- and video-maker Pratibha Parmar has "[heralded] the emergence of a South Asian lesbian and gay subjectivity." With her recent video, *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun*, Parmar continues her pathbreaking work. Insofar as *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* depicts the previously unrepresented identities, perspectives, and experiences of lesbians and gays with disabilities, that video 'heralds' the emergence of disabled lesbian and gay subjectivities (to borrow Rashid's phrase).

Although *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is only 25 minutes in length, Parmar focuses effectively upon a wide range of concerns that are relevant to lesbians and gays with disabilities. For this reason, Parmar's video will be an important tool for disabled activists and educators, as well as for our non-disabled queer sisters and brothers. Many of the disabled lesbians and gays here speak of the oppression which they have in common with straight disabled persons; namely, ableism. For example, some of the disabled lesbians and gays shown at-

tempt to dispel the pervasive myth that disabled persons are asexual. Moreover, others shown aim to refute the patronizing belief that disabled lives are tragic ones. At the same time, though, these lesbians and gay men draw attention to the homophobia of disability communities. One disabled dyke, in particular, remarks on the ways in which disabled lesbians and gay men are marginalized by the non-disabled lesbian/gay community, as well as by the disability movement. For her, these margins parallel each other.

In order to avoid broaching these issues in a fashion which is either too didactic, or overly rhetorical, Parmar alternates between two formats: dramatized sequences, on the one hand, and interview/discussion-formatted ones, on the other. Weaving the dramatic segments with the documentary sequences enables Parmar to show that the systemic political oppressions of disabled lesbians and gays are forms of cultural marginalization that have deep personal impact.

The dramatic segments depict two gay men with disabilities, Tim and Peter, on a date in the former's candle-lit apartment. After the two characters converse and drink some wine, they begin to caress, and embrace each other. In an unprecedented cinematic moment, the men join each other on Tim's bed, undress one another, and make love. Now, some feminists might be tempted to dismiss the scenes depicting Tim and Peter's lovemaking; that is to say, some might suggest that Parmar has unfortunately presented one more display of male sexuality. But, in a sense, that sort of (ableist) reaction would surely miss the point. By including those scenes in her video, Parmar begins to subvert some of the obstacles which disabled women and men confront when they attempt to "come out" as lesbian or gay.

To be sure, the coming out process is often difficult for many non-disabled lesbians and gays, particularly if one does not fit with the white, gay male stereotype. But consider the specific problematic involved in coming out as a *disabled* lesbian or gay. Consider the uncertainties disabled women and men might experience taking up the *sexual* identities of 'lesbian' and 'gay' within ableist social contexts where disabled persons are commonly perceived as asexual. How, if at all, are disabled lesbians and gays to con-

struct their sexualities when disabled lesbian/gay sexual practices are not even depicted in the queer cultures they want to call their own?

I, for one, was tremendously affected by those particular scenes. In that brief depiction of lovemaking between two disabled gay men, I could recognize aspects of my own erotic practices (e.g., the practice of negotiating who can do what, to whom!) that are not represented in non-disabled lesbian erotic imagery. Viewing those impaired bodies making love, my disabled lesbian sexuality was, at last, publicly validated and redeemed. This, I suggest, is just one of the ways in which *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is affirming, and elevating, for the self-esteem of disabled lesbians and gays.

As the organizers of Toronto's Lesbian/Gay Film and Video Festival (the Inside/Out Collective) describe it, *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is Parmar's "most ambitious work to date." Certainly, others working in the film and video medium would do well to adopt some of the techniques Parmar employs here. Especially instructive for other film/video-makers and producers are the innovative ways in which Parmar increases the accessibility of that medium for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. In some sequences, the speaker is shot face-on in order to enable lip reading; in other sequences, a British Sign-Language interpreter appears in colourized windows on-screen in order to translate the verbal text; at yet other times, verbal text is open-captioned. By introducing these and other techniques into a medium which has by and large excluded persons with hearing-impairments, Parmar confirms her accountability to, and political solidarity with, disabled lesbian and gay subjects.

Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun is available from V-Tape, 183 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario (416) 863-9897 (voice), and is distributed by Women Make Movies, 462 Broadway, Suite 501, New York City, NY 10013 (212) 925-0606 (voice).

THE CHANGE: WOMEN, AGING AND THE MENOPAUSE

Germain Greer. Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

by Deborah Heller

First, the good news. As a writer, Greer has lost none of her energetic irreverence. In *The Change* she takes on the psycho-medical establishment, the "Masters in Menopause," and reduces their manuals and studies to rubble as effectively as if she had passed them through a paper shredder. She observes that while nearly half the women aged fifty or over in Britain are single, menopause manuals are based on the myth of the 30-year monogamous marriage in the leafy suburbs and assumes a menopausal woman's main duty is to attract and stimulate her husband. Studies passing as scientific purport to chart changes in women's attitudes at menopause without establishing a control base for pre-menopausal women. Medical and psychiatric texts are exposed as a jumble of moralism, prejudice, and pseudo-science.

Having discredited the Experts, Greer turns to cultural anthropology, history, folk wisdom, women's writing, and her own experience. Some of the results are fascinating, as, for example, her exploration of the witch role as "a coherent protest against the marginalization of older women and a strategic alternative to it." Her abundant discussions of women writers confronting their own aging and that of those dear to them are frequently exhilarating, likely to send readers back to old friends and introduce them to new ones, except for poor de Beauvoir, Greer's repeatedly flogged *bête noire*. Woolf, the creator of two of literature's most memorable middle-aged heroines—Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay—is never even mentioned, despite what appears as Greer's earnest effort to acknowledge women writers whose achievement has been to defy the prevailing convention that "all our heroines are young."

The woman writer Greer appeals to most frequently, however, is herself. And here we come to the thorny issue of personal preference. No one would wish to

deny Greer the legitimacy of her own experience, but she is irritatingly prescriptive, so that if you don't do it her way, you're somehow in "denial." Greer reiterates that menopause is a time of misery and grief. Statistics and the personal experience of others may tell a different story, but such claims are either discredited or dismissed.

Another reiterated assertion (in a book of many repetitions) is that women lose interest in sex at menopause. Advanced first as a simple matter of fact (for which no evidence is given), it gradually merges with prescription: if women *don't* lose interest in sex, they damn well *ought to*, because by middle-age they are unlikely to find or hold a sexual partner. Viewed in this light who can object? Yet some of Greer's most unsisterly gloating is reserved for women who don't acknowledge the limits of what she considers age-appropriate. She mentions Jane Fonda three times to make the same point, "It's either your bum or your face." In other words, the "strain" in Fonda's face is a providential judgment on her desire to stay trim and, by extension, on her unseemly recent marriage. But must we sneer at Fonda's wrinkles? Might they not be just normal signs of age, which Greer's own logic tells us (elsewhere) we ought not to despise?

Her treatment of George Eliot's marriage at the age of 60 to John Cross, twenty years her junior, reveals similar censoriousness. Six weeks after the marriage, Cross attempted suicide by jumping into the canal in Venice. Determined to see this as an expression of a younger man's revulsion at his older wife's body, Greer deliberately distorts the known facts of the case. Haight's biography of Eliot reports that Cross was suffering from "acute mental depression...not the first of its kind in his life," but Greer, drawing on the same source, assures us that Cross had "never before...showed any sign of mental derangement." One might think that a book ostensibly written to affirm the creative potential of women after menopause would remember George Eliot instead for having written *Middlemarch* in her early 50s and *Daniel Deronda* when she was near 60. But Greer, who tells the Eliot-Cross story twice, has a more important axe to grind.

Some twenty years ago Greer burst on