

UP AND DOING: Canadian Women and Peace

Janice Williamson and Deborah Gorham, eds. Toronto: Women's Press, 1989.

By *Kim Hume*

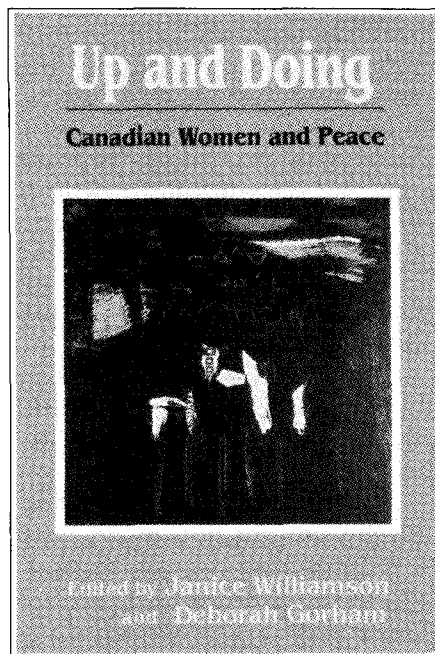
"Do not despair. Act. Speak out.... In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing."

This quotation from Margaret Laurence's well-known essay, "My Final Hour," provides the title for this volume on Canadian women's struggles and successes in the peace movement. The peace movement is driven by fear; fear of nuclear war and the end of human life. This book is a collection of history, autobiography and poetry documenting the ideas, actions and feelings that have resulted from women's fear of war and consequent participation in the peace movement.

The first section, "Peace History," briefly outlines women's activism before, during and after World War I. Beginning with an article on Nellie McClung, R.R. Warne examines McClung's attitudes to peace and war, in an attempt to justify her contradictory position as a member of peace organizations while supporting the war effort during World War I. The following chapter presents portraits of Francis Benyon and Laura Hughes, two of the few women who opposed war during World War I. Thomas Socknat then discusses Canadian feminists and interwar peace activism, identifying the seemingly inherent connection between peace activism and feminism.

The second part, "Thinking About Peace," is a collection of essays, reprinted articles and speech extracts focussing on theories of peace, theories of war and explanations as to why peace activism is predominantly a feminine activity. Included is Kim Echlin's disturbing and powerful account of the fallout from U.S. testing of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands that began in 1946. These people's innocent suffering is a rude reminder of what atrocities we, as a human race, are capable of.

The section "Acting for Peace" includes a selection of articles on contemporary peace activism. Today, the peace move-



ment incorporates a wide range of issues and activities. Shelly Romalis provides an account of the lives of non-violent activist women protesting nuclear weapons at Greenham Common. Ann Hansen, a violent social activist, is serving a life-term in Kingston penitentiary for her part in the bombing of Litton Systems. Her statement to the court is included in this section to explain the rationale behind this form of peace activism.

The final section of this book, "Imaging Peace," uses the narrative, the poem and the lyric as forms for illustrating life in a nuclear age. With contributions from poets, writers, professors, feminists and peace activists, this section presents images of peace. It is an elusive thing; we do not live in a peaceful world, and so cannot know what it really is, which makes peace a difficult thing to strive for. It may be easier to imagine the horrific aftermath of sterility and barrenness that would result from nuclear war, as some of the writers for this section have done. By depicting the alternatives, these images provide the most forceful argument for peace.

Individually, each section in this anthology contributes to the discussion of Canadian women and peace. Unfortunately, the parts do not form a cohesive whole. While the intentions of the editors, to "explore the experience of Canadian women with the issue of peace" is fulfilled, the book lacks a focus. The introduction includes a resources list of printed materials, films and peace groups, which suggests the book is to be considered a resource. However, the absence of an

index considerably diminishes its value as such.

It is difficult to define an audience for *Up and Doing*, save perhaps the already-converted. This book will be an informative and interesting read for feminists and those involved in the peace movement. It is to be hoped that the material included in this volume will prove useful for discussion with those who have yet to be convinced of the necessity and importance of peace.

THE HYSTERICAL MALE: New Feminist Theory

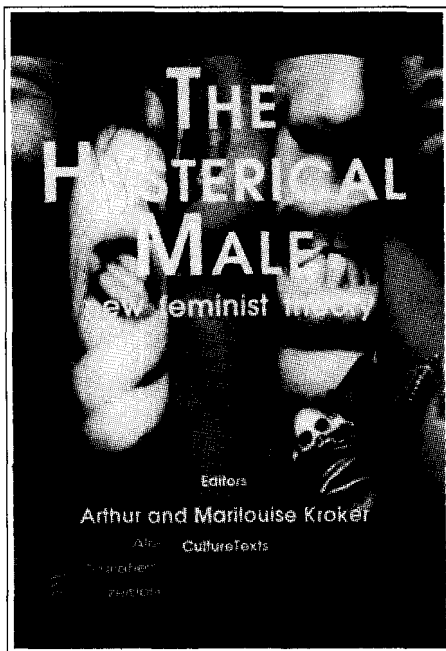
Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, eds. Montreal: New World Perspectives CultureTexts Series, 1991.

By *Jennifer Henderson*

Pee-Wee Herman, who figures somewhat prominently in *The Hysterical Male*, was recently arrested for "exposing" himself in a California cinema. His action makes the naming of this collection of essays particularly apt, given the thematic focus of the work around a concept of male hysteria as nostalgia for the lost penis/phallus. The exhibitionist's game of now-you-see-it-now-you-don't enacts the anxiety of male subjectivity in profound crisis — as the editors put it, "that fateful point where the specular coherence of unitary male subjectivity shatters, and what remains is but the violent residues of the death of the old male cock."

This book does not deliver the unified picture of the end-of-century male hysteric promised by its title. The conjunction of feminist theory and cultural criticism of most of the writers, however, provides a way of making connections between what might be called the sensibility of post-modernism and the material reality of a "penile power" which erects itself on the abused bodies of women and children. The book is dedicated to the fourteen women murdered at the École Polytechnique in 1989. Male violence, it is argued throughout, is the end of a process in which the hysteric converts a fundamental lack into emotionally cathected ideas.

The essays are framed with the provocative suggestion that Freud's nineteenth-century theory of the hysterical female must be read in reverse image at



the end of the twentieth-century. Not the clitoris as a failed penis, therefore, but the penis as a “hyper-inflated clitoris.” Or, the deflated Victorian penis/phallus in relation to the female body as the new purveyor of meaning and value. Several writers name this relationship of envy and appropriation with acuity. Chris Tysh, borrowing a phrase from Ntozake Shange’s *for coloured girls*, remarks that “somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff.” The male hysteric, for Tysh, is the new philosopher, “Innkeeper of Logos,” who “adds on to himself that by which he is diminished.” This male hysteric is “up there on the stage of the 21st century Symposium on Philosophy for the Future,” performing a pantomime of the feminine in a last scramble for power.

Avery Gordon makes the very important connection between male hysteria and violence against those who pose a challenge to the sovereignty of white masculinity. For men, “increasing challenges to that sovereignty, to that intersection of knowledge and power and the resulting ambiguity of cultural meanings,” is terrifying. This terror gets translated into terrorization of those who threaten the enclosure of the white male’s perspective on the world.

Not all of the contributors (who, incidentally, are British and American as well as Canadian, and male as well as female) deal specifically with the male hysteric. Several writers, in a highly self-conscious fashion, explore the construction of female identity: the mechanisms of confession and surveillance in the practice of

cosmetic surgery, the attraction of the Harlequin romance for feminist readers, the endless regression of mirrored identities in the genealogy of the bleached blonde. These essays in particular are extremely original pieces of feminist criticism. The self-consciousness of the writers informs their arguments with the contradictory realities of feminist experience.

While the quality of the contributions is uneven, and the copy-editing often careless, this collection of essays tracing the next stage of gender politics is a worthwhile, though arduous, read. Feminists interested in questions of popular culture and theory (or how George Bush can be a seductive hysteric or how women can learn to ejaculate with practice) will find much to ponder here.

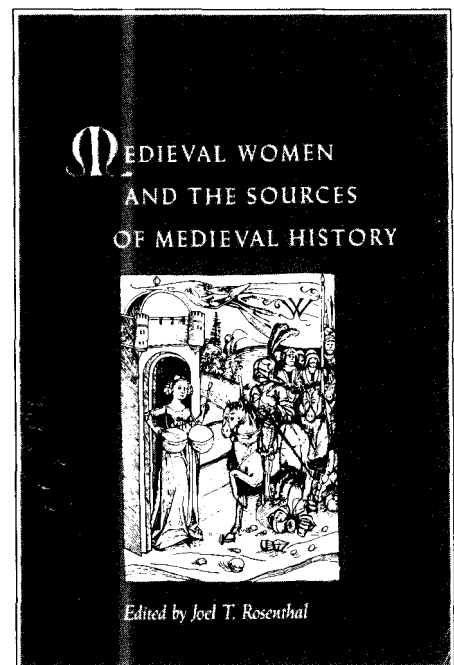
MEDIEVAL WOMEN AND THE SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY

Joel T. Rosenthal, ed. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1990.

By Laura Cameron

There are winners and losers in history, and although sometimes we might like to believe that objectivity is easily attained, more often it is an elusive thing. Intended for students and teachers of history, *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* endeavors, with a good deal of success, to probe into the whereabouts of women during the medieval period. Surely they existed, but as many of the authors demonstrate, the losers in the history game do not often figure prominently on the scoreboards.

I read the various articles of the anthology with a mixed reaction. There is a certain cause for anger here, as I am made aware by one historian after another of the scribes who ignored, dismissed and were oblivious to, even the *presence* of women in medieval life. Although there is information to be gleaned from the sources, much of what we could learn about women’s lives, about gender interaction, and (although the winners might scoff at this last) even about men’s lives, has been irretrievably lost. However, I was excited to discover that there are scholars who are committing themselves to the task of “uncovering” medieval women.



The fourteen papers in this collection are written in a variety of styles and cover diverse subjects. They range from Janet Senderowitz Loengard’s re-examination of English legal history, in an effort to extract new insight from an old and well-established topic, to Helen Lemay’s hypothesis on how women’s medicine might have influenced the male medical establishment of the day.

We can begin to learn more about medieval women and society by scouring established sources, and opening up our traditionally trained minds to previously uninvestigated sources. Janet Tibbetts Schulenburg demonstrates this beautifully in her work with hagiographic sources, an area of historical research traditionally considered unreliable and insignificant. Some of the papers approach material through the compare-and-contrast paradigm. Jo Ann McNamara’s account of the fate of two religious women, touched by the hardening views of contemporaries, who shunned what they saw as excessive pluralism taking root in spiritual Christian thought, is riveting. Others, like John Freed, use case studies to examine the data, first from a male perspective and then again in the context of both sexes. They are excellent at illustrating the richness and depth possible when both perspectives are examined — which raises an interesting point.

I half-hoped, half-feared that Rosenthal’s collection would raise the fire of militancy in my soul. My half-hope was born out of anger. My half-fear was