

*Wolf without tears,
I am left stalking bones
where there are no fires.
My hands ache from their clinging;
my half-breed heart chants
for the fall.*

Clements' world is a world populated by scenes from the past, a search for the self in the heritage of her Seneca and Blackfoot forebears and an acute consciousness of loneliness and death. In her universe, people often don't "talk to each other" because they are afraid; their hearts are "hidden," and "In The Suburbs Of Summer" she states:

*Something
Is singing here —
Something, also, wise enough
For silence.*

The poem ends with a statement of loss and compassion:

*You enter me
Out of an ignored
And mortgaged grief.*

Another very strong poem deals with the "Buffalo at Rosa Park Zoo." She addresses the buffalo directly, and connects herself to him, her "Shaggy brother." She says: "Together we've stampeded/ the tract-house suburbs of sleeping America." And in the poem, beautiful and fierce, the reader becomes conscious of the poet's struggle to maintain her integrity against the "lure of endless rooms," "the bribes of food and touch." Despite the sophisticated use of beautiful language, the poet is aware of the dark underside of the universe, and in the final poem in the chapbook, "Snow Country," Clements describes a tender moment between herself and her dying mother; she captures the delicate breathing of the kitten she places in her mother's lap, and the hands of mother and daughter touching as "together we wait, our hands rising up./Listening as my mother's bones fall away/Like spring snow."

In this chapbook, Clements has proven herself to be a poet whose delicate, graceful poems are also fiercely courageous and powerfully moving.

CREATION FIRE: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry

Edited by Ramabai Espinet. Toronto:
Sister Vision Press, 1990

By Clara Thomas

When I last reviewed a book of poetry by Canadian women, I complained of the lack of representation in it of Third World writers. Ramabai Espinet, working with members of CAFRA, The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, has now splendidly filled a large portion of the gap. The poets represented in *Creation Fire* are by no means limited to association with Canada, however; they come from all over the Caribbean and live there, in Canada and in the United States. One of the most interesting features of this anthology is its portrait gallery — each writer represented by a picture, a few lines of biography and both place of birth and of present domicile. The inclusion of this pictorial record is an especially fine idea: the whole volume is personalized and given a sisterly dimension by its presence. In their informative preface, Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen and Rhoda Reddock, Secretariat members of CAFRA, describe the foundation of the association in 1985 and describe the aims of this group of individual feminists, women activists and women's organizations, "spanning the Dutch, English, French and Spanish-speaking Caribbean diaspora."

Ramabai Espinet, herself both a poet and a scholar-critic, has provided an informative introduction, tracing the volume's development from its beginning at the launching of CAFRA, through its early difficulties in persuading women to submit their poems, to this final, triumphant (and it *is* triumphant), publication. An essay she wrote, urging women to come forward with the poetry she was positive they were writing, became part of a kit that was widely distributed by CAFRA. Word spread about this forum-to-be; enthusiasm mounted, and finally over 500 poems flooded in, causing the editorial committee a considerable problem of selection. Finally they chose about 200

poems by 115 women for this publication and planned a limited edition of *all* the submissions as an invaluable historical record of the enterprise.

Their most interesting decision was to divide the poems into 12 themes: The Seer; The Artist; The Lover; The Mother; The Exile; The Mourner; The Land; The Region; The Guerilla; The Worker; The Survivor; and The Praise-Singer. In itself this list is a tantalizing menu: the contents of each section fully realizes its promise. Of the final collection Ms. Espinet writes:

I believe the voices of a number of groups previously unrepresented in Caribbean collections have emerged... the overwhelming quantity of the poetry is written in English. But the contributions in languages other than English, although small, are signals of the feeling of commonality experienced by women of the region. We can see here the beginnings of a female crossing of the barriers of race, class, language and history.... Glosses have been provided as adequately as was possible. It would have been ideal for each poet to supply a translation which was satisfactory to her, and this was the first method tried, but on the whole, this was not the case. The glosses have concentrated upon providing meaning and not an attempt to render the work into a facsimile of English poetry.

The combination of these poems and their glosses, while admittedly few, provide one of the chief pleasures of *Creation Fire*, one that is unique in my experience.

There are angry poems here and bitter ones, elegies and love poems, but most of all, throughout all the poems, ring the voices of those who endure, who will be heard, and who will speak in the voices that they are just now finding. Any woman, a member of the CAFRA "tribe" or an onlooking outsider, as I am, will find challenge, strength and an abundantly fresh way of seeing somewhere in these pages. I could quote from many of these poems, for they speak to me beyond their particulars to the universal concerns of all the sisters under the sun. This, for instance, from "Praise Song For My Mother," by Grace Nichols of Guyana:

*You were
the fishes red gill to me
the flame tree's spread to me
the crab's leg/ the fried plantain
smell replenishing replenishing
Go to your wide futures, you said*

Read, enjoy and *teach* from this grand anthology — its glossary of unfamiliar words is a splendid aid to teaching — and thereby support the series of literary anthologies which CAFRA plans to follow this one.

**AT FACE VALUE:
The Life and Times of
Eliza McCormack/John White**

Don Akenson. Kingston and Montreal:
McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990

By Allison MacDuffee

At Face Value presents an intriguing hypothesis: that Canada's first woman M.P. was Eliza McCormack White, a female transvestite who took the name of John White, served in Parliament from 1871 to 1887, married another woman and raised eight adopted children. The book challenges the conventional view that Agnes Campbell MacPhail became Canada's first woman M.P. in 1921.

The author, Don Akenson, a specialist in Irish history at Queen's University, became interested in John White while

researching Irish immigrants in Canada. He found a curious gap between John White's arrival in Canada from County Donegal in 1846, and his re-emergence in the mid-1850s as a prosperous cheese-factory and foundry owner near Belleville, Ontario.

Then Akenson came across an 1847 newspaper account about one Eliza McCormack, a woman who had been arrested in Hamilton for disguising herself as a man. He realized that "the best way to make sense of the career of John White in Canada was to recognize that he was actually a she: that Eliza McCormack had taken on the deceased John White's name and much of his persona."

According to his hypothesis, Eliza McCormack White, John White's sister, assumed her brother's identity after his death from fever in 1846. By adopting male clothing and mannerisms, and sometimes wearing false facial hair, she was able to carry off her deception successfully.

Those who expect *At Face Value* to prove that John White was a woman will be disappointed. In the Preface, Akenson explains that his point in writing the book was not to prove the gender of his protagonist. Rather, he wanted to make the reader question gender stereotypes.

At Face Value is written largely in the first person, from Eliza's point of view; there is also much invented dialogue. So it seems fair to judge the book as a historical novel, rather than a conventional biography or history book.

The most successful chapters are those which describe Eliza's childhood in Ireland. Drawing on his knowledge of Irish history, the author creates a vivid picture of a country ravaged by famine and disease. The scene in which young Eliza convinces her father to let her learn the blacksmith's trade is especially moving.

The part of the book describing Eliza's life in Canada is more uneven. The description of her years as a prostitute in a Toronto hotel may seem gratuitously shocking to some readers. On the other hand, the chapters about her political career provide an interesting picture of politics in nineteenth-century Ontario, and the story of her marriage to Esther Johnson is touching and insightful.

By creating a character who is in many ways androgynous, Akenson makes us question our preconceptions about gender. Eliza is presented as a mixture of

"masculine" characteristics — business acumen, political shrewdness and sexual adventurousness — and more "feminine" traits, such as modesty and gentleness.

Despite some faults, such as an unfortunate abundance of typographical errors, *At Face Value* is a thought-provoking and often moving book. While Akenson does not prove that John White and Eliza McCormack were the same person, he does demonstrate that taking on a man's identity in the 19th century might have been a very sane and sensible way for a woman to achieve power in a male-dominated society.

**THE OPPOSITIONAL
IMAGINATION: Feminism,
Critique and Political Theory**

Joan Cocks. London: Routledge, 1989

By Ian D. Thatcher

This is a good book in that its aims are clearly stated and its arguments are pursued both cogently and persuasively. Cocks' subject for examination is power, specifically the regime of masculine/feminine:

an order of sex and gender inclusive of the established phallogocentric discourse on the meaning of the body.... the elaboration of the "masculine" and the "feminine" personality, the sexual division of labour, the social orchestration of biological reproduction, the assignment of public and domestic power and subjection made on the basis of genital type.

In Part One, Cocks discusses the works of Said, Williams, Gramsci and Foucault. From her exposition and comparison of the ideas of these critical theorists she constructs a series of assumptions about the nature of power. First, power imposes itself through culture. Second, the messages emanating from any power regime will be a selection from descriptions of reality which are infinite. Third, there will be several regimes of power which, although one will be dominant, will coexist and intersect. Fourth, no single system of power determines all others. Fifth, no power regime can incorporate all thoughts

