

how to cope with it; to a compulsion to speak out and finally to transmitting the wisdom acquired and reintegration into the community. Footnotes suggest personal acquaintances as the source for the theory. Whatever the source, as the basis for describing the structures of the works under discussion, it is wonderfully illuminating, particularly in its power to reveal the intersections of race and gender in the individual development of the characters. *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, then, is not only a fine study, it is also a splendid example of why one needs different paradigms and questions to understand the experience and the literature of marginalized people.

Many of the early plays that she discusses are published in James V. Hatch and Ted Shine, eds. *Black Theater USA: Forty-Five Plays by Black Americans, 1847-1974* (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

WOMEN COMPOSERS, A Lost Tradition Found

Diane Peacock Jezic. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988

Ann Armin

Women Composers, A Lost Tradition Found offers a fact-filled overview of the work of women composers from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries. Reading this 250-page volume, I found myself taken on a voyage of discovery into the virtually unexplored realm of the musically creative woman. Jezic surprises the reader into an awareness of the long line of women composers that stretches from the fascinating and prolific Hildegard of Bingen, abbess of a convent in the eleventh century, to Judith Lang Zaimont, composer-in-residence at Wesleyan University.

The book is divided into five sections corresponding to the major periods in musical history: medieval and baroque, classical, romantic, romantic and early twentieth century, later twentieth century. Jezic has selected twenty-five composers, and provides a chronology, a short biographical essay, an analysis of one or more scores, a selected listing of compositions/discography and a bibliography

for each. We meet the composer's contemporaries, both male and female, and gain a quick-study insight into the musical context in which they worked and the changing role of women composers over the centuries.

Author Diane Peacock Jezic is a pianist and music historian who teaches music literature at Towson State University. As she tells us in her preface, the book is designed to accommodate the needs of music history and Women Studies courses. It is also accessible to those of us who are unable to answer the simple question, "Can you name three women composers?" One happy feature of the book is that recordings of the scores selected for musical analysis are available on two cassettes specially produced by Marnie Hall of Leonarda Productions.

In spite of their success and popularity in their lifetime, and despite the quantity and quality of their output, most women composers prior to the twentieth century are largely forgotten in today's concert halls and go unmentioned in musical textbooks. Clara Schumann, for example, was a major composer of German lieder, solo piano works, concerti with orchestra. In P.H. Lang's prodigious *Music in Western Civilization*, she receives the following honourable mention: "Clara Wieck, the daughter of his (Schumann's) first piano teacher, one of the most distinguished women musicians in history, and an understanding and enthusiastic propagator of his music, became his wife after an epic courtship in 1840." A quick glance through the bibliographies supplied in *Women Composers* soon makes apparent that the correction of this astounding neglect of women composers in standard texts is being handled primarily by women, by means of articles and books.

It also becomes apparent that the last hundred years has brought about some positive changes in the status of women composers. Prior to this period, compositions by women were performed either in the religious setting of medieval or renaissance convents or in the intimate settings of musical academies, the European courts or chamber music evenings in the home. It is not until the mid-1800s that we hear of the first performances of large-scale works written by women. It would seem that American composer Amy Beach heralded a new era for women's music. In 1882, her concerto for alto and orchestra,

Eilende Wolken, was performed by the Symphony Society of New York, their first performance of a work by a woman. Her symphonies were performed by the Boston Symphony and other American orchestras as well as orchestras in Leipzig and Berlin. Of the six living women composers selected by Jezic, all have received recognition through performances in prestigious musical venues, commissions, financial support and awards. In 1983, Ellen Swilich was the first woman composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize.

LUNA

Sharon Butala. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988

Eleanor Dudar

Embedded in the specific context of Canadian prairie life, concretely realized in precisely rendered detail, the central preoccupation of Sharon Butala's *Luna* is woman — her nature, her roles, and their meanings. Butala has drawn a strong trio of characters to embody her argument — Selena, defined almost completely by her roles as wife and mother; her younger sister Diana, who increasingly refuses definition of herself in these terms; and their aged Aunt Rhea, who lives alone in a tumbledown house, bakes bread in a wood stove — yes, she chops her own wood — and grows a flower garden on the thin prairie soil that no one else can match.

The novel is full of incident, beginning in June — taking us through a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary community dinner, a fowl supper, a 15-mile cattle drive in blinding snow at temperatures of -30, a family Christmas, and a Women's Night Out — and ending in March with the birth of a child to Selena's daughter Phoebe, at midnight under the full moon. Butala makes us feel the rhythm of the country year, where the change in the land and people's activities are so closely entwined. Much of this rhythm is reflected through Selena, working long hours in her garden in summer, preserving her harvest in the fall, assisting her husband Kent with the cattle throughout the year. Her sister Diane, unable to follow in this path, strikes out for the city, seeking civilization and the something-more she is unable to put a name to.

Diane, or Diana — she takes on more

and more the qualities of the huntress and fittingly reverts to the original form of her given name — has, like her Aunt Rhea before her, fallen out of the world of everyday selves into the inner world which is a “kind of madness.” She is the new woman who will cast aside or redefine the roles that have contained her race. In stark contrast to Selena, who believes “we carry all our possibilities... in our wombs,” Diana sees motherhood as the death of possibility:

Motherhood kills the life of a woman. It kills the woman's separate life, and I cannot, I will not believe that that is right. That any woman who becomes a mother has to die herself.

Unlike Diana, Rhea did not consciously choose to respond to the demands of her inner voice. In the desperate loneliness of her life as a pioneer woman, her interior life forced itself upon her irresistibly.

They're afraid of it, afraid it's nothing but a black hole into which their everyday selves will fall. People are afraid they will fall into that other world, into madness, and never be able to climb out again.

And they're right. It is a kind of madness into which I fell. I fell inside myself. Alone, day after day, with the wind and the sky, the grass and the wild things.

The Rhea we meet on the first page of the novel lives largely in a seemingly timeless mode, sitting for hours in her darkened living room, musing upon her life. Butala's use of the continuous present when we are with Rhea effectively places her beyond the world of measured time. Rhea's oracular function culminates in her retelling of the creation myth, a poetic *tour de force* which challenges her listeners to transform their world.

But it is Selena whom Butala knows most intimately. There is something very poignant in this portrait of the untransformed woman who persists in a life little different from that of her mother, stirred by feelings of discontent, yet quite unwilling and unable to break out of the familiar mould. Her part of the novel is the ground for the flights of Diana and Rhea; that bedrock realistic account of the entrapment of Selena's everyday life is what gives such potent meaning to Rhea's epiphanies and Diana's quest.

Selena is trapped in the past. In rendering her reveries, Butala seldom uses

that special power of the present tense that she bestows on Rhea and Diana. Selena cannot lay claim to the heroic stature of the pioneer that distinguishes Rhea; this is the unglamorous generation that will lose the farm or the ranch not to the elements, but to the banks. She has not been able to mythologize work, to say, as Rhea does, “Work was only the raw material out of which I fashioned my life, out of which I fashioned my soul.” Selena has not yet found a vision beyond her endless toil; she hasn't made that dangerous journey into herself that the novel suggests must at some point be embarked upon. The birth of Phoebe's daughter causes her to recall the horror connected with Phoebe's birth, feet in stirrups, hands strapped to the table. Is this situation a paradigm of Selena's whole life? Her last words are ominous: “I got panicky when I realized what they had done to me... I thought if I don't struggle, I won't know... I'm a prisoner.”

Diana has broken out of her prison. And yet her path into the future is by no means clear. The novel gives her the last word, in a letter she sends to Selena from Central America. Journeying into a foreign culture, Diana sees her own in a new light. She begins to value and understand her own women folk when she reflects upon the stunning embroidery that decorates the everyday costume of the Indian women she meets:

The first time I saw it, I couldn't believe it, couldn't imagine the spirit that would make them produce some beauty that they could live with every day, even in that hard, unbeautiful killing life that they lead. It told me something about women. In fact it made me think about that argument we had about the community college — about all those classes in embroidery and sewing and different kinds of crafts... I see now what they were for, what they mean. And my respect for the women I grew up with has grown. I may not have been entirely wrong, but I wasn't entirely right, either.

The novel's conclusion highlights the seeding which Diana has barely begun as she travels “further and further into the jungle.”

What does this novel offer? A prairie reader will especially recognize Butala's power to convey the life of that daunting and beautiful landscape. For the urban reader with any rural roots it will evoke memories of a way of life now changing

radically, and perhaps a renewed appreciation of the strength of spirit those women have had to summon up in order to survive at all. For the student of literature, there is the pleasure of developing a reading that gives full play to the mythopoeic strands of *Luna*, starting with all those moon-goddess names! Or one could explore Butala's deployment of the central argument through the two sisters and their aunt, or the interesting connection between Selena and the narrative point of view, or Butala's report on female culture and the relations between women and men in this particular setting. The most challenging question is how this novel will strike the reader who recognizes in herself the predicament of Selena.

In the end, I liked *Luna* for the most old-fashioned of reasons — I cared about the characters. And I treasure it for something else that I'm not going to try to define here — the Canadian-ness of its voice. Novels like *Luna* remind me that our literary culture is distinct and distinctive. Now, more than ever, it must be defended.

AN AMERICAN CHILDHOOD

Annie Dillard. New York: Harper and Row, 1987

Deborah Jurdjevic

Autobiography is centred in, is anchored in the self; the autobiographer's challenge always is to use the self as metaphor, the way a musician uses an instrument. The unspoken hypothesis is a faith that the melody is already out there, as God's voice was for Augustine, as Nature's was for Emerson and Thoreau; the self is a hollow reed the wind blows through.

Dillard has given us a biography of a girl-child, an American, in the mid-twentieth century, in the eastern-most of middle-western cities — Pittsburgh. For readers who know *Holy the Firm*, or *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, this seems a most unlikely local habitation. Annie Dillard and the fiery smoke-belching furnaces that fouled the Ohio river? Annie Dillard, her feet blackened by the carcinogenic morning dew that coated the grasses along the Ohio, the Monongahela, the Allegh-