

Larkin does not intend to generalize from her research sample; not every female student experiences all or any of these forms of harassment. But considering the universality of the experience begs the question: "How much is too much?" While defining the scope of the problem is important, one cannot lose the significance of, or condone, or normalize, even one incident of such threats to the safety of our daughters. In fact, much data is available to support Larkin's findings.

Considerable research has been conducted in the last few decades on teenage girls, especially in regard to their loss of self-esteem in adolescence (Carol Gilligan's *Making Connections* and the Canadian Teachers' Federation "A Cappella" report are examples). Many initiatives have been undertaken to help girls overcome barriers to an equitable education (for instance those encouraging female students to succeed in Math and Science). The problem with existing programs, argues Larkin, is that, for the most part, they focus on "fixing" what is wrong with girls. Most ignore the devastating psychological impact of the "destructive behaviour levelled at them" which "acts like a wall that blocks young women's movement toward equality in education."

One of the ways in which all of the barriers can be removed is for education systems to adopt the AICE model of equal opportunity, developed by Larkin and research partner Pat Staton. This comprehensive model gives equal weight to four components: Access, Inclusion, Climate, and Empowerment. By meeting the criteria of this model, says Larkin, educators will be "tackling" sexual harassment in schools "in its wider context of gender inequity in education," and this "will move us a giant step closer to making schools more supportive places for female students."

Doris Anderson, in *The Unfinished Revolution* (Doubleday, 1991), states that one of the "big steps that must be taken" to challenge "the

basic inequalities between the power of men and women" is to "root out—once and for all—sex stereotyping and sexist attitudes in schools, where they still flourish."

As a mother whose daughter participated in this research, and as an educator active in the "rooting out," I for one hope that this book and the AICE model which grew out of the project will receive the attention they deserve as valuable contributions to resolving a problem which has been clearly identified, and whose solution is long overdue: sexism in patriarchal educational systems.

HELEN LUCAS ... HER JOURNEY— OUR JOURNEY

Directed by Donna Davy. Davy Productions, 1996.

by Jocelyn Allen

Here is a film to celebrate. Donna Davy has produced, directed, and co-written a documentary film on Canadian artist Helen Lucas which is visually beautiful and very moving. Let it be said at the outset that Helen Lucas, best known for her very large canvasses of flowers, is at this moment evidently in her vibrant prime, painting at full power. Lucas has travelled far in her life, not only from her origins in a Greek immigrant community in Saskatoon, but also in her evolution as a woman and as an artist. Lucas' journey, implies Davy in her title, has much in common with the life journey of all women; she suggests that to share Helen Lucas' experience through this film is to illuminate the way we as women see ourselves.

How does Davy achieve this? The film moves back and forth in time between the present (through conversations with Lucas and others), and the past (through flashbacks to her childhood). To evoke the past Davy uses early photographs, reenactment of the child Helen by two young children, glimpses of her early art work, and highly articulate observa-

tions by Helen herself. Punctuating this format are glowing commentaries on Helen—by women artists and friends, her daughter, art critics, and gallery owners who have shown Lucas' work. Her friend Margaret Laurence, too, has a say through letters and a photographic presence. (These "asides" enhance the film, except where they become repetitive). Davy blends these various ingredients into a brilliant, fluidly changing succession of images on the screen to produce a highly affecting portrait. Some of these images act as major touchstones to Helen's life and work.

The opening image is stunning. The camera from on high pans across a field of tall sunflowers in full bloom. Amidst this mass of fierce yellows and golds we discover Helen's dark head and brilliant blue figure, gathering flowers. We are reminded of her huge, close-up canvasses of these self-same flowers, large enough and seemingly inviting enough for us to walk right into. The sunflower image—in the field and on the canvas—points up the inseparable link between Lucas' life and her art.

Icons of the Greek Orthodox Church dominate Helen's memories of a repressed, almost monastic childhood in her Greek immigrant community. To her, these stern, male icons "judged or blessed according to their will,"¹ and assailed her for the failure of being female. Icons of the Virgin Mary represented the ideal of womanhood—submissive, chaste, asexual, and silent. In this church community the only female sexuality which was acknowledged openly (and condemned with horror) was that of the whore.

In her life and her art Helen struggles to come to terms with these icons and the values they represent to her. With great courage she escapes Saskatoon and medical school to attend the Ontario College of Art in Toronto—only to find herself quickly transplanted into another Greek community, another Greek church, and a difficult Greek marriage. The birth of her two daughters both enlarges and restricts her life. The artistic

record of these years appears in her *Diary Drawings, 1971–1978* (now in the Archives at York University)—long years of working only in black and white. Above all, the drawings are obsessed with weeping or sleeping female nude figures, unawakened spiritually and sexually and resonant of the Virgin Mary icons. It is in “Angelique,” Helen’s humorous story of a fallen angel created after the end of her marriage, that she is able at last to poke mischievous—and blasphemous—fun at her own process and the rigidity of the church.

When Helen’s work moves at last from black and white into colour, she calls this moment one of “life over death. Life over wasted life.”² At the same time, and apparently without conscious effort, she moves away from figural subjects and toward flowers. Petals start to appear out of tears, blossoms from crucifixes. Finally, she is painting nothing but flowers in dazzling acrylics. She lays claim to all the colours of the spectrum. She lays claim to female sensuality, and she sees it as good. Her painting has become a political act. In her private life she finds “a beautiful new partner.” She says “For the first time the boundaries have opened right up.” Her studio is her “place to dance in the sunlight, to celebrate life.” We celebrate this film about Lucas, with only one quibble: Davy’s ending to the film seems almost too happily-ever-after for real life. She leaves us wondering where there is for Lucas to go from here—undoubtedly a cinematic ending rather than a real life one.

This film may speak most eloquently to women, but it will also have universal appeal. As Lucas herself says in the film, “Everyone is on the same path....” I say, put this film on television, put it in libraries, put it on college courses—courses on women’s studies, the immigrant experience, the family, gender equity, women in art, and art history. It will educate in the best sense—the heart and the head.

¹The Diary Series, Early 011.

²The Diary Series, Early 011.

BLOWING HOLES THROUGH EVERYDAY

Sheila Dalton. London, ON: HMS Press, 1993.

THE WORDS I KNOW

Cathy Stonehouse. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1994.

NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN

Ann Cimon. Oakville, New York, and London: Mosaic Press, 1993.

by Deborah Jurdjevic

Sheila Dalton’s first book of poems, *Blowing Holes Through Everyday*, reads as a dialogue between a pragmatist and a dreamer. The poet inclines toward first the one, then the other, moving steadily toward the penultimate poem “Whales on the Saguenay River,” from which the title phrase is taken. This is one of the better poems in the volume and one which melds the two voices. The strong opening line, iambic tetrameter, promises epic story telling, a hero, a plot along the lines of “The Ancient Mariner”: “The wind was strong, the waves were high.” But this is a late twentieth-century poem written by a woman with other concerns on her mind. She abandons both the promise of rhyme and an established rhythm for free verse more appropriate to the autobiographical and the confessional. She sees the whales as “a distant flash of truth,” hears them “puffing air against/ the silence/ blowing holes through the everyday,” and her concern is for the future of the small son she holds in her arms. The poem’s moral, that the world is a marvel for those committed to seeing, is defined by the whales who appear without warning and in the final line, remembering the epic form of opening, slide “onwards to the sea.”

“Tests,” the poem immediately preceding “Whales,” is also confes-

sional in tone, immediate, and written for the sake of the “moral” which appears conventionally at the end. Unlike “Whales,” however, this is a pragmatic poem. Its governing metaphor is a diagnostic test made to determine the source of a persistent back pain. The physical exam tropes the set of circumstances testing the author’s willingness and ability to endure pain and frustration in order finally to write. Dalton concludes: “But not to try/ means yet another woman/ Silenced.” One takes the point, but wishes at the same time for less explanation and for a greater trust in the reader.

One of the riskier and, to my mind, one of the more successful poems is “Friends/Conversation” in which Dalton does trust metaphor to tell the tale. The subject of this poem is infidelity between husband and wife, between woman friend and woman friend. Nowhere is there anything approaching direct statement. Dalton foregoes rhythm and rhyme for prose; the poetry lies in the power of her images. Her setting is the natural world, a possible Elysium, in the form of a picnic, but what we get, through metaphor entirely, is a sense of that first world shattered.

The poem proceeds in a series of verse paragraphs, each representing a composition, a still-life, and each suggesting through what is depicted a more important absence. The opening paragraph, for example, “next to the wine glasses shoved at angles into the grass, ants scramble onto giant wheels, fan out in a plateful of legs,” is typical of the whole. The wine glasses are askew either because the terrain threatens their upright stability or because the wine has been drunk and the glasses abandoned. This is the first of a dozen delicate details which suggest that something is false in the poem’s prosaic Eden. Ants, unwanted always, invade the scene, and are not prevented, perhaps not even noticed except by the poet whose image of a “plateful of legs” gives us both the sense of distance from the ongoing action and a sense of the whole accessible only in fragments.