

something that can just be assessed in a matter of minutes in a self-help book or on a talk show.

And if you think that men aren't included here or don't play a role, you are mistaken:

The men in women's lives - grandfathers, fathers, friends, brothers, bosses, boyfriends, lovers, husbands—have a powerful impact on whether or not women conceive children. Virtually no research has been done on the male influence on a female's maternity, even though some sociologists, including Kathleen Garson, have observed that it is the most important influence of all.

There are a lot of reasons you should read this book. It has only one flaw. The people who need to read this most, the ones that need to be educated about women like Laurie, myself and the thousands of women who, for whatever reason, don't want to have children, won't. It's sad but true.

After reading *Without Child*, I am armed with fact and knowledge that there were others before me that fought this stigma, and I will proudly continue the fight. I now feel not only confident in speaking to others on the subject, but relieved that I am not such an anomaly, that there are indeed lots of women out there living happily and heartily as I am. That I don't need to have children to complete the picture. My picture is complete.

## **WOMEN'S UNTOLD STORIES: BREAKING SILENCE, TALKING BACK, VOICING COMPLEXITY**

Romero, M. and A. Stewart.  
New York: Routledge Press, 1999.

**BY CHERYL VAN  
DAALEN-SMITH**

In *Women's Untold Stories*, editors Romero and Stewart manage to weave several stories rarely discussed into a comprehensive representation of seldom told components of diverse women's lives. Their title itself is a demonstration of their clear commitment to ensure the voices of women are front and centre. The introduction articulates their project and their forthright confrontation of what they term the master narrative which "subsumes many differences and contradictions that restrict and contain people, by supporting a power structure in which gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and ability all define who matters and how." Far too often, the real stories of women's lives become silenced, distorted, and discredited. In this text, the authors give us raw, unprocessed, and fully contextualized accounts of women's experiences in the voices of the women themselves. Examples of carefully woven narratives include :

- Two African American women's experience of infertility
- Reflections of a self-defined Tom-boy
- Homeless, Black and Female
- Japanese American Women's experiences
- Housewives' experiences of WW II
- Motherhood, Heroin and Methadone: one woman's journey; and
- A white woman's experience in

the civil rights movement

Romero and Stewart's strengths, and there are many, include their attention to diversity within and amongst women's lived experiences. Countless disclosures, thoughtful reflections, and poignant narratives invite the reader to immerse herself in the lives of sisters perhaps not unlike herself. Readers may in fact find themselves, their own suppressed voice, here within the stories of sixteen women who agreed to break their silence, talk back and voice the complexities that permeate their lives and their beings.

What is clear is that this text is a political act on the part of Romero and Stewart: finally giving voice and validity to the lived experiences of women frequently overlooked or misrepresented. In doing so, perhaps this text and its ability to meticulously engage its readers in dialogue with its writers, will invite more and more of us to break our own silences and gain comfort knowing that we are all more alike than we are different.

## **A PERSONAL CALLIGRAPHY**

Mary Pratt.  
Fredericton, New Brunswick:  
Goose Lane Editions, 2000.

**BY JANICE ANDREAE**

Mary Pratt's *A Personal Calligraphy* gives voice to her private struggle for solitude. With wit and candor, and an attentive eye for detail, she records the historical fragments of a lifetime spent in the Maritimes. Reprinted also are selections from addresses made at the numerous university convocations and public occasions that merit her attendance; for exam-

ple, the dignified and solemn Canada Conference (1999) held in St. John's Newfoundland. (Pratt is a Companion of the Order of Canada.)

Pratt invites her readers to an intimate encounter with what she describes as "my life within my family and a small circle of friends [without whom] life would have been very different." This memoir offers a fluid construction of her identity, shaped and affected by daily domestic routines and rituals, local events, and the unpredictable needs of a growing young family living in semi-isolation (by the Salmonier River southwest of St. John's in Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula). Add to these demands managing those of an earnest young painter—husband Christopher—with a strong sense of his own destiny. Pratt never makes a formal complaint. Nonetheless, she makes her readers aware of her struggle to survive what must have at times seemed an unforgiving adventure. Each day, husband Christopher ambled off to watch the news, to paint in his studio or to do whatever else he thought required his attention, and she was left to contend with four young children, three under the age of five. Like it or not, the Pratt household was clearly her responsibility, a scenario mirrored by countless North American households in the 1950s and 1960s, and was her personal confrontation with Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* and "the problem that has no name." Yet significantly, she made a place to work in the midst of these chaotic surroundings, which she ably maintained as her family grew up — acts of survival by anyone's standards.

What began as a practice of recording daily events in a series of letters written to Christopher's mother and her own about "the exploits of the children, my attempts to cook or keep house, the success or failure of parties and the progress of Christopher's painting" had by the 1970s become a necessary and intimate aspect of her daily activity. "The journals became an essential outlet

... with the children gone away and my life becoming increasingly solitary," a place of solitude where loneliness and "things as they are [might be] recognized and accepted." She notes how this period of increased loneliness occurred as her painting career was "taking off":

Perhaps the only place where I can be what I want to be is in my journals and my letters. The old adage that actions speak louder than words is true. But the written word lasts longer than memories of the spoken word and actions are interpreted differently by everybody. So I trust my journals. I am as faithful to honesty as possible when I write. Within their pages I rediscover myself as I know myself to be, or to have been.

Although Pratt confesses a mistrust of words, she trusts her eyes. What she sees and paints directly signifies "the stuff of life" around her—a concrete reality of her visual world: colours, textures, lines, light effects, visual contrasts and details that define the substance of things as they are in her daily life. Speaking about her process of painting, she describes the important role of personal slides (many are reproduced in this text) used to document how a painting changes, providing her with a kind of visual journal. Pratt nevertheless believes that "all writing is contrived and not as immediate as the painted image"; she sees her practice of journal writing as both lifeline and legacy. She echoes bell hooks's sentiment expressed in *Remembered rapture: the writer at work* (1999) that "[w]e write to leave legacies for the future" with her own: "only by using inert stuff can we prolong our own lives after we are ourselves dead."

As this text indicates, she is now free to make choices and comfortable with her life: "The world I now explore I enter alone. I like it that way." Her hard-earned solitude allows her to paint and write. How-

ever, she avoids what must be a very painful recognition for her — of never intimately sharing a full lifetime of physical and emotional connections with partner Christopher — and traces of that loss become more visible with each reading. Had there been equality in their expectations of each other, such a partnership could have generated much. Her readers can only speculate. Christopher Pratt expected a supportive, knowledgeable companion and helpmate, who would parent and raise his children, provide for him, and nurture his painting career towards the greatness he anticipated. Mary Pratt might have expected the same or, at least, a mutual sharing of their burdens. Clearly, Pratt required solitude—a "willing aloneness" necessary, as Carolyn Heilbrun concludes, in *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty* (1998 ed.), "to find one's self again, or to find a new self" (12) in order to facilitate a daily routine and to continue her productivity as a practicing artist. In *A Personal Calligraphy*, she offers her readers lifelines of (her) survival.

## WOMEN AND AGING: TRANSCENDING THE MYTHS

Linda R. Gannon.  
London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

BY SHERRILL CHEDA

When we are children, getting older means growing up and we want to grow. Then, getting older means independence and we strive for that. Next, for some of us, getting older means gaining more experience, a better job, perhaps a mate or a family