

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

and society rewards us with a higher status. Later, getting older means looking forward to retirement. And then? That's where aging seems to begin and suddenly, we are staring at the end of life. Contemporary societies, messages are no longer positive. Aging is treated as if it were a series of diseases, each one needing medical intervention.

This is where Linda Gannon, a psychology professor at Southern Illinois University, begins. Reviewing the literature, she challenges the traditional assumptions about aging and highlights physical competence, social skills, and economic independence as determinants of well-being in aging women.

Gannon, using feminist analysis, studies sexism in every aspect of her exploration of aging. Her view is that nature and nurture are interdependent. She looks at osteoporosis and cardiovascular disorders as well as menopause, castration of women by removal of ovaries, and hormone therapy. She finds a strong interdependence between physical and psychological well being.

As we know, social skills and support, control over one's life, and socio-economic roles are major determinants of physical well being. Physical well being is discussed in terms of diet, exercise, substance abuse, and obesity. In turn, physical health is the strongest predictor of psychological well being.

Gannon opposes androcentrism and biology as ideology because they legitimize inequality. She wants to free us from the medical concept that in any biological phase in which women are free from reproductive concerns, they are considered ill. In her introduction she says,

Normality is routinely invoked in order to pathologize certain people who fail to conform to the dominant ideology. Women are not normal because they are not men, elderly women are not normal because they are not fertile, women who are not moth-

ers or not heterosexual are not normal because they have failed to follow the normal life course dictated by a patriarchal culture, and normal aging for women is dismissed as unimportant or uninteresting, exploited and pathologized in order to make a profit, or assumed to be similar to that of men.

Gannon's central contribution to understanding women and aging is that women have experienced less control in their lives than men, so women do not get more depressed as they age. Women's control often increases as they age, when children leave home and they can determine their own schedule. This is a wise book and Gannon has a deep understanding about the differences between women and men and the ways they perceive control and conduct social relations. Women have more close friends than men do and this contributes to their lesser degrees of depression as they age. As well, women have multiple roles and so do not feel the loss of one role as acutely as men feel the loss of work with retirement. As control, social relations, and roles determine psychological health, which in turn is associated with physical health, women and men's experience of aging is quite different.

Gannon challenges the assumption that cognitive decline is inevitable with aging. If the elderly can remain physically active, they have a relatively high probability of retaining cognitive skills. Maintaining strength and aerobic capacity through exercise remains the most effective method of delaying functional incapacity.

Gannon discusses menopause not as a disease that needs treatment but as a normal life event. In non-western cultures, women report fewer hot flashes and see menopause as relief. Gannon discusses the risks and benefits of hormone replacement and thinks the risks outweigh the benefits. She concludes that there

is no evidence that natural menopause is dangerous or associated with deteriorating health.

We really know little about the sexuality of aging women as most of the research uses men as the norm. The same is true of women's cardiovascular health.

The emphasis throughout this book is on delaying disability as we age. Gannon sees the strong influence of socio-economic status on health, disability, and mortality and speaks out strongly for universal national health care systems.

Her extensive and excellent bibliography make a perfect starting point for any university student interested in learning more about this subject.

DAGMAR'S DAUGHTER

Kim Echlin.
Toronto: Penguin, 2001.

BY CLARA THOMAS

Kim Echlin's first novel, *Elephant Winter*, introduced us to a uniquely different creative imagination at work in the fiction field. Now, in her second novel, she has continued to surprise us—and enchant us. For *Dagmar's Daughter* is an enchanted tale, and must be approached as such. To truly savour the novel, we need to give our trust to its teller and allow ourselves to be led where she leads us, in the open-hearted spirit of children who are eager to be led into a fairy world. The novel unfolds a mythic tale, with ties to two ancient myths, the story of Demeter and Persephone the most often-told and familiar. Demeter is the harvest goddess and immortal. Her daughter, Persephone, is stolen by Pluto, Prince of Hades, and taken to the underworld. Demeter follows and brings her back,