

# Fictionalize This

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ANNA PORTER

*L'auteure a publié pendant plusieurs années les écrits de Doris Anderson et relate ses souvenirs autour de la publication de ses romans et de son autobiographie: "Rebel Daughter and the Unfinished Revolution" qui rapporte sa recherche sur la condition féminine dans douze pays différents.*

Doris had no pretensions about writing literature. She wanted to tell stories that kept people interested and she was eager to impart some of her learnt wisdom, mostly, but not solely about issues that affected women's lives. She published her first novel, *Two Women*, in 1978 and was deeply disappointed with its sales. I did not work on this book. It was published by Macmillan, a rival publishing house. It is about the lives of two different women and the choices each one makes, choices that determine how they live their lives. If read in the context of the women's movement of that time, it reveals where Doris saw her own life and priorities.

She decided to try McClelland and Stewart with her second book, *Rough Layout*, the novel that she said almost wrote itself. She was angry at the "boys" at Maclean-Hunter, the men in suits who had refused to acknowledge her success in more than doubling *Chatelaine's* circulation, changing its focus to invite a younger, more challenging readership, in providing a platform for new ideas and new ways of attracting devoted fans. We met in a restaurant she favoured off Bloor Street and she shared her views about her former employer and told me the story of Jude and Crazy Horse: the talented woman editor and the dimwitted publisher with no sense of what a good magazine was or should be, yet he had been appointed because he was, after all, a male.

He constantly bothered Jude with unworkable ideas, fussed about colour reproduction, and wasted precious time. He treated the magazine as though it were breakfast cereal. He called *Young Living* "the Product." He spoke of circulation as "750,000 units

a month." The cover was "packaging." Readers were "potential consumers." The time the magazine spent on the news stand was its "shelf time."

Today Crazy Horse was wearing his pin-striped, brown-and-white suit and brown loafers. His tie was within a millimeter of the width prescribed by *Women's Wear Daily*. He wore a signet ring with a diamond, a digital watch with a black alligator strap, and gold cuff links. His thick, prematurely white hair was blow-dried to keep it under control. He had a degree in commerce from the Zenith Academy for executives, an obscure correspondence school in Iowa. Three secretaries had been fired because they simply could not transcribe into any kind of logical prose the lengthy monologues he spent hours dictating every day. (*Rough Layout* 27)

*Rough Layout* was a good "commercial" novel with a credible heroine, a bit of sex, some glamour, fun and a nifty insight into the magazine world, with the added touch that everyone knew Doris had left *Chatelaine* and most people, including reviewers, were guessing who was who in her none too flattering portrayal of the Maclean Hunter management. For a while we worried that Crazy Horse would sue, so she touched up his appearance, but in the end, of course, he was too smart to own up to being in the book.

*Rough Layout* did better than her first novel, but it did not become a major bestseller and Doris stayed away from books for a while. I left McClelland and Stewart and was at Seal Books when it published her *Affairs of State*, Doris's cautionary tale about politics and politicians. No better than the others, really. She was convinced that her own political ambitions had been thwarted by the Liberal Party's all-male leadership, many of whose members could now find themselves aptly destroyed in her book.

In 1990, she brought me the idea for *The Unfinished Revolution: The Status of Women in Twelve Countries*, as it was later entitled. As she said in her introduction, this

“book was born out of frustration.” Her own frustration as a feminist who knew too little of what was going on in other countries, how other women were coping or faring in Europe and the United States. I was at Doubleday at the time, a large American firm with a Canadian presence, and she was hopeful that the book would reach an international audience. She traveled to each of the twelve countries, interviewed over three hundred women in a multitude of professions, with a vast range of interests, in and out of work, optimistic and disillusioned with the women’s movement.

I certainly haven’t seen it all, but I have seen enough of government structures, volunteer initiatives, law-making and pressuring to form some idea of what works—and what doesn’t. (21)

*The Unfinished Revolution* was a formidable piece of work, a good read, an extraordinary collection of information that should still be in print and read for its insights. It went into three printings in Canada and was praised by critics, however the reality of the numbers was disheartening after the two years of hard work it had taken

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There are compelling reasons for writing this book at this time, more than 20 years after the second wave of feminism began. The women’s movement is not, as many people would have us believe, a peculiarity of the twentieth century—an irritating blip in history created by a small group of uppity women no longer content with traditional women’s roles. Nor is the movement over, even though the press has been announcing its demise almost from its beginning. Nor is it true, in spite of a few women with alligator briefcases who partake of “power breakfasts,” that women are now in a “post-feminist” mode.

A lot more has been accomplished than most women—particularly young women—realize. Yet we are still not even close to some of the original objectives. Now, as we approach the quarter-century mark, is an appropriate time to stop and take stock of where we have come from, where we are today, and where we still need to go. (*Unfinished Revolution* 16-17)

She described herself, as she saw her role in this book:

I have been involved in women’s issues since before the movement’s formal beginning in Canada. I started out in 1958 as the editor of a rather run-of-the-mill Canadian woman’s magazine, which I gradually turned into a quite radical, for its time, feminist magazine. Then I became the head of a government-appointed advisory council for women, a body that most countries have put in place to deal with the women’s question. After that I was president of a large umbrella organization made up of almost six hundred voluntary women’s groups, whose purpose was to lobby legislators. And all this time, I have continued to write and comment on the women’s movement in Canada and elsewhere.

to complete the research and writing.

Doris and I, however, remained friends and she agreed to publish her autobiography, *Rebel Daughter*, with Key Porter Books. Her one condition was that I give her my solemn promise to stay with the firm long enough to see through the publication of the new book and a while beyond, to make sure it climbed onto the bestseller lists. She used to joke that her signing a book deal with a company where I worked was a guarantee that I would be leaving it within months, long before her book went through the inevitable hurdles.

I half hoped that if I could see the whole of my life in one piece I might have more insight into why I took one path rather than another easier and more compelling one. Having finished, I am as mystified as ever. Perhaps the best reason for writing this book, in the end, is to remind younger women of “how it was.” The exercise has been rewarding. I count myself fortunate to have been born in this century, in this country, and with the opportunities I have had. As I look back, most of the journey has been buoyant, turbulent at times, and often filled with incredible joy. (*Rebel Daughter* 8)

In the past, Doris’s idea of being edited was that she would discuss the contents of her book and, when she was ready, she would turn in the manuscript. Then she could get on with the rest of her life. She was uninterested in second drafts and loathed long editorial sessions. She thought editors tended to be self-important and she viewed all copy-editors with intense suspicion. She had studied the work habits of successful writers and determined that most of them did not indulge their editors. However, she was willing to spend the extra time on *Rebel Daughter* and



Doris (second on the left), speaking to Myrna Kostash, at an all-women's party in the home of Maryan Kantaroff, sculptor, 1970s.

it is, I think, her best and most thoughtful book. It is one that deserves to remain on everyone's reading lists especially now that Doris is no longer here to promote it.

It seems to me that we stand at a fork in the road: one fork leads to a world divided into haves and have-nots, accompanied by environmental devastation. The other is a different, more women-centered world.

Like many feminists, I never dreamed—or wished—to be rich. We wanted for more than that: we wanted to change the world. The greatest accomplishment of the women's movement has been to give women a sense of their own worth, and men the courage to explore other aspects of their psyches besides the constraining macho option. Realizing we share far more traits than differences, men and women rob each other of potential growth when they allow themselves to be shoehorned into narrow traditional roles.

If I had a daughter, I always knew what I would tell her. First of all, I would try to counter all the outdated stereotypical claptrap that girls are commonly told about their sex—that women are valued far more for their sexual characteristics than their character and brains—and encourage her to be a truly independent person. Only in knowing who she is herself will she be able to find her own life's work

and make good decisions in choosing a partner and having children.

Love has been defined as the absence of fear, but how can one partner not be fearful when the other controls most of the money and is allowed by tradition to dominate? True intimacy without fear or game-playing can only be achieved between equals with respect for each other.

I would also tell her—as I have told my sons—that it isn't good enough to pass through this world concerned only with your own well-being. If everyone—and we are all capable—tried to leave the world a little better place than he or she found it, most of our troubles would be over. (*Rebel Daughter* 276)

*Rebel Daughter* reminds us of the great, magnificent woman Doris was and how she had determined her own course, chose her friends and her enemies, and accomplished so much for successive generations of women. It is a book to give our daughters and granddaughters—it is a book to cherish.

*Anna Porter joined McClelland and Stewart in 1969 as editorial coordinator, became editor-in-chief a couple of years later, left to head Seal Books in 1978, founded Key Porter Books with Key Publishers in 1980, left in 2005 to write full-time. She is the author of six books, the most recent of which is Kasztner's Train.*

## THE SNAIL-LIKE BATTLE FOR PROGRESS

*Chatelaine*, Editorial, August 1967

For over twenty years we have been trying to push our stagecoach-era divorce laws into the twentieth century. Why can't people dissolve a hopeless marriage honestly, instead of being forced to play a part in a degrading farce to get the only acceptable evidence in Canada (outside of Nova Scotia), proof of adultery?

Back in the 1950s we started advocating reform of Canada's rigid abortion law. Why, we asked, should a victim of rape have to bear her assailant's child? Or why should a woman who is informed she is going to bear a deformed or retarded child not have a choice of continuing or terminating the pregnancy?

For almost twenty years we've been advocating that Canadian laws about birth control be changed. The Criminal Code makes it an offense to advertise or publish instructions about birth control and prohibits sale of contraceptive drugs or devices—making criminals out of doctors, druggists, social workers, and thousands of ordinary citizens....

We've also supported the unpopular idea that since half the working women in this country are married we need more day nurseries, as well as tax relief for women who pay for household help....

At times, I've wondered what good we were doing.... However, last spring a few timid changes braved the cold Canadian social climate. In February, the Prime Minister said he hoped to introduce Criminal Code amendments on birth control and abortion. In May in the Speech from the Throne he promised new legislation on divorce. The Carter Report came out strongly for tax relief for working married women.

However, the battle—the boring, never-ending battle—isn't won. Even now one of the changes indicated seems to be withering away. The Roman Catholic Church has asked the government to delay legislation on abortion while the church prepares a report. If the government bows to this request in spite of urging for more liberal abortion laws from the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Bar Association, the United Church ... one segment of society will have imposed its views on the whole society once again.

Apparently nothing happens in this democracy until everyone is in favour of it.

*Doris Anderson, Editor*

## JUSTICE: 1 WOMAN TO 263 MEN

*Chatelaine*, Editorial, September 1968

When our new parliament meets this fall, it has plenty of pressing problems to consider. Besides the delicate constitutional issues, there are decisions to be made on changes in our birth control and abortion laws and the criminal code. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which continues its hearings this fall, is expected to make its report sometime within the next two years.... Yet the parliament that will deal with these questions, many of which are of particular and history-making concern to women, consists of 263 men and one solitary woman.

Canadian women have one quarter as much representation as they had in the last parliament of 265 members. Compared with most western nations, four women to 261 men was a miserable showing. One woman to 263 men is sure to get us the booby prize, behind not only most European countries but many African and Asian countries as well.

Politics in Canada, particularly at Ottawa, remains largely the last and biggest exclusive male club in the country....

Canadian women are handmaidens in the political world. They are used in dull, menial jobs, rarely in important posts or as candidates in ridings where they might be elected. Why?

One excuse is that ... we haven't had outstanding women in politics. And I dispute this. Our few women politicians compare at least as well as most male politicians, and some women—Agnes Macphail and Judy LaMarsh in particular—added zest and sparkle to a house sadly lacking in both. Any single day in the House of Commons is enough to convince any visitor that the intellectual and oratorical level at Ottawa is not beyond the reach of most articulate, intelligent women.

Women don't work hard enough is another excuse. "Any woman can get a riding nomination if she is willing to work for four years at it," said one male candidate pompously to me. (Yet this man, like many of his fellow male candidates, had parachuted into a riding just two months before the election.) Why does a woman have to work four long years to get what a man picks up overnight?

Why, when half the population is female, are we represented by less than one half of one percent of the members at Ottawa? Is this the "just" society?

*Doris Anderson, Editor*