

too, are remarkable. In “Lull” and “Critique” the narrator compares herself to a bird. In “Lull,” she is vulnerable, “like a fledgling bird / I can fall in the limber space between us.” In “Critique,” an encounter with the department head of creative writing, she has become “a yellow parakeet on his shoulder.” “Critique” is one of many poems that evidence Lipszyc’s sensitivity to sonic elements of a poem. Here internal rhyme and monosyllabic words skewer the creative writing department head: “what he thought I ought to say.”

Lipszyc’s “Teaching ESL (at a Branch of Shopper’s World)” lifts and transforms the experience from a tour of pronunciation and grammar to an expression of hope: “And when we conjugate / past and present, we sense / how our lives move one tense to another, / turning over and back again like a coda / around this undefeated planet.”

“Reading Braille” is an example of brilliant, breathtaking, daring use of line length and stanza breaks. The long single mid-line of the poem, following a single word line of the longest stanza—comments on the metaphor and simile in the first two stanzas as “poor intermediaries,” and then moves to the metaphor of the title. The last few words of the poem engage the reader in active interpretation through the sort of ambiguity noted by critic William Empson, as they join the struggle to comprehend with sudden clarity. The genius of the metaphor of reading braille finally resides in its essential tactile element, an irony when all that’s left of the absent lover are words on a page.

Careful and casual readers will both find pleasure in reading Lipszyc’s *Singing Me Home*, which exemplifies well-crafted poems of keen observation and deep feeling.

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WOMEN BETWEEN: CONSTRUCTION OF SELF IN THE WORK OF SHARON BUTALA, AGANETHA DYCK, MARY MEIGS AND MARY PRATT

Verna Reid
Calgary: University of Calgary Press,
2008

REVIEWED BY JANICE ANDREA E

Verna Reid has many stories to tell of “women between,” especially a generation of Canadian women whose creative working lives extend well into the last-quarter century of their lifespan and into the new millennium. Her readers might expect a text heavily informed by theoretical analysis, for the artists and writers she examines—Mary Pratt, Aganetha Dyck, Mary Meigs, and Sharon Butala—have contributed much to the development of contemporary art and literature in this country. They are practically household names—certainly to academics and students, readers and viewers of Canadian art and literature. Or, her readers might expect a text structured within a tight feminist framework that leaves her reader wanting more about the actual visual and text work produced by each. What Reid delivers, however, is her own story of reading between disciplines and genres, between generations and life stories, of these artists and the work they produce.

Her story might not have been told, or known, before the advent of women’s studies courses and programmes in post-secondary education. Indeed, this text suggests the valuable contributions of feminist education and feminist analysis to the activities of “making” and interpretation. Like Reid, the lives of her four subjects operate within the confines of Adrienne Rich’s “compulsory heterosexuality” and, as Carolyn Heilbrun suggests, the daily struggle

between private domestic constraints and the public sphere of self-determination and agency.

Reid began teaching literature at the Alberta College of Art and Design in 1967, then women’s studies at ACAD and the University of Calgary where she received her Ph.D. in 2003 at the age of 75. Her intertextual and interdisciplinary doctoral work was inspired by the autobiographical content of her students’ work and the experiences they shared in her classroom but her interpretation and relational analysis were made possible by the critique and content of women’s studies courses and the body of feminist-informed knowledge she acquired through her studies. She cites the importance of Mary Kelley’s “On Sexual Politics and Art” in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (1987) edited by Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, and Pollock’s own *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (1988) and *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories* (1999).

Reading between the disciplines, Reid employs feminist scholarship and feminist theory to rupture existing androcentric, hierarchical canons of literature and the visual arts, and the historical and interpretative practices they advance (See Julia Kristeva, *New French Feminisms*, 1981). Reid’s strategies of interpretation echo Susan Stanford Friedman’s in her groundbreaking essay “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice,” Heilbrun’s in *Writing a Woman’s Life* (1988) and Nancy Miller’s in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (1988). Also evident is the influence of life-writing texts *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (1992) and *Autobiography and Questions of Gender* (1991) edited, respectively, by Canadian academics Marlene Kadar and Shirley Neuman.

Reid’s own investigation relies heavily on the concept of unraveling representation(s) of the self expressed

in literary text and visual art. Structurally, this text resembles Mary Ann Caws's *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (1990). She too weaves together stories that cross disciplinary boundaries of the work and life of Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Leonora Carrington. Caws uses psychoanalytical theory to tease out the relations between what she knows of their lives and their representations of self, just as Reid does. However, Reid also draws from her vast background as a visual arts writer (and more recently, a painter) known for her well-written and highly accessible essays, reviews, and interviews with/about Canadian women artists and writers. In *Women Between*, she makes good use of Meigs's life-long painting practice in relation to her autobiographical text *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait* (1981) and Pratt's in connection with *A Personal Calligraphy* (2000). Characteristically, Reid's discussions begin with the art or literary work itself and then explore direct connections and associations within and between works. Next her attention shifts to gathering the threads connecting differences between the lives of her subjects in relation to what she reads/sees and the work each produces inside or outside discipline or genre.

In the process of reading "between the lines" the reader finds Reid's own life story, a story of survival, between as she phrases it "modernism and post modernism." Reid sees Pratt, Meigs, Dyck and Butala as "freeing agents" and the inter-connections between their lives are vital to her text. What they share as a community of survivors connects them in spite of geographical distance; differences of sexual orientation, spirituality, class and ethnicity; and different strategies of their practice as artists, material- and technology-wise. In deciphering Reid's textual strategies of weaving together performative, autobiographical, material, and inter-textual connections, her reader weaves herself into the text.

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EDEN'S OUTCASTS: THE STORY OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT AND HER FATHER

John Matteson
New York: W. W. Norton, 2007

MARGARET FULLER: AN AMERICAN ROMANTIC LIFE

Charles Capper
Vol. 1, *The Private Years*; vol. 2, *The Public Years*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 2007

REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

The two main subjects of these exhaustive biographies, Louisa May Alcott (1833-88) and Sarah Margaret Fuller (1810-50), were the principal female members of the Concord Transcendentalists. They have recently appeared in this role in Susan Cheever's *American Bloomsbury* (2006), reviewed here in an earlier issue. I shall refer to Alcott by her first name to distinguish her from her father, who shares the focus of Matteson's book. Both women were educated by their fathers and raised to "heroic" ambitions, which neither achieved in her abridged life. Both regretfully came to see themselves excluded from motherhood and marriage (this condition changed for Fuller) and quested for a significant public voice. Matteson's biography has won the Pulitzer Prize, Capper's

first volume won the Bancroft Prize. Both biographers work from rich published and archival sources, including the conscientious journals and improving correspondence of their subjects' circles, highly personal essays, and autobiographical fiction. This wealth of life writing, liberally quoted, occasionally reduces the biographer's role to the adding of mere, in Matteson's case even superfluous, explication. Matteson writes primarily a family biography, of a detailed thoroughness that sometimes lapses into a daily chronicle. Capper constructs a "social biography [of] Fuller thinking and acting with others" as well as with intellectual and political movements (preface to vol. 1). He dismisses all previous biographies of Fuller as unreliable and intellectually uninteresting.

Matteson's subtitle acknowledges the fact that Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) was mostly known as the "Father of Little Women, while the title extends to Louisa the spiritual interpretation that her father gave to his own life. However, the arcs of their lives were dissimilar: the father suffered repeated failures but late in life enjoyed a long period of public respect, good health, and satisfaction, whereas the daughter's life was cut short just when she felt freed from uncongenial duties to pursue the great work she aspired to. Louisa died a few days after her father. Matteson recounts "Louisa's two dominating *raison d'être* had been to earn her father's approval and to assure her mother's comfort." She obeyed the latter impulse by generally siding with her mother in marital conflicts and by continuously working as "the angel of the house" as well as through her commercial writings for the house. Louisa burnt most of her mother's writings, but she memorialized her in her fictions, notably in Marmee of *Little Women*. Strong-willed and tempestuous but loyal wife of an acknowledged "saint," Abba was a social activist in her own right. While sharing Louisa's judgment of Abba's merits and marital circumstances,