

sensibility. Whether it is your story or not, read this book.

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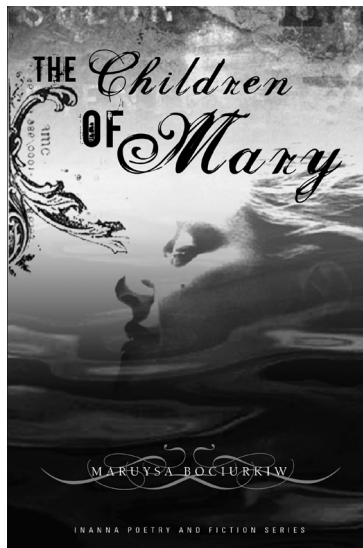
## THE CHILDREN OF MARY

Marusya Bociurkiw  
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2006.

### REVIEWED BY CYNTHIA FLOOD

A ghost sister. A herbalist Baba. A mother who dreams of floating in the Red River, the water warm as the Mediterranean. These, plus a sister who's very much alive—rebellious, loving, lesbian, grief-stricken, angry, heavy with memory and hope—are all embodied in the title of Marusya Bociurkiw's new book, *The Children of Mary*. She has a way with titles! Earlier works are the short-story collection *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (Press Gang 1994) and the poems of *Half-Way To The East* (Lazara 1999). I admired these and looked forward to reading Bociurkiw's first novel, set in Ontario and Manitoba from the 1930s to 2000. This novel is about loss—but it's not sad. Rather, it is, yet life and energy and courage ultimately transcend that sadness.

Grandmother Maria, mother Tatyana, daughters Kat and Sonya: all three generations of women in this Ukrainian family are compelling and multi-dimensional. Maria and



Sonya tell the story, alternately, in first person; sometimes dream-sequences in third person give Tatyana voice. Perhaps she is worst off? She's born far from the homeland yet can't access Canada's possibilities, and unlike her mother and younger daughter she lacks willpower. However, the stringent limits imposed on Baba's existence amount to bondage. A hard, hard life she has—yet a core sweetness in her and a driving intellectual curiosity repel despair.

As for Sonya, she's rejected, even loathed by her mother for being lesbian. Her grief for Kat paralyzes her so that she can't form honest emotional bonds with the living. She runs away, runs, runs. Not until she's understood all that she can about her dead sister and their family history can Sonya change. Kat too gradually gains presence, as over the years those who knew and loved her react to her mysterious death.

In addition to these central figures, there's a long roster of minor yet complex characters. Baba's socialist husband Nestor has a completely different view of the world from hers, one that has its own legitimacy even though for good reason she can't see it. The evil of Tatyana's husband is shaded and shielded yet still exposed by what other people say of him. Sonya's friends, past and present, old and young, gay and straight, and her various lovers are all much more

than mirrors set up to reflect her various qualities. They have agency and impact, and the big Christmas Eve dinner scene that brings many of them together at the same table is marvellous.

These women inhabit settings that Bociurkiw makes vividly real through her presentations of public spaces (bars, restaurants, workplaces), of domestic furnishings, of clothes and cars, and of popular culture, particularly TV. These descriptions don't just sit there on the page as set-pieces; they're dynamic. And food! Bociurkiw does amazing things with food, showing a rainbow of attitudes and emotions in what people cook and eat and drink -- or don't, or won't, or can't. (Her next book, by the way, is a food memoir, *Comfort Food For Break-Ups*, due from Arsenal Pulp in spring 2007.)

Another fine feature of *The Children of Mary* is its use of landscape. Yes, in Canadian novels both big-city neighbourhoods and prairie skies are commonplace—but Bociurkiw's descriptions are definitely not. I especially admire her treatment of rivers. They begin and end the book, in Maria's and Sonya's voices. Powerful visions, both—I've read each several times. From the flooding Red River to tiny buried Taddle Creek, those running waters shape the story, and Torontonians can get a whole new vision of their city as underwritten by an entire language of lost streams.

And I still haven't said anything about *The Children Of Mary's* treatment of Catholicism (dire), or of herbalism (fascinating), or of lesbian movie festivals (laden with irony)—nor about much else that this richly-flavoured novel offers. So go read! And be sure to notice the chapter titles. They're beautiful, too.

*Cynthia Flood's short fiction has won the National Magazine Gold Award, the Journey Prize, a Prism International Prize, and the Western Magazines Gold Award. Her novel, Making A Stone of the Heart, was nominated in 2002 for the City of*

*Vancouver Book Prize. She recently completed a new novel, After the Language Changed, and is at work on various other writing projects.*

## SHADOWS LIGHT

Ann Elizabeth Carson  
Toronto: Longboat Alliance Graphics  
Group Inc., 2005

### REVIEWED BY RUTH GOLDSMITH

If you love poetry, add this gem to your collection. And if you always hated poetry in school, give it another try with these refreshing new poems by Ann Carson. This is your chance to revisit that unexplored area of your life; you may be pleasantly surprised at how accessible it is.

In her solitude, Ann's senses are sharpened by the sounds of everyday living: "This is a good silence, the rustle of people's living. The silence so deafening a poem has a hard time finding a way through it."

Ann has incisive comments on noise pollution. In the serenity of the country, motorboats offend her: "Please, get to the other side of the lake, that raspy noise is spoiling the early morning stillness."

Take this book with you on to a crowded subway train and allow Ann to transport you to another dimension: "I will read a book in the sun, on the subway. I will read a book to stay away from my life—it really works." Take this book with you—it really works!

Indeed, Ann is an ideal travel companion. When you read this book you will be embarking on a journey, along a road you may never have traveled before. Feel the crisp, clear morning air. Or dip into this treasure of images when you are encased in an economy class airplane seat, and read "Day slips down over the roof-tops" or "The window is open this morn-

ing upper and lower sashes, framing a perfect landscape."

From the exhilaration of early morning in the country to the utter futility of a son's tragic suicide: "That spring I was healing from a winter-long illness. My younger son is found dead in the back of his van. Only thirty-five. Shot through the head. By his own hand. There is a hurt in me so deep. blackness inks my soul. in dark bowels of pain." And in a later poem, her answer: "Felled, I sank out of sight, frozen solid in shock. All winter. I was so very still and silent. What kept me alive? Music.... The sun still touches me, sounds of rain bring some pleasure... It's hard, the way you walk beside me now."

In comparison, her daughter is "successful, easy going, comfortable in her skin kind of person who has it all, even a group of women with whom she can explore the distance."

There is feminist rage here too: "I could rage to the end of my next life. It extends through generations of women still howling 'cross the days and nights... I have howled for years. It does no good."

Ann's comments on family life will surely strike a responsive chord: "My grandfather made my grandmother cut off her long chestnut hair and throw it in the garbage. Because it was unseemly, in a married woman." Ann's reaction is: "I know the violence of not being received, or believed, of being someone who disappoints." And "Theirs is not a family drawn closer in crisis. Rather, they fragment, splitting apart. Life goes on as usual, each alone."

Ann is not only a poet, but a sculptor as well. Interspersed among her poems are photographs of her sculptures. Reading this book is like walking through an art gallery: each poem paints a landscape, an experience, an emotion. Ann recreates the key moments in her life and hands them to us in print, so that we may read and savour them to recapture and experience their sorrow, their splendour, and their joy.

Finally, Ann prepares us for our last journey. "There is no place to come home to. There is no language for the very old ... afraid, not of death but of living too long."

And "To die at once, or piece by piece. We have no choice of memories."

"How do I live a different life when I am so old?"

"I must remember not to forget to remember."

You certainly will never forget this book. It really works!

*Reprinted from the Spring 2006 issue of Contact.*

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## PERFORMING FEMININITY: REWRITING GENDER IDENTITY

Lesla Lockford  
Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press,  
2004.

### REVIEWED BY SALINA ABJI

Most feminists would agree that women still face significant ideological pressures to conform to traditional, patriarchal notions of femininity. Do women feel similarly pressured, however, to perform in prescribed ways in order to be taken seriously as feminists? *Performing Femininity* challenges feminist readers to question the complex web of ideological constructs through which subjectivity is negotiated. For