

Lockford, this involves a critique of both the socially dominant norms of prescribed femininity, as well as feminist disavowals of these acts, which “likewise function ideologically by pressing women toward conformity in order to be taken seriously as feminists and as women.”

In developing her analysis, Lockford draws largely from contemporary feminist cultural criticism, including Judith Butler’s ground-breaking work on performativity and Julia Kristeva’s theoretical explorations of the abject body. Lockford deliberately chooses autoethnography as her methodological approach, which involves “the use of narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture.” Hence, the text is composed of three narrative performances or autoethnographic reflections of Lockford’s experience as an image-obsessed weight watcher, an exotic dancer, and a theatrical performer. Autoethnography allows Lockford to engage readers somatically, challenging them to question their intellectual and emotional responses to the narrative text as a way of illuminating underlying ideological assumptions. Her intention is both to attract and repel the reader; to position herself as “abject” by transgressing the boundaries of the reader’s tacit conceptions of gender norms.

Lockford’s approach results in a critical work that is both demanding and enlightening in its direct challenge to the reader to test her own assumptions. Perhaps the best example of this involves Lockford’s performance of what she terms a “scholarly striptease for academic gain”. She recounts how, while conducting academic research on the lived experiences of women in the sex trade, she is challenged by one of her research subjects to perform as an exotic dancer, and through that performance, to transgress the boundaries between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ subject. Utilizing a narrative style that foregrounds personal voice, Lockford leads the reader through a sophisticated and

insightful recounting of her conflicted experience—to strip or not to strip?—and the implications of her choice in terms of her identities as a feminist, as an academic, and as a woman.

For Lockford, the experience of stripping illuminates the problematic “abjection” of sex-work within mainstream feminism as a necessarily oppressive act; one in which the female sex-worker is assumed to have internalized her oppression. In positioning herself as both ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ subject, and by adopting an ‘abject’ performative stance, she challenges the reader to consider both the limits and the possibilities of a sex-trade worker’s performative choices within a patriarchal system; to reconsider complex notions of agency, pleasure and desire, as articulated by sex-positive feminism, in the struggle to understand the multiplicity of women’s lived experiences.

The implications of *Performing Femininity* for the feminist movement are significant. Lockford’s analysis raises important questions regarding how one performs “feminism” as an act of resistance, while cautioning against the development of equally problematic norms within the movement itself. *Performing Femininity* also highlights the important role of feminist cultural critics in exploring, and in some cases transgressing, the complex ideological constructions of identity through which subjectivity is negotiated. These are the boundaries that, if left unchallenged, threaten to undermine the continued relevance of feminism as a vital socio-political movement.

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ALICE MUNRO: WRITING HER LIVES

Robert Thacker
Toronto: McClelland & Stewart
Ltd., 2005

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH HELLER

Robert Thacker’s *Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives*, the first full-length biography of its subject, will be welcomed by Munro’s expanding and admiring readership. The author’s engagement with Munro’s work is long-standing, dating from his graduate student years, when Munro had published just three books, and continuing into the present. Today Thacker, an American, is Professor of Canadian Studies and English at St. Lawrence University (New York) and a leading authority on Alice Munro.

Thacker’s current book fleshes out and updates material already contained in Catherine Sheldrick Ross’s elegantly concise *Alice Munro: A Double Life* (1992) and the recent memoir by Munro’s daughter, Sheila Munro, *Lives of Mothers and Daughters: Growing Up with Alice Munro* (2001). Munro is a writer who has drawn heavily on her own experience in creating her fictional universe. The earlier books on Munro and numerous interviews with her over the years have clarified many details of her life, enabling readers to recognize autobiographical elements in their subsequent fictional (re)incarnations. The subtitle of Thacker’s biography highlights his interest in the interplay between life and fiction that marks Munro’s writing. Explicitly, he proposes to follow “Munro’s own pattern,” tracing “her life and career going from the fact to the fiction and back again,” confident that “autobiography is embedded in [her] work . . . and she can be seen as always ‘writing her lives,’ the lives she has both lived and imagined.”

The contours of Munro’s life are by

now well known: Scots-Irish ancestors, growing up outside Wingham, Ontario, her mother's debilitating Parkinson's disease (contracted when Alice was about twelve), two years on a scholarship at the University of Western Ontario, marriage to James Munro and their move to British Columbia, difficult years as a housewife struggling to write fiction (including, at publishers' urging, misdirected efforts to produce a novel), three children (plus one who died shortly after birth), dissolution of her twenty-year marriage, her return to Ontario, a second marriage, and increasing critical acclaim and popular success as a writer of short stories. In Thacker's view, the decisive event in Munro's creative development was her return to Huron County, Ontario, which enabled her to reconnect with her original material and see it anew in a more complex way.

Although Thacker includes some new details of Munro's personal life, he focuses more sharply on her development as a writer and the way she makes use of her life in her work, published and unpublished. He quotes generously from her memoirs and from particularly engaging unpublished drafts of work found in the Munro papers at the University of Calgary, implying that unpublished fragments frequently contain more autobiographical material than what remains in Munro's published stories. Thacker is also sensitive and judicious in examining the published fiction, carefully distinguishing its autobiographical elements from imaginative inventions, which are often stimulated by Munro's research and the experiences of others. In this sifting, Thacker never presumes that the life can "explain" the fiction, implicitly recognizing that the sources of a writer's creativity must remain in some sense unfathomable.

Any writer who has lived a life as relatively private and uneventful as Munro poses problems for her biographer, possibly exacerbated by the fact that she and many of her friends and family are still alive. Although

relations between mothers and daughters, fathers and daughters, and adult lovers all figure prominently in Munro's fiction, for example, Thacker tells much more about Munro's relationships with her (dead) mother and father than about her relationships with her own (living) daughters and ex-lovers. His choice is reasonable, though some readers may remain curious. Moreover, Thacker, whose authority derives from his excellent critical writings on Munro, does not offer much in the way of literary analysis here. Looming large in these pages is the publication history of Munro's work—her relations with various editors and book publishers in Canada and the United States, with her agent, and with her editors at the *New Yorker* magazine, which has played an important role in augmenting her readership. Equally prominent are extensive citations from the increasingly laudatory, though sometimes critical reviews of her work. In these citations we see the best efforts of many skillful reviewers (among them prominent writers) to account for the magic of Munro's writing. For all those who care about Alice Munro, this is a rich and fascinating book. It will be the definitive biography of Munro for many years to come.

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THE COMING OF LILITH: ESSAYS ON FEMINISM, JUDAISM, AND SEXUAL ETHICS, 1972-2003

Judith Plaskow, Ed. with Donna Berman
Boston: Beacon Press, 2005

REVIEWED BY JOHANNA STUCKEY

Any publication by prominent American feminist theologian Judith Plaskow is worthy of our close attention, but *The Coming of Lilith* is especially significant. The material included in the book allows us to trace Plaskow's development as a feminist, a Jew, and a theologian from her first encounter with feminism in 1969 to her coming out as a lesbian and her recent work on sexuality. It is a great pleasure to revisit many of Plaskow's early and extremely influential writings on feminist Judaism, feminist theology and anti-Judaism. It is an equally great pleasure to have access to a number of her articles that were previously not readily available. In addition, the collection presents a thorough and exciting overview of Jewish feminist theology.

The book is divided into four sections: Section I, "Formulating a Feminist Theory," contains one of her earliest feminist articles "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology" (1972), which she ends with her feminist story of the usually reviled Lilith. In the next year she was questioning the concept of "women's experience" and arguing for multiplicity of experiences. The final piece in the section, dated 1995, reconsiders her story of Lilith in terms of others' reactions to it and her own understanding of it as fitting into a long Jewish tradition of such interpretive stories. In Section II, "The Complexity of Interlocking Oppressions," we find "Christian