

reflecting long-standing cult practices is not supported. The practices of the Eleusinian Mysteries may not have included Demeter at all prior to the period of the poem's composition, and Suter presents strong evidence that the *hieros gamos* involving Persephone and Pluto / Hades was the centre of the earlier rites.

The amount of material Suter surveyed is impressive. She applies several well-developed layers of analysis to the poem. I had already been persuaded of a feminist reading of the story emphasizing Persephone's independent power as Goddess of the Underworld (see *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and her free choice to take Hades as her consort, but on the basis of less evidence than Suter presents here.

Suter's reading of the poem is archaeological and literary and so she did not include the ecological shift in Greece that precipitated the Dark Age out of which the Olympians and the suppression of the goddesses emerged. The deforestation of ancient Greece resulting in desertification and a rapid decline in population surely altered the viewpoint of people about the all-benevolent Mother Earth goddesses.

My reading of Suter was informed by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and Roberto Calosso's *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, and the understanding of the gods presented in Greek drama—Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* particularly—and the Homeric and Orphic Hymns. By rethinking this foundation story, considering the free choice of the young woman goddess to rule over death and rebirth with her chosen consort, patriarchal family relationships, including the domination of the elder over the younger members, are challenged. By reawakening the joyful embrace of death by life, the mysteries can still move us. Beneath the misogyny and the Olympian overlay there are still some wonderful things to learn from the Greeks.

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## **TREASURES: THE STORIES WOMEN TELL ABOUT THE THINGS THEY KEEP**

Kathleen V. Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman  
Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004

### **REVIEWED BY STEPHANIE DICKISON**

The items which women surround themselves with—either kept tucked away in a shoebox under the bed or radiantly sitting atop her writing desk—are full of stories about the women who own them.

They might be held onto for a number of reasons—sentiment, practicality, or aesthetic pleasure. But do not mistake them for mere knick-knacks or *tchotchkes*. These items not only hold profound meaning for the women who possess them, but can help define and describe them by what events led them to this artifact and how it's transformed them.

Through candid interviews with over one hundred women with varying backgrounds and interests, we are invited into the front rooms and backyards of women across the country to hear the stories of how they and their items were united.

These stories are vital, not only from a historical perspective but because they remind women of their need to have meaning in their life, whether it is evoked by a grandmother's dress or dog tags from a beloved pet, sheet music from Czechoslovakia or a collection of fridge magnets

from trips abroad. It brings them back to memories of childhood, family and friendship, or encapsulates a time, event or memory. As described by the authors:

[The possessions] create a women's history which, while it might not appear in textbooks or museums, informs how women live their lives; how they earn their living; how they think; how they relate to their foremothers, their daughters, their friends and lovers. Women save possessions from their own lives and the lives of others to create both a personal and a collective narrative. As one of our participants, Paddy, put it, 'This is who I am, and this is where I come from, and these are my people.' The keepsakes comprise a story she tells herself and sometimes tells others. These stories create meaning for individual women, sustain the private culture of women, and encourage women to enter the public realm.

The stories that unfold are frank attempts to immortalize tender moments, everyday tales of lost loves, former lives lived and heirlooms passed through the generations. Most are touching, but more often heart-breaking, such as Carol's memory of her father's gift of a scapular:

I went on an exchange trip when I was in grade school to Trinidad, and, as I was leaving, my dad went out and bought this for my birthday. He always used to give my mom money for Christmas or birthday presents, and she would go shopping. I can still remember sitting in the house, and he just made me so nervous, and I remember sitting there and opening it and he said, 'I got that myself.' And it still chokes me up because he – it just made me feel good to think that he was thinking of

me and because he recognized that the spiritual part of my life was important to me. It was like his way of saying, 'Stay safe.' It's so sad. And it's important to me because it keeps me close to my dad. Plus I guess it is a statement of me, my identity statement, because spirituality is so important to me.

The interesting, and staggering, fact about this story is it was not a relationship resplendent with a lifetime of love and gifts. As explained in the text, "For Carol, this singular gesture of affection in a lifetime of anger, violence, and fear meant so much. Through it, her father seemed to say that he loved her, 'without actually having to say it.'"

The first person accounts are what draw the reader in. The emotions that are unfurled, the stories of lands and times far away, and the eloquence of the women who have held onto a piece of history are fascinating. It is hard to not read the whole book in one sitting.

*Treasures* will have you clearing out closets, diving under beds and throwing open cupboards, unleashing a whole you you'd likely forgotten about. The seashell that you picked along the Cape Cod shore with your best friend that still instantly evokes the smell of summer—sunshine, cocoa tanning oil, and hot dogs; the movie ticket stub from the night he proposed and the rolling pin that your mother gave you. Even though you don't bake, the mere glimpse of it leaves you awash with feelings of love and devotion.

This is a book every woman should have, every woman should read, and should have every woman displaying anything that ever mattered to her. I'm sensing a revolution here.

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*The Dalhousie Review, Surface and Symbol Arts, New England Theatre Review, and Washington Asia Press.*

## **THE BELLES OF NEW ENGLAND: THE WOMEN OF THE TEXTILE MILLS AND THE FAMILIES WHOSE WEALTH THEY WOVE**

William Moran  
New York: Thomas Dunne Books,  
St Martin's Press, 2002

### **REVIEWED BY JEANNE MARANDA**

L'histoire des ouvrières du textile en Nouvelle Angleterre dans le milieu de 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, a fait l'objet de nombreuses publications, surtout de femmes qui en furent témoins, comme Edith Abbot<sup>1</sup> et d'autres plus récemment comme Elizabeth G. Flynn<sup>2</sup> et Sarah Evans.<sup>3</sup> William Moran, journaliste et réalisateur à CBS pendant 25 ans, maintenant résidant aux USA, a pour sa part choisi de relater l'histoire de ces «Belles» en mettant l'accent sur le rapport de force entre elles et les «Brahmins» bostoniens qui les ont exploitées pendant presque un siècle. Son livre nous convainc que la Nouvelle-Angleterre doit sa prospérité et sa renommée comme centre mondial de l'industrie du textile au début du siècle, au travail et aux sacrifices des ouvrières de ses filatures.

François Cabot Lowell a installé les premiers de ces filatures dans une usine sur les berges de la rivière Merrimack au Massachusetts en 1814. Doté d'une conscience sociale, et dégoûté de ce qu'il avait vu en Angleterre dans les usines de textiles, ce marchand de Boston a rêvé d'un style de vie pour ses employées et pour la ville où il s'implanterait. Il recruta ses premières ouvrières dans la campagne avoisinante et déploya

de grands efforts pour leur assurer confort et bien-être pendant leur séjour à l'usine. Il a bâti église, écoles, pensions, parcs, et les parents, rassurés sur le sort de leurs filles, ont accepté de les laisser quitter leur village. Celles-ci, à l'idée de gagner quelques dollars qui leur assuraient une certaine autonomie, étaient enchantées. Le travail était dur mais l'atmosphère était chaleureuse, elles avaient organisé des clubs de lecture, des cours, elles se faisaient des amies.

Despite the toil we all agree  
Out of the mill or in,  
Dependant on others we ne'er  
will be  
As long as we're able to spin.<sup>4</sup>

Malheureusement ces conditions ne durèrent qu'un temps. Une autre génération de patrons a bouleversé le climat et les ouvrières en ont subi les contrecoups: la tuberculose et les infections pulmonaires dues à la poussière de coton en suspension dans l'air, la fatigue des longues stations debout ont eu raison de leur belle jeunesse en santé. De nombreux témoignages ont étayé leur triste condition de vie en usine, dans des locaux mal ventilés, dans un environnement bruyant, debout de 14 à 16 heures par jour pour des salaires dérisoires. Celles qui ont tenu le plus longtemps sont devenues sourdes et d'autres ont perdu la vue suite au travail minutieux sous la lumière blafarde des lampes à l'huile de baleine durant les longues journées d'hiver. Une ouvrière qui a signé « Phenev » a laissé ces lignes :

And amidst the clashing noise  
and din  
Of the ever beating loom  
Stood a fair young girl with  
throbbing brow  
Working her way to the tomb.<sup>5</sup>

Avec le temps, le commerce du textile allant en augmentant, les magnats bâtirent des filatures plus grandes qui exigeaient davantage de main d'œuvre. Les Américaines, usées et aigries par leurs conditions de tra-