

gain so much significance for a newcomer to Canada. Agnew remembers with humour how she did not understand what “very cold” meant until she came to Canada; how she was taken by her friends (and not very impressed) to see the quaint Mennonites at the market, who would make preserves at home; and how she did not know where and how to buy herself food and clothes in the beginning. The details of everyday life and how she managed to deal with them are funny, though reflected on in solitude; one is made aware that, at the time, the adjustment must have been very difficult, although she is able to look back on them in a good humour. These everyday details are remembered together with the hardships of studying the involvement of Indian women in history when there were almost no resources in the discipline and close to no discipline at all. The racism and sexism that she experiences both in her everyday life and academic environment are again honestly (but not accusatorily) included in her memoir because to Agnew they have all been determining factors in her search of an identity, which results in the writing of this book, but does not end here, as, she writes, “who I am now is only one stage in a life long process of *becoming*” (5).

BODIES IN A BROKEN WORLD: WOMEN NOVELISTS OF COLOR AND THE POLITICS OF MEDICINE

Stanford, Ann Folwell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

REVIEWED BY STEPHANIE
HART

In *Bodies in a Broken World: Women Novelists of Color and the Politics of Medicine*, Ann Folwell Stanford

undertakes a broad textual analysis which seeks to explore the epistemic gap between institutional definitions of medicine and illness and a notion of health and well being as a communal endeavor mitigated by socio-economic specificity. Her analysis, which is situated in an American context, hinges upon the notion that western medicine has traveled along a singular road which deems illness as individual pathology. She further argues that this model actively erases the connection between social conditions, identity, and health. Through careful readings of texts such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*, and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Stanford argues that these works offer a revolutionary reconfiguration of not only illness itself, but of the notion that in the absence of careful attention and sensitivity towards socio-cultural specificity and community, dominant medical practices are extremely limited, if not complicit in the marginalization of women across axes of race, class, religion, and education. Stanford makes this explicit in her introduction as she states, “feminist medical ethics strives to locate the patient in her or his socio-cultural context, not simply by way of an addition to the ethical process, but as an epistemological prerequisite to it” (Stanford, 2).

Stanford has carefully selected texts that are not simply ‘medical’: issues such as infanticide, domestic and sexual abuse, mental illness, gay bashing, and eating disorders are clearly conditions that can be explicated according to what Stanford names “a sick world”. In her analysis, she suggests that the broken bodies found within the texts are part and parcel of a diseased world in which the systematic oppression and abuse of the other is normalized under a distant and disinterested medical gaze: in other words, that racism, sexism, and classism share a vested interest in constructing a specific model of

health and disease; recovery and mortality, demonstrated as she writes, “Medicine...is...a culturally and emotionally anesthetizing and alienating practice, consigning people to a living death” (Stanford, 50).

Throughout the text, Stanford argues that what is needed, and what these texts offer, is a shift in definitions of healing: from an intrusive action placed upon an anonymous body to a more holistic, communal activity: an activity in which the (usually female) patient must be actively involved. In this sense, Stanford argues that by resisting the notion that health and illness equals the presence or absence of certain symptoms, the texts under examination also resist the power relations which allows women’s bodies to be absorbed into the larger discourses of racism and sexism, demonstrated as she writes, “The authors of the novels I have examined in this study construct representations of illness rooted in such social factors as racism, classism, homophobia, as well as corruption and greed and other factors that contribute to the creation of a kind of infecting world that renders medicine itself vulnerable” (Stanford, 217).

Ultimately, Stanford’s analysis is a powerful one because it poses more questions than solutions: to attempt to do so would re-enact the same dismissive, totalizing analysis that these texts seek to subvert, clearly articulated as Stanford writes, “sickness is not simply of individual biopathology, but is necessarily a symptom of a larger phenomenon” (Stanford, 36). Instead, Stanford offers her experience as both literary scholar and field worker to suggest that wellness, and in particular the wellness of those who are denied medical care or simply dismissed and silenced, cannot be treated as symptom or malady, but as a part of a larger community in which social, psychic, and bodily specificity is considered: health is never localized in an individual body, but is rather, as

Stanford argues, made possible through an actively engaged social network which works in tandem with medicine: a strategy which is successfully elucidated throughout the text.

WOMEN AND THE HISTORICAL ENTERPRISE IN AMERICA: GENDER, RACE, AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

Julie Des Jardin
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

REVIEWED BY JENNIFER HARRIS

The central premise of Julie Des Jardin's *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory* is that American women have a long-standing tradition of contributing to the practice of history, a tradition that has variously been welcomed by men, derided by male academics, and used as a template for other female historians and researchers of American social history. Des Jardin locates the origins of women's historiography in mid-nineteenth-century practices which privileged the morality of white women and their role as educators of children and preservers of culture. That such women widely interpreted this role to include cultural history, extending their analyses from portraits of "important" men to the women who birthed them, suggests their rejection of dominant political and economic national narratives. For Des Jardin, these early female pioneers serve as a point of departure from which to consider the rise of the academic social science discipline of "History" and how its male practitioners attempted to devalue the "unofficial"

past previously chronicled by women in favour of the public political sphere designated "official"—only to witness a return to such practices by the 1930s.

Des Jardin might have considered more substantially the importance of the historical novel, and how women often undertook the revisionary writing of history through the practice of writing fiction—as Nina Baym does in *American Women Writers and the Work of History*. However, the backdrop she does provide works to foreground the period immediately preceding her timeframe of 1880-1945. Within this timeframe Des Jardin identifies several trends, beginning with the professionalization of the discipline; the relationship between women and the academy—and the obstacles placed before them; as well as the "varied social agendas of American women in the twentieth century and the need to construct new versions of the past to carry them out," particularly suffrage (177). With examples drawn from published and archival materials Des Jardin's study aims not to be exhaustive but rather representative, and thus is far more readable.

What ultimately proves most interesting is her consideration of the ways female scholars approached subjects decreed marginal. Des Jardin writes, "Our designation of these regional scholars is rarely simple... we acknowledge the margins as sites of disempowerment and limitation, but also as spaces of opportunity, experimentation, and perspective for women historians... [Some] found that the margins could be a vantage point from which to expose power dynamics between elites and nonelites in the American past" (93). She continues, "When we view women's production of history from the margins and outside the historical establishment, the emergence of social and cultural perspectives in the 1930s no longer looks like a shift into uncharted waters but a resurfacing of a tradition of history started

and perpetuated by women" (94). Funded by WPA programs, women of the 1930s collected and itemized things previously deemed irrelevant by academic historians—everything from the diaries of Mormon settler women to oral histories of First Nations peoples to African American folktales in Florida, the last collected by famed writer, Zora Neale Hurston. Such methodologies had the potential to produce histories that disrupted traditional Eurocentric assumptions and narratives—particularly about indigenous peoples. Yet, while male scholars were beginning to do the same, it was women Des Jardin asserts "who suffered professionally for their questioning" (115). As she demonstrates, there existed an uneasy tension between the insights such a liminal position enabled, and the punishments articulating them invited.

Des Jardin's most thoroughly developed discussion occurs in chapters four and five with the consideration of African American history. This is the first consideration of non-white women as agents of research. The impetus for such was their desire to inculcate racial pride through the revelation of histories unacknowledged by the mainstream and to establish social respectability through countering predominant representative paradigms. Interestingly, this same racial uplift premise led to black women being concentrated in disciplines "more conducive to community reform" (131), and accomplishing their historical work through different means. Nevertheless, Des Jardin documents the significant contribution of women to the New Negro History Movement through their roles as educators, librarians, archivists, community leaders, and fundraisers. Importantly, it is this section that most fully realizes her earlier premise that women have historically accomplished history in non-traditional ways. Moreover, it most fundamentally demonstrates her assertion that history and politics have been fundamentally intertwined for