

THE FEMININE GAZE

Anne Innis Dagg. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2001.

TELLING TALES: ESSAYS IN WESTERN WOMEN'S HISTORY

Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne, Eds. University of British Columbia Press, 2000.

BY CLARA THOMAS

Anne Innis Dagg began *The Feminine Gaze* in 1985 by writing a paper on early Canadian women writers of non-fiction. Fifteen years later she has now published her compendium of 476 writers, having long since realized that time and space would not allow her to include books in French, though that had been her earlier intention. A daughter of Mary Quayle Innis, herself a distinguished and versatile writer, Anne Dagg has always been a committed feminist; her dedication and scholarship are constantly evident in the collection she has produced, one which will be endlessly useful to present and future investigators. Her introduction, divided under various headings and giving an overview of her aims and methods, is particularly useful, outlining her methods with reference to the text to come and at the same time pointing the way to future fruitful lines of inquiry. It is a ready-made organizational chart for future researchers. First she lists her guidelines as they developed, and gives her rationale for them. Then, under the broad heading, "Interpretive Commentary," she indicates her main categories of investigation under headings such as "Who wrote non-fiction books," "Perspective," "Why did women say they wrote books," and finally, "Crystal Ball," a consideration of

these books from the perspective of today. Her final conclusion is both an admission of erroneous expectations and a celebration of the variety and quality she found: "I began this work believing, in keeping with the private/public sphere dichotomy for the sexes apparently in place in early middle-class Canada, that there would be few women writing non-fiction, setting themselves up as voices of authority, especially before the First World War.... This was not true.... Although many writers focused on subject matter in the women's domain, a surprising number discussed 'big' issues such as war, nationalism, imperialism, women's studies and Quebec. The extent of this focus is impressive...."

Browsing in the following text is a voyage of discovery—from Abbott, Maude Elizabeth Seymour Babin, a pioneering medical doctor and author of over 140 scientific papers, to Ziegler, Olive Irene, founder of the Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT), secretary for the national Young Women's Christian Association, and biographer of J.S. Woodsworth, the first leader of the CCF (NDP) party. It is also an indispensable resource for women's studies—and not least, a document to give hearty and prideful satisfaction to all of us.

Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History, in its quite different format and thrust, is equally to be admired. Catharine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne have gathered and published a diverse group of papers which remarkably enhance our understanding of the women who settled western Canada and the challenges they faced. Their contents evoke strong emotions: Nanci Langford's "Childbirth on the Canadian Prairies, 1880-1930" made my blood run cold. "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Ukrainian Settlement: East Central Alberta between the Wars" by Frances Swyripa enraged me, as did the enforced subservience of young Mennonite girls to the stultifying rules devised by their

male churchmen as revealed in Frieda Klippenstein's "Scattered but Not Lost: Mennonite Domestic Servants in Winnipeg, 1920s to 50s." Again and again I found myself appalled at glaring inequities and cruelly primitive conditions—and so recently a part of our society. It is impossible to read these papers without realizing that, though we are inclined to congratulate ourselves on a historically "humane" society, in reality it was nothing of the kind. We practiced blatant discrimination and, certainly, in our legislated responses to native people and emigrants, we were all implicated in country-wide culpability.

The two articles on native women by Sarah Carter and Nancy Pagh and Sherry Edmunds-Flett's "Abundant Faith": Nineteenth-Century African Women on Vancouver Island" add their considerable evidence to the docket of inequity, but their effect is muted in the face of the entire collection. That, to my mind is a pity. What they deserve is an entire book on the plight of native and African-Canadians in our west. Ann Leger-Anderson's "Marriage, Family, and The Cooperative Ideal: The Telfords" is also less effective than its subject deserves. She demonstrates that, for its time, this was a truly triumphant marriage, allowing both parties freedom to do their own work and enjoy their own development to a degree that few men and women of the day enjoyed. Leger-Anderson's account of all that is somewhat marred, finally, by what seems to be her disappointment in acknowledging that "gender and culture ultimately triumphed over education and ambition." Of course it did: "for its time" was the operative phrase earlier; even the forward-looking Telfords could not negate the times they lived in.

Finally, I question the necessity for the apologia-introduction. It is well argued, it is convincing, but from its beginning it seems to me to be arguing for a recognition of the importance of women's lives and experience that has already become

an accepted feature of historical scholarship. "History writing is one form of storytelling, and at the turn of the twenty-first century in Canada its terrain resembles nothing so much as a pitched battle." Is this true, or is the statement a paper tiger that the editors use to give urgency and energy to their work? Those fighting words seem to me to belong to the very early days of militant feminism in the field of history rather than to the present many-faceted discipline that engages a healthy diversity of scholars.

Surely at this time there need be no rationale and no apology either for this collection or for the myriad studies of women's lives and times that we all anticipate.

LES FEMMES ET LA GUERRE

Madeleine Gagnon. VLB editeur
Montréal, 2000

PAR JEANNE MARANDA

Quand on a tourné la dernière page du livre de Madeleine Gagnon, « *Les femmes et la guerre* » on vient de terminer un périple dans la souffrance, la douleur et les deuils des femmes de notre monde en guerre.

Ce sont les femmes du Kosovo, de la Macédoine, de la Bosnie-Herzégovine, d'Israël et de la Palestine, du Liban, du Pakistan et du Sri Lanka, qui témoignent des sévices qu'elles ont subis aux mains des hommes qui s'entretenant au nom d'une religion quand ce n'est pas au nom de la pureté d'une race!

Madeleine Gagnon et sa collègue Monique Durand, journaliste à Radio-Canada, ont voulu voir de plus près ce que les femmes vivaient dans ces contextes violents où chacun sait que les guerres d'aujourd'hui n'épargnent pas les civils. Elles rapportent des histoires d'horreur qui nous font frémir. Pourquoi cette haine entre frères et surtout pourquoi cette violence envers les femmes et leurs enfants? On ne trouvera pas la réponse dans ces pages, mais on restera marqué par la cruauté des hommes.

Ces histoires vécues recueillies de la bouche de femmes qui travaillent à remettre leur pays sur pied sont bouleversantes et on reste ébahie face au courage et à la détermination qui animent ces femmes qui ont tout perdu, mari, fils, parents, tous leurs biens matériels et pire que tout, l'intégrité de leur corps. Car les viols en masse sont un des fléaux qui marquent ces guerres et visent les femmes et les jeunes filles sans discrimination. On ne peut oublier le traitement infligé par les Serbes qui ont gardé leurs victimes enceintes enfermées pendant cinq mois afin de

les empêcher d'avorter, pour ensuite les jeter à la rue où elles ont accouché dans des conditions qui arrachent les larmes.

Chaque femme interviewée par Madeleine a parlé d'espoir. Du Pakistan, « Asma-la-courageuse nous dira : les seules lueurs, les seuls espoirs viendront des femmes ». Du Liban, elles posent la question : « comment reconstruire l'humain? » Elles répondent : « ce qui sauvera le monde sera le doute des femmes »

Madeleine qui parlait pour s'enquérir du pourquoi de cette violence envers les femmes s'est retrouvée investie du pouvoir de transmettre le message de ces infortunées à notre monde. Elle leur a promis de parler d'elles, de leur souffrance, de leur isolement et de leur infortune. Elle a tenu parole.

« Les femmes et la guerre » n'est pas un livre triste. Là où il y a des larmes, il y a aussi des rires, où il y a la mort, il y a aussi l'amour. Et en filigrane, la solidarité des femmes qui rebâtissent, qui redonnent le goût de vivre aux plus éprouvées avec la promesse de jours meilleurs. Madeleine nous a donné des portraits de femmes dans une langue faite de tendresse et de poésie, qui nous habiteront longtemps.

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