

President of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. In *The Road From Coorain* she recalled her childhood on an isolated ranch in the Australian outback and her education, culminating in a degree from the University of Sydney in 1958. *True North* continues her story: her breakaway from Australia to do graduate work at Harvard, her marriage in 1962 to John Conway, a Canadian historian at Harvard, and their move to Toronto where John became a member of the newly-established York University history department and the Master of Founders, York's first college. Jill taught at the University of Toronto from 1964 on, completed her Ph.D. at Harvard in 1969, and became Toronto's first woman Vice-President. *A Woman's Education* continues the story with her acceptance of the Smith College presidency in 1975 and their move to Northampton.

With both wary trepidation and eager enthusiasm she faced her new challenges. They were many. As the first woman President of a women's college founded by Sophia Smith a century earlier, she faced a faculty of whom seventy percent were males (she calls them the dinosaurs), elderly men prepared to fight tooth and nail against any encroachment on their overall authority—curriculum, appointments, tenure, and governance. Many of the women faculty were also elderly and quite satisfied with the status quo. On the other hand, younger faculty members, both male and female, and the student body, some three thousand strong, had been well infected with the unrest of the sixties. They demanded academic change and particularly a response to feminist concerns that were currently embroiling the academic world. The campus was a hotbed of warring factions and every committee meeting was a fresh battleground. Writing a safe twenty-five years from her initial field of conflict, Conway can frankly record her first difficult faculty meetings:

The dinosaurs managed to say "Madam President" in tones that made it sound like an insult. The male feminists looked astonished at their older colleagues' behaviour. The "ladies" were soothingly ladylike, and the faces of the younger women faculty shone with joy that the time of reckoning with their older male colleagues was at hand.

Any thought of the ideal women's college that had been uppermost in her mind speedily gave way to the realization that Smith was simply "a small scale theater for the culture wars brewing across the entire range of American intellectual life." The hard working, well organized, enthusiastic Smith Alumnae qualify for Conway's unstinting praise. As she speedily realized that fund-raising would be a major part of her responsibility, so she came to know many of these remarkable women. Further, she found that she could always depend on their practised, dedicated fund-raising skills.

Personally, Jill and John Conway were constantly threatened by his recurrent manic-depression, an illness that disrupted their lives with terrible regularity. Still, in the good times, they treasured their friends, particularly Archibald MacLeish, playwright and former Librarian of Congress, and his wife, Ada, who had adopted them as surrogate family. In time they bought a country place of their own, where they became joyful gardeners in the holiday weekends that gave them respite from Smith's demands.

As she approached the ten-year mark in her tenure as President, Jill Conway became more and more convinced that she must make a move. She was ready and eager for an opportunity to do the writing she had put to one side for so long. As President she could claim many achievements: incentives for older women in courses and funds; facilities for athletics, neglected until her time; a

reordered curriculum which stressed women's studies as well as retaining the traditional courses of a Liberal Arts College; and finally, a sound financial foundation for the entire enterprise.

*A Woman's Education* is densely written, a manual of presidential activities in a college setting whose founding and funding are unfamiliar to Canadian readers. But it is an essential chapter in the on-going life of a remarkable woman. She has certainly fulfilled her writer's promise since her resignation from Smith. *When Memory Speaks*, a study of autobiography, is only one of a distinguished list of publications, all of them written primarily about and for women. She and a friend, Elizabeth Kennan, writing as Clare Munnings, have also embarked on a mystery series. *Overnight Float*, their first effort, is a lively college campus mystery whose academic sleuth, Rosemary Stubbs, seems all set to provide future entertainment.

## TOUCHED

Jody Lundgren.  
Vancouver: Anvil Press, 1999

## BY NANCI WHITE

The "madwoman in the attic" has become a familiar figure in western literature. Eve, Cassandra, the Bacchae, Ophelia, and Mrs. Rochester were all creations from the pens of men to attest to the ongoing problematic of having two sexes: one on the top and the other on the bottom. Only rarely before the twentieth century were women writers self-possessed enough to describe for others their so called "bouts of insanity." With the rise of modern literary techniques such as stream of consciousness and the confessional poetry of

the '40s through '60s, the reality of culturally-induced madness was dissected by sufferers who came forward to describe what turns out to be a widely occurrent phenomenon: occasional, and often early, debilitating episodes of breakdown or dysfunction in the lives of girls and women.

Perhaps the most celebrated of these womaniacs is Sylvia Plath, a classic overachiever with an unresolved Electra complex and a smoldering resentment of her mother. She wrote two separate diaries of her madness in the early '60s; one, *Ariel*, in poetic form, the other *The Bell Jar*, as a novel. Plath quickly became a martyr for the rising women's movement, a victim of the "degradations" of the patriarchy, when she killed herself after a prolonged depression aggravated by the failure of her marriage. In both texts Plath's personas, like Shakespeare's Ophelia, display an insistent and often confusing preoccupation with the weight of words, the primordial cauldron of language and meaning.

When the larger patterns of living prove too unwieldy, the need develops for absolute control of even a small portion of social discourse. One fixates on words, their constituent and mysterious parts and beginnings. How have they come to have such power? So, too, Jade King, the young heroine of Jodi Lundgren's novel *Touched*, begins her unravelling tale with lessons in etymology. The title itself is *noir* playfulness suggesting all the variants of its meaning: insane, felt up, affected with feeling and emotion and ripped off. All of the above apply to the dissolving-before-our-eyes narrator as she is sucked downwards into a maelstrom of repressed sexual memory.

Despite the fact that Lundgren wrote the novel in her early '30s, this is a survival manual for young adults confronting the lethal cocktail of drugs, alcohol, sex, and unfamilies that contemporary North American society serves up to them. Jade barely manages to stomach this concoction

and it produces in her a wealth of hallucination, dissociation, and paranoia. But just because you're paranoid doesn't mean you're not being followed. Lundgren suggests that all help, except self-help, is ultimately of limited use. Teachers, parents, lovers, and friends, many playing multiple roles here, are unable to help Jade with the necessary body and soul work of crash and recovery.

The velocity of her disintegration is signalled in the text through the almost complete breakdown of language use. As Jade sorts through word fragments, the reader, too, is subjected to loss of comprehension, a difficult task of versimilitude for any writer to control effectively. If narrative meaning resides in words linked purposefully together, what happens when this purposefulness is lost?

Counterposed intertextually with this syntactical chaos is the even more disorienting publications of The Mental Health Act, which make the fragmentary sound bites of Bedlam seem preferable. Our heroine's struggle to regain control of her soul and body is, unsurprisingly, not helped by bureaucracy. The harder she works to forge "the new sexual revolution" the more she is drawn back into the primal, historical roots of her "illness." Neither is she allowed the luxury of casting her father in the role of unmitigated villain in her story, but must acknowledge that his sin is a sad collocation of the quotidian and the catastrophic. The true tragedy here is the banality of the destructive forces in our lives—that the apocalypse arrives, not in the form of a rough beast but in the postmodern guise of a shuffling, defeated man whose mother didn't love him very much. And like naming, like dominoes, the legacies of abuse topple down the generations.

The mad, throughout history, have often been possessed by the "delusion" that they have the power and the duty to save the world. So have the sane. Indeed, when that world shrinks to the size of a single human consciousness, like Hamlet's nutshell,

if the mental traveller is "touched" in the right way, she may succeed in her vocation. Lundgren argues that both body and mind are consecrated to this work; only in tandem can they creatively transform the pain that induces hysteria and her handmaidens. The kitchen, the bedroom, the attic; women need to get out more.

## COVER ME

Mariko Tamaki.  
Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2000.

BY STEPHANIE DICKISON

Here lies a work of fiction by one of the most intriguing personalities and fascinating writers in Toronto today—Mariko Tamaki. You might know the name from her participation in the *Scream in High Park* festival, as performer and co-creator of the *Strange Sister Cabaret* at *Buddies in Bad Times* theatre, or as co-creator of the fat activist group, *Pretty, Porky, and Pissed Off*.

Mariko is rebellious to the extreme and, as a sex toy sales clerk, was named "Amateur Sexpert" by *NOW Magazine's* Susan G. Cole.

However, while she might be a force to be reckoned with in person and on stage, her prose is remarkably quiet and poignant, but simultaneously sparkling, funny, and smart. And her use of language is awe-inspiring.

I emerge, out of breath, from the toothless mouth of the cool musky subway station, and walk briskly, bangles pumping on my wrists in the clammy palm of early summer heat.

Mariko has the ability to put both