

than elsewhere. As well, military personnel often bring venereal disease and AIDS to developing countries although in both developed and developing countries, prostitutes and not johns are held responsible for health risks.

In their discussion of religion and prostitution, Brock and Thistlethwaite address more than Christianity. They also examine the effects of both Buddhism and Hinduism on prostitution. It is interesting that they find support for practice of the sex trade within all of these "higher" religions even though the dynamics differ. All of these religions value men over women, and place the responsibility for sexual behavior on women who cause loss of control in men. To understand prostitution, Christianity looks at sin and the major Asian religions look at karma. Both of these concepts see the behaviours of prostitution as individualistic. From this perspective, the victims are blamed for what happens to them. They are considered to have made poor choices. However, Brock and Thistlethwaite state clearly that the sex trade must be seen as a complex system that will only change as economic, military, legal and justice, ideological, religious, and social systems change. Change in these areas can be brought about through social action that is done in the community. In their analysis the authors do not presume to be experts in all religions and cultures but they refer to the work of Asian theologians.

The authors consider the impact of various possibilities in the area of law and justice and present the reader with the pros and cons of systems ranging from strict control to non-involvement on the part of lawmakers. Decriminalization of prostitution is seen as necessary, but only as part of a larger change. The need for sanctions against johns, pimps, traffickers, and brothels is essential if women are to be protected.

A strong point of this book is its consistent analysis of the cultural and social differences that apply in

the countries discussed. In social systems less individualistic than we are used to in North America the motivation for prostitution can vary. For instance, in some areas of Thailand young girls offer themselves freely to the sex trade to improve the economic situation of the entire family.

Continually present in all aspects of this analysis of prostitution is the authors' assertion that the sex trade is economically based to the point that it underwrites the economy of some poorer countries. Threatened economic collapse following the closure of military bases has resulted in the burgeoning of the tourist sex trade. Worldwide estimates (likely low) of the value of the sex industry reach five billion dollars per year. On an individual basis, poverty is a driving force behind the entry of many women into prostitution.

Brock and Thistlethwaite are to be commended for this extensive, detailed and daring piece of work. They name the systems that create, benefit from, and maintain prostitution. The stories they relate are often heart wrenching. However, in a summary that does leave some room for hope, the last chapter addresses the question, "What are we to do?" Instead of a list of academic possibilities, we are given examples of work that is actually being done in community.

UNDERGROUND

nathalie stephens. Laval: Éditions Trois, 1999.

PAR DORETTE HUGGINS

Ce petit livre de nathalie stephens arrive en plein milieu de ma lecture

des oeuvres complètes d'Anne Hébert dont la syntaxe et le style reposent aux antipodes de ce quatrième ouvrage de l'auteure qui s'intitule, «Underground.»

La lectrice est d'abord frappée par la syntaxe qui n'est pas du tout irréprochable. En effet, non seulement impose-t-elle aux lectrices des phrases marathons comme des voies ferrées sillonnant des plaines arides mais l'auteure semble avoir du mal à savoir où s'arrêter. Au nom de quel sport de la pratique de la langue doit-on débiter une phrase, très belle d'ailleurs «La douleur appartient au champ lexical imprononçable, ...» avant de trébucher, épuisé quelque 205 mots plus tard, sans point à la ligne? En outre, la lectrice doit faire face à des pléonasmes, tels que «voire même» qui ponctuent le trajet du livre à intervalles réguliers comme des arrêts du métro.

De manière fort originale, l'auteure utilise la métaphore de l'«Underground,» le métro, pour mettre en relief les corps de deux femmes seules, livrées à elles-mêmes dans le ventre souterrain de la vie urbaine. Des paradoxes, il y en a. Bien qu'elles soient unies dans le regard qu'elles portent sur elles-mêmes et sur leur environnement clos, Madicole et Ernestine demeurent séparées, «Entre elles, deux voies ferrées effilochent la ville.» Elles se trouvent sur des quais opposés et arrivent néanmoins à s'attacher l'une à l'autre en dépit du gouffre qui les tient à part.

L'auteure réussit à nous faire rire de la façon de vivre de l'une ou de l'autre. On partage leur frustration, leur silence interrompu par des coups de violence. Le téléphone sonne. Chacune de son côté court vers la cabine téléphonique sur les quais. Elles décrochent et parlent; pourtant la sonnerie du téléphone persiste. Elles détruisent les appareils. Ensuite, Ernestine se penche sur un journal qui cache un téléphone portable, source de leur délire spontané. N'ayant pas pu arrêter ce téléphone, Ernestine jette le portable sur les rails

où il se casse en morceaux silencieux. Doit-on voir dans cette folie passagère, dans le manque de maîtrise de soi et dans l'image d'un simple téléphone portable, un commentaire de l'auteure sur le sort de la femme sans homme, soumise aux gestes et aux faits d'une autre femme?

Les lecteurs avides des oeuvres de Nathalie Stephens trouveront dans ce dernier livre toute la richesse de son style. L'auteure jette la lectrice dans un bourrage de mots qui se battent pour se libérer du corps de manière obsessive. «Cette façon d'écrire est une atteinte à la pudeur,» écrivait-elle avant de se poser la question suivante: «Devant la grossièreté de la mémoire, l'impertinence de l'auteure, comment réagis-tu?» Or l'imposition de phrases longues et ardues défie le sens et indispose la lectrice. Tout au long de son livre, l'auteure nous donne l'impression qu'elle cherche à secouer la lectrice avec ses gros mots, fort inutiles qui servent à soustraire l'âme aux beaux passages dont voici un exemple, poétique: «Le corps en quête de savoir est sans bornes, flirte avec les conventions, fait la cour au chaos, expose ses étendues intimes, l'intuition des mots, l'accouplement des pensées, la huée du pouls à la recherche d'un rythme nouveau.»

Or comment la critique répond-elle à la question posée plus haut? L'auteure peut autant qu'elle le désire réserver son grand talent aux déchets des gros mots ou à des phrases interminables, pourvu qu'elle respecte les règles de la représentation de la langue et ne mène pas en mal la patience de la lectrice et du lecteur.

Où donc est-il passé mon Kamouraska?

DEAR EDITOR AND FRIENDS: LETTERS FROM RURAL WOMEN OF THE NORTH-WEST, 1900-1920.

LIFE WRITING SERIES 4

Norah L. Lewis, Ed. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998.

BY PAM MCDERMID

This recent title in the Life Writing series is a great example of our history, both in content and format. More than 100 women speak to us of our history through their letters to the "women's pages" of early 20th-century agricultural newspapers in the four western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia).

It is a fascinating and poignant record, with the issues of the time (racism, property rights, suffrage, etc.) presented in the voices of the women who lived with their impact on an everyday basis. They were not in the forefront of the struggles for change; they were just the extraordinary, ordinary women settlers of this vast part of our country.

The "women's pages" provided a forum for women "as isolated by language, religion, ethnic origin, or deep-rooted prejudices as they were by distance." They expressed their feelings and ideas and learned about the lives of other women in similar situations. The volume also includes some of their photos, an introduction giving an historical context, and a list of additional readings, which encourages further exploration by readers.

Editors of the "pages" were women interested in all aspects of the lives of women and were advocates for improved social, financial, legal, and political conditions. At a time when "women's place is in the home" dominated, the employment of these edi-

tors was, in itself, a strong statement about their interest in changing the status quo.

Women such as Kate Simpson Hayes, first female journalist in the West (*Manitoba Free Press*), Lillian Beynon Thomas who worked closely with Nellie McClung, Francis Marion Beynon (*Grain Grower's Guide*), a dedicated suffragist, and Violet MacNaughton, (*Saturday Press* and *Prairie Farm*, first president of the Saskatchewan Equal Franchise League), understood the problems faced by rural women. They were accessible to women throughout the far-flung communities, and an important source of support. Women's suffrage was not widely endorsed and the editors and their readers added their voices to those of organized labour, feminist reformers and women's organizations.

The letters explicate public issues in a very personal/private way. "I am a very poor woman ... the stamp and paper were given to me by a kind friend.... I live on a farm ... and have most of the work to do for my husband is almost helpless having hurt his back lifting logs" (1900). "I heard a remark made by an Englishman that he would as soon shoot a Scandinavian as an Indian" (1901). "... [T]he time has come when it is necessary for some provision whereby a woman may acquire a homestead without being a widow" (1905). "We decided I should go home and stay with my parents until the birth of our third child After the birth ... I arrived and he told me he did not consider me his wife and to get off his place.... He has not given me one cent" (1908). "I've just discovered that my husband has mortgaged our homestead and the money all paid away" (1912).

"I found men taking work from women and women taking what was left, generally the hardest and the dirtiest.... Now I have made good, people don't seem to think I was unwomanly" (1914). "Before I was married, I worked in an office from 8 to 6 ... I had an occupation....