

EDITORIAL

Mary O'Brien's first book is dedicated to the aunts who raised her in working-class Glasgow and "who taught me that women are strong." By all accounts she was a "bold child," cheeky and irreverent. Her outstanding talent and spirited sense of justice and the absurd were evident too as a young woman. During her midwifery training she won the MacKay Hart Prize for Obstetrics but was almost not awarded it because, much to the merriment of the whole hospital, she had dubbed Dr. MacKay Hart's very large and very long car "The Room and Kitchen" (a postwar term for a small two-room apartment often occupied by a large family).

It was the women's movement that provided the space for Mary to fully realize and grow beyond her early promise as a troublemaker and iconoclast into full stature as philosopher and visionary. Otherwise this would not have been possible. And Mary was among the first and most insistent in recognizing this. Mary believed that people hold the future, women hold the future: "the future is not the product of mind but the product of praxis, the unity of theory and action. What we must have is the continuation of the struggle to transform" (*The Politics of Reproduction* 209).

As a mature female graduate student Mary was an oddity. She was also bold, brilliant, and very brave. She seized the time of our growing collective power to write dangerous books that make so much sense—the most sense of all! How fragile and under threat these moments and matrices are, is evident in Mary's own life and work. She trained as a political theorist but no Political Science Department hired her, a fate not uncommon among feminist political science graduates. Few hired women in 1980, much less feminists.

Today, across Canada, many Political Science Departments are reacting repressively to women's increasing presence and increasing demands. Confident and activist female graduate students are experienced as a serious and intolerable threat. The last few years have seen feminist and anti-racist struggles in the Political Science Departments of the University of Victoria, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Manitoba (see the lead article in *Women's Education des femmes*, Spring 1996, Volume.12, Number 1).

The continuity of feminist work and scholarship is deliberately interrupted by omission and commission. At the University of Victoria, for example, where Somer Brodribb taught Mary O'Brien's work to enthusiastic and active feminist

students, their shared intellectual excitement and commitment was dismissed by one of the male faculty members in a widely circulated attack as mindless subservience to Somer, portrayed as a fundamentalist leader in the cult of Mary O'Brien, herself characterized as a McCarthyite manhating goddess (for more information see Dorothy Smith's article in the *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 1997, Volume IX, Number 2).

What are we to do in the face of such punitive rage against women's admiration for wise women's work? How can we resist the systematic interruption of women's knowledge of each other across generations? Mary's irreverent wit, irrepressible *joie de vivre*, powerful and life-affirming women identification, accessible brilliance, simple courage, and breathtaking oratory is an inspiration for us. She thoroughly enjoyed our collective and conscious efforts to remember and sustain feminist work and support those who engage in it everywhere as we strive to change the world.

Celebrating her life and work in this volume is one small and pleasurable part of this continuing struggle. It has fittingly been a project shared with many. We would like to thank Luciana Ricciutelli and Jennifer Liptrot of *Canadian Woman Studies* who worked tirelessly and brilliantly under tremendous time pressure with grace and flare as well as Cath McNaughton, Gail Geltner, Frieda Forman, Pam Harris, Didi Khayatt, Phil Masters, Helen Reznowich, Robyn Smith, Sylvia Sommers, Jennifer Spencer.

SOMER BRODRIBB AND ANGELA MILES



Angela Miles, Mary O'Brien, and Somer Brodribb, June 1996.

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