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Review of Images of Women in Literature

The Feminist Press

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WOMEN, RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTION by Sheila Rowbotham (Pantheon, New York, 1972: \$7.95) illuminates the continuity and universality of women's movements for change. A British historian, a Marxist and a feminist, Rowbotham chronicles the history of European and American women from the late renaissance to the early twentieth century. Separate chapters on women in the Soviet Union and China precede three case studies of women in Algeria, Cuba, and Vietnam. Throughout, the author traces two strata of women activists: (1) middle and upper class women wanting the privileges of their brothers—emancipation and education, and, more recently, the right to interesting and productive work; (2) and this is the focus of her book, women who have always been workers, generally impoverished ones, whose history, at least before the twentieth century, is almost wholly lost or not yet found. Rowbotham introduces us not only to the varieties of subjugation women have endured, but to scores of heroic women, named and unnamed, who have brought forward the idea of liberation.

LA MUJER: EN PIE DE LUCHA, edited by Dorinda Moreno (Espina del Norte, San Francisco, 1973: paper, \$8.50), should please those teachers who have felt the lack of materials by and about Latin women. The book has ten chapters: four on Chicanas; one on other Third World women in North America; one on women in Mexico, one on Cuban women, and one on women in other Latin American countries. There is a chapter on children; one on Third World women and the Vietnamese War; and one on *El Hombre: Contemporaneo y Tradicional*, containing some interesting speculations about *machismo*. The contents include artwork and photographs, and poetry, essays, and political manifestos—some in Spanish, some in English. The quality is sometimes uneven, but the book is, on the whole, a testament to the creativity, productiveness, and diversity of the women of La Raza.

SEXISM IN SCHOOL AND SOCIETY by Nancy Frazier and Myra Sadker (Harper and Row, New York, 1973: paper, \$2.95) is among the first titles in a new series of texts meant for undergraduate education majors interested in "Critical Issues." It will also be useful for parents, teachers, and others looking for a concise account of the failure of schools and colleges to serve the sexes equally. In addition to chapters on sexist practices and curriculum in elementary schools and high schools, there is a chapter on "The Male University." A chapter called "Who Is Sylvia? What Is She?" usefully surveys theories of patriarchy, the ubiquitous quarrel between the geneticists and the environmentalists, and the work of Freud and others. All chapters review relevant studies and reports, documented thoroughly, so that the footnotes also provide a mine of information and bibliography. Despite the dismal portrait the authors are forced to draw, their book is never depressing. Rather, they remind us that teachers are finding in a knowledge of facts and theories the energy and hope with which to effect change.

UNLEARNING THE LIE: SEXISM IN SCHOOL by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison (Liveright, New York, 1973: \$6.95) is a brief and readable account of a two-year effort to change sexist attitudes, beliefs, and practices, in and out of the curriculum, at a private, multi-racial elementary school in Brooklyn, New York. Harrison, a writer and the parent of two children who attend The Woodward School, makes palpable both her own reluctant conversion to feminism and the process initiated by the instrument of change, the "Sex-role Committee." A group of white female parents, the Committee found itself in an adversary position, not only in relation to the school's staff and to male parents, but, since the school is multi-racial, to black female parents who made up a parallel Black Studies Committee. The book concludes with a group of papers about

women's lives, written and researched collectively, and then climactically presented, by a Committee finally including both black and white women, to an audience of teachers and other parents. Harrison's book usefully documents a process of changing an institution; we have too few such books.

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN FICTION: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES, edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1972: paper, \$4.00), gathers some of the best examples of feminist literary criticism, grouping them in four categories: the woman as heroine (traditional views), the invisible woman (the woman as "other"), the woman as hero (women as whole people), and feminist aesthetics. There are essays on the works of individual writers, male and female; on women in the genre—fiction, science fiction, popular literature; on thematic and structural problems; and on feminist criticism itself. The quality of the essays is impressive; taken as a whole, they demonstrate the validity and vitality of a critical method that combines, at its best, three things: the rigor of close textual analysis; the feminist's awareness of the cultural, historical, and sociological contexts that have shaped the lives and work of women; and the courage, arising from this awareness, to confront literature with a personal immediacy. That is, to ask: what does this work have to say to me?

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN LITERATURE, edited by Mary Anne Ferguson (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1973: paper, \$5.00), provides a thoughtful selection of short stories and poems, arranged around the images of the submissive wife, the mother, the dominating wife, the seductress-goddess, the sex object, and, a welcome inclusion, the liberated woman. The introductory material brings historical and sociological analysis to bear on the literary characterizations of each image. Ferguson helpfully distinguishes between the terms "archetype" and "stereotype," demonstrating how at times the two reinforce one another at the expense of realistic portrayals of real women. Even if one chooses not to follow her format in one's own course, the range and quality of the selections—from Mailer and Hemingway to Olsen and Lessing—make it one of the more useful anthologies on women and literature.

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM THE CLEARINGHOUSE

Feminist Resources for Schools and Colleges: A Guide to Curriculum Materials. Eds. Carol Ahlum and Jacqueline M. Fralley. Annotated bibliography for teachers who want to know where to begin, what to study and what's available for students. Prices, facts on how to order where to write. 16 pp. \$1.00 plus \$.25 postage and handling.

High School Feminist Studies. Eds. Carol Ahlum and Jacqueline M. Fralley. The first published collection of high school course syllabi, bibliographies and materials. Introduction provides an overview and evaluation. 130 pp. \$2.50 plus \$.50 postage and handling.

Nonsexist Curricular Materials for Elementary Schools. Ed. by Laurie Olsen Johnson. Kit including: consciousness raising materials for the teacher; bibliography on sexism in schools; checklists and worksheets for observing and analyzing classrooms and school systems; curriculum materials and units; student workbooks and bibliography.

Order from: The Clearinghouse on Women's Studies, The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, N.Y. 11568.