

they become tank drivers, security guards and combatants wielding AK-47s with a casual elegance that is at once a horrifying and a mesmerizing affirmation of the power that some women gain in times of immense social upheaval.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone teaching a course in gender and peace studies – or courses on women's work – since it so vividly illustrates the varied roles that women must take on in wartime and the aftermath. Looking at the book with others, I found that the images, and Matthews' powerful prose, were a catalyst to open up discussions of how women respond to the opportunities offered, as well as lost, in conflict zones. Because their social roles are shaped by so extreme a spectrum of experience, it is sometimes difficult to conceive that in wartime, some women can become violent, gun-toting amazons while others become caregivers to child soldiers; that some weep over children who have died of displacement-induced hunger while others search for the strength to care for children conceived through rape. Matthews' photographs offer a testimony to how women manage to bear all these contradictions; I am grateful for the opportunity she gives us to share stories that are so often untold.

For a preview of the images and text in Jenny Matthews' *Women and War*, go to <http://www.actionaid.org/newsandmedia/gallery/gallery.shtml#>

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Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada: A Question of Ethics. Marie Carrière. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002; viii + 243 pages; ISBN 0-8020-3620-1; \$55.00 (cloth).

Marie Carrière's study of the work of five contemporary women writers from French and English Canada is a welcome assessment of "writing in the feminine" from the critical vantage point that is permitted by twenty years' distance. A feminist literary movement of the seventies and eighties, "Writing in the Feminine" was launched in Quebec by women writers who had become

disenchanted with the arid formalism of Québécois "modernité" and wanted to broach questions of gender oppression and female specificity in their writing. The movement soon spiralled out into English Canada, generating a fertile exchange across the linguistic and cultural divide, between feminist writers of theoretically-informed, genre-blending texts. Carrière's approach is not to compare French and English versions of "Writing in the Feminine," however; instead, it is to read this body of writing from what she calls a "late nineties perspective," that is to say, through the lens of ethical philosophy: the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Luce Irigaray. This fresh angle not only permits her to include a few less obvious practitioners of "writing in the feminine" in her canon (she treats the work of the poet, Di Brandt, for example), it also allows her to complicate the writing's obvious concern with female selfhood with questions about ethical relations to others, especially to the other woman. Carrière's thesis, elaborated through a sequence of close readings, is that individual female selfhood is secondary to ethical intersubjectivity in this body of writing: identity, in other words, is subordinate to alterity. What occupies the place of alterity throughout is the maternal, a maternal understood not in conventional terms as the negative of the masculine but rather as a "same other," a point of identification and differentiation for the feminist subject. While *Writing in the Feminine* traces the lineage of poststructuralist feminist thinking about the maternal that influences this set of writers, the book does not acknowledge the critique of this preoccupation with the mother-daughter relation (made by Teresa de Lauretis and others) as another form of sexual indifference that obscures specifically erotic relations between women. Carrière's nuanced readings are attentive to differences in strategy and tone amongst this set of writers and she navigates their theoretical and philosophical debts adeptly, only occasionally offering interpretations that reduce the creative texts to paraphrases of theory. But the boldest, most interesting section of the book is the final one, which reshuffles the pairings of writers established earlier on in the book, tracing a different set of connections in light of some difficult questions about the implications of idealism, escapism, and reversions to other forms of transcendental

conceptualization in the writing.

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Feminist Engagements: Reading, Resisting, and Revisioning Male Theorists in Education and Cultural Studies. Kathleen Weiler, editor. New York: Routledge, 2001; 256 pages; ISBN 0415925762; \$21.95US (paper).

The essays in *Feminist Engagements* respond to a very good and timely question: what is the significance of feminist engagements with male theorists? The question invites some serious considerations of what counts as feminist scholarship and how this scholarship relates to what is often seen as masculinity masquerading as universalism. On the whole, however, the collection is markedly uneven in terms of the calibre of arguments made in the individual essays. This is to be expected in any collection of essays, but the bimodal quality distribution in *Feminist Engagements* is especially pronounced.

Rather than using feminist engagements with male theorists as occasions to further our thinking *about* the uneasy and useful tensions that get produced, many of the essays here seem just to point to them. At least half the authors tend to rehearse common complaints about male theorists (who don't acknowledge women in their paradigms or whose paradigms are actively sexist). This is an obvious starting point. But too often the essays skip to an equally obvious endpoint (that feminists find male theorists and their paradigms extremely useful for doing feminist work) without lingering enough on the very interesting middle points. Some essays tend to rely heavily on summarizing the work of male theorists (essays by Cally White, Jane Kenway, and Annette Henry, for example) while authors such as Elizabeth Adams evince more adoration than critique.

This said, some essays do engage with the problem in more subtle and careful ways. Particularly good are Frances Maher's essay on John Dewey, Kathleen Weiler's "Rereading [of] Paulo Freire," Alice Pitt's psychoanalytic inquiry into "The Dreamwork of Autobiography," and Patti

Lather's assessment of "Critical Pedagogy and Its Complicities." For instance, instead of pointing out particular silences in Dewey's thought, Maher investigates theories of pedagogy to explore "how their silences about gender...have operated to silence and confuse *as well as liberate and encourage*" (15; my emphasis). Her original and intricate analysis considers "the female teacher" in Dewey's work as a particular kind to authority figure in order to examine the gendered assumptions behind both feminist theory and progressive education. Weiler's, perhaps the best essay in the collection, provides a trenchant critique of Paulo Freire's troubled relationship to feminism and his claims to actually be a woman. She attends carefully to Freire's use of pronouns and considers what is at stake when editors and translators try to gloss over Freire's sexism. Meanwhile, Pitt uses psychoanalytic theory and an analysis of trauma to consider education beyond the moment of actual knowledge transmission. She provocatively suggests that "the detours of *Nasträglichkeit* [deferred revision]...return us to the problem of education, of how knowledge comes to matter in belated time" (104). Finally, Lather's work is a theoretical *tour de force*, engaging with the history and critique of post-modern theory to highlight the possibility of "knowing from our failures of knowledge" (188) and gesturing to "a double-edged story that attests to the possibilities of feminist practice yet, in the very telling, registers the limits of it as a vehicle for claiming truth" (191). Her analysis indexes the liberatory power of feminism while acknowledging the limitations and the failures of knowledge that feminism can produce. These four essays all advance feminist thinking by assessing the analytical paradigms that we have inherited.

This book needs more essays like its strongest ones - essays that analyze feminist theory's relationships to histories of theory more generally. As a collection overall, the unevenness of *Feminist Engagements* can be said to belie the work of the best thinkers between its covers.

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