

## Letter to the Editors

Dear Atlantis Editors,

When I was an active publisher, I chose not to respond to what I considered inaccurate or unfair reviews of books our company published and I encouraged our authors to do the same. No longer in the publishing world, I've given myself permission to bring to your attention the errors and omissions included in your reviews of *Reclaiming the Future: Women's Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Somer Brodribb. I'm also taking this opportunity to provide you with information about the state of feminist publishing in general, and gynergy books in particular, given what appears to be a lack of knowledge in these areas by your reviewers.

I strongly believe that the editor and contributors to *Reclaiming the Future* deserve professional treatment by a feminist journal; and I hope that those of you who teach Women's Studies or related subjects will inform yourselves, your students, your colleagues and your readers about the state of independent feminist publishing, given that it is very close to disappearing. It seems that there is a big gulf between those who publish feminist work, those who teach in this field, and those who review books published by small, independent feminist houses. This is truly unfortunate given our close connection to feminism in the past and, hopefully, in the future.

A little background: almost two years ago, when gynergy books was still an active independent feminist press, *Atlantis* requested six copies of *Reclaiming the Future: Women's Strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Somer Brodribb. We were very surprised to be asked for so many review copies and almost didn't send them to you. (The standard practice in the industry is to send one review copy per journal, newspaper, etc.) In the end, we concluded that you, a small Women's Studies journal, must be in tighter financial straits than a feminist publishing house so, in the interests of having an Atlantic Canadian studies journal review an important and one-of-a-kind millennial book from the only active

English-language feminist publishing house east of Toronto, we sent off the six copies.

And now, two years after sending you those copies, and a year after gynergy books has been sold and is no longer an independent feminist house, four editorial members of *Atlantis* have published their perspectives. Here are my comments:

- gynergy books stopped publishing in October 2000, having been sold. Libby Oughton started the press in 1987 and sold it to me, Louise Fleming, two years later, in October 1989, not in the early 90s as Rhoda Zuk states. And although Elly Danica's book and Nicole Brossard's chapbook were groundbreaking works, mentioning only them and not any of the 60 feminist books that were published between 1989 and 2000, when Louise Fleming and Sibyl Frei ran the press, is an oversight that surprised me from a Women's Studies journal. I think fact checking is important. Failure to mention that gynergy books was sold and to note the closure of other feminist presses, is a serious omission. In Canada, Press Gang, Sister Vision, the Women's Press and gynergy books are mostly gone or folded into other, bigger presses, who bought up the backlist. In the United States, Firebrand, Papier-Mache, Aunt Lute, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, Third Side, to name only a few, are no longer publishing. And then there are the feminist bookstores, whose numbers decrease alarmingly each year.
- Equating mixed reviews from within *Atlantis* as perhaps "an indication of more astute direction [needed] from publishers" seems very tenuous in the face of a lack of serious attention to the book (see Marilyn Porter's article which begins with "I read this book while serving as a scrutineer during the Canadian Federal election in November

2000"), or a lack of understanding of the importance of including current historical information on global activism for its own sake (Donna Varga thinks it would have been a stronger contribution had the organizers of the Women's March 2000 further developed their list of demands "so as to discuss strategies for working toward their achievement"). In the real world, it took hard work, across continents and languages, in extremely tight time frames, to be able to include the information at all, in a book that was released at the end of 1999.

produce: a feminist book to ring in the new millennium, hopeful without the hype, a trade book with crossover potential, an accessible book that had a diversity of voices. An activist book that would include insights into cyberspace. A tall order, indeed, which we took to Dr. Somer Brodribb, a well-respected activist and academic who had already published with a feminist press. Fortunately for us, Somer took on the project. We think she did an excellent job in organizing the project, soliciting articles from over 100 women, narrowing them down into a cohesive collection, ensuring a range of subjects and a voices and an overarching theme of strategies to help us go forward.

Of course, every published project has to stand up to critical scrutiny and in no way am I suggesting that *Reclaiming the Future* be spared such scrutiny. It is an important book for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it deserved a careful and thoughtful review by a Women's Studies journal. In my estimation, *Atlantis* didn't deliver.

Louise Fleming  
Former publisher  
gynergy books

- How many collections are there which include activists, academics, young feminists, First Nations women, a Canadian editor and publisher and eight Canadian contributors, in a book published by a feminist press about the millennium? None, to my knowledge. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how *Reclaiming the Future* could be considered "a conventional book spiced up by creative pieces" or that there is "...little in the volume to provide hope and strategies for a better future for women." Yet not one of your reviewers situates *Reclaiming the Future* as the only feminist trade book to appear among the hundreds of books released as part of millennium fever, a book that avoids the hype, seeks out new ground, hopeful ground as the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins.
- No, it wasn't a project that the editor presented to us; a careful reading of the book makes that clear. (And again, checking the facts is always an option.) It was the result of several book ideas generated at brainstorming sessions we held in our PEI community in early 1996. Top of the wish list of books to