

writers who did know in their own lives and experience what it was to endure patriarchy's assaults on body, mind and spirit. This knowledge would have meant so much to me in my thirties, when I searched so passionately for connection to the writers I loved, some understanding of the pain I endured, but was then too untutored to find.

Brenda Daly's *Authoring A Life* has been on my "must read" list for several years as references kept showing up in other texts I read. Daly's theoretical work on how an abused woman achieves what I have long termed "authorial authority" is important. She quotes Judith Herman: "...the act of authoring is an essential step in the recovery process..." (Daly, 3). I have seen this many times - women by the thousands are writing their lives and thereby recreating their lives as adults in the process of coming to terms with childhood abuse. Daly further says that "...recovery is primarily, though not exclusively, a linguistic event, an act of authorship by which a woman transforms her victim self into her ideal self" (Daly, 3). I would qualify this somewhat and propose that we rethink our ideal selves and work toward them, since I'm not sure any ideal self is entirely achievable, however much I believe in the importance of having such a goal.

I did wish in this book for more theory and a condensed version of her life story. I particularly appreciate her point about the danger of public speaking: "...visibility makes one vulnerable, threatening the loss of the writer's authorial ear and voice. Once again: objectifying women, making spectacles of them, is a strategy for denying them public voices, for taking away their authority" (Daly, 212). Having once been described by a woman journalist, on air, as Canada's most famous victim, I know precisely what she's talking about and the validation here was very useful. The texts written by women, most unpublished because there is a publishing chill around stories of child abuse, and memoirs by women - unless they are very famous - don't make it to the bookstores. We can learn to give ourselves permission to create our own adult woman's authority, but it doesn't mean anyone will be willing to publish it or make it available to readers. We have a long way yet to go to change this, but Daly's contribution will help us think about the process and realize just what we are engaged in. Not mere useless scribbling as some would have it

(and I've heard women describe their work this way too, though that doesn't seem to stop them), but a rebuilding of our strength, word by word, line by line, page by page. I wrote journals for thirteen years before I was strong enough to write my first book; thirteen years of trying each day to give myself permission to speak in my own voice about my own pain.

Each of these books was a challenge to my thinking. I recommend them to you in the hope that you will discover new directions for your own thinking, research and writing.

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***Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace.*** Produced and directed by Patricia Kipping. Canada; 1999; 46 minutes; VHS; color; English; distributed by Perversity Productions Inc.

***Democracy à la Maude.*** Directed by Patricia Kearns. Produced by Annette Clarke and Signe Johansson. Canada; 1998; 61 minutes; VHS; color; English; distributed in Canada by the National Film Board and in the United States by Bullfrog Films, [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com).

*Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace* and *Democracy à la Maude* are two recent documentaries focusing on the underdeveloped subject of Canadian women who have shaped the country and the culture we live in. *Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace* invites the viewer to experience a very personal portrait of Muriel Duckworth, a leading peace activist and founding member of the Canada Council for International Cooperation. Told within the framework of a journey to her cottage, the documentary explores Duckworth's relationship with filmmaker Patricia Kipping and the way in which Duckworth's commitment to social activism has influenced Kipping's *Life*. In contrast, Patricia Kearns' *Democracy à la Maude* provides a more conventional political biography of Maude Barlow, president of the Council of Canadians, the largest citizens' group in Canada and a Canadian social

activist of international repute. Kearns' film explores Barlow's formative years and personal life within the context of her political activism and examines how that activism has helped shape the Canadian political landscape.

*Democracy à la Maude*, in keeping with its more traditional approach, is an interactive documentary that relies on the familiar conventions of the genre, including archival footage and interviews. The film is more technically accomplished than *Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace*, transiting smoothly from depicting her discovery of feminism in the 1970s, to her early political activism (which began when she became the director of Equal Opportunity for the city of Ottawa), to her involvement with the Liberal Party, to her stand against free trade. Finally, it examines her move from mainstream politics to head the Council of Canadians and chronicles her most recent activism, including a conflict with Conrad Black concerning his takeover of Canadian newspapers, which becomes a narrative catalyst for discussing her participation and achievements in creating social change.

Aesthetically, *Democracy à la Maude* combines straightforward classical documentary aesthetics with neutral voice-over narration. Well-chosen low angle shots of Barlow as she speaks support the respectful tone of the work. In particular, slow zooms in are used for emphasis as she discusses serious issues. Such visual strategies reinforce a narrative approach that seeks to venerate Barlow and to place her within context as one of Canada's most influential activists.

In *Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace*, Kipping, drawing on performative documentary techniques, becomes herself a character in her documentary and it is her personal portrait of Duckworth that drives the film through the use of interviews, archival footage and home movies framed within her own interaction with the narrative. This is evidenced by Kipping's opening narration where she states plainly that "each person has a special story about Muriel. I'm making this documentary about mine." The self-reflectivity provides a narrative structure that is fresher and less conventional than that of *Democracy à la Maude* on several levels. First, the central organizing impulse of sharing a train journey with Muriel to her cabin provides a certain grounding for what would

otherwise be a disparate assortment of recollections. Second, the interpretive use of images foregrounds an emotional sense of Duckworth and Kipping's relationship to her, an intimacy that makes this portrait very different in feel from that of Barlow in *Democracy à la Maude*. For example, at the midpoint of the film, Kipping describes how she arrived at Duckworth's apartment during a snowstorm to find the activist close to death from meningitis. As Duckworth comments in voice-over that she was certainly not prepared to die, shots of water rippling and glinting in the sunlight are superimposed over slow motion shots of Duckworth in close-up profile and then in medium shots as she rises out of the water after a swim. Duckworth goes on to discuss her spiritual and physical strength as Kipping evokes water as a source of life, explaining on voice-over that Muriel's energy comes from an unnamable, ancient quality.

If one of the key strengths is the film's formative approach, it is also at the heart of its major weakness. As engaging as *Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace* is, Kipping fails to give a distinct enough portrait of Duckworth's contributions as an activist, perhaps assuming that a general audience has a greater grasp of her subject than it does. *Democracy à la Maude* is more successful at blending personal information with a sense of Barlow's professional accomplishments. However, because it is a veneration of Barlow, there is little critical sense of her actions and their political implications, save a few unpleasant comments made by Conrad Black. This ultimately weakens Kearns' portrayal of Barlow by making it obviously one-sided.

Ultimately, however, both *Democracy à la Maude* and *Muriel Duckworth: Practising Peace* achieve their main objectives in bringing to the screen women of historical and political importance. The films have a wide variety of potential audiences and can generate debate in a range of disciplines, including Women's Studies, Political Science, Canadian history and Social Justice, to name a few. Well worth viewing, both films are welcome additions to the slim canon focused on women's roles in activism and politics.

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