

In nine chapters and a postscript, Faith presents a multi-faceted analysis of Madonna's beginning career through to the Fall of 1997 when the film, *Evita*, in which she plays Eva Peron, was released and her daughter, Lourdes, was born. The book contextualizes the place of Madonna within popular culture, addresses her vast and fascinating contradictions and provides a rollicking, if sometimes repetitive, analysis of Madonna and the postmodern cultural world she (and we) inhabit. Faith provides extensive discussions of Madonna's work as it relates to identity politics, s/m erotica, pornography, censorship and "the similar threads of inquiry" (75) shared by Madonna and Foucault (yes, that one!). The appendix, by Frances Wasserlein, provides a useful, if highly - and non-fan - selected, index of Madonna's artistic productivity in theatre, video, film, and disc.

Faith treats Madonna fairly and without judgmental overreach, an accomplishment for a self-described "sexual conservative, although lesbian identified" (33). Faith draws from a wide and impressive scope of criticism, both academic and popular, and she includes a large number of Canadian citations. The juxtaposition of discourses can be sometimes jarring for the reader (Judith Butler meets Norman Mailer), yet, it demonstrates the border-crossings that good scholars of culture must themselves execute to produce effective and (more widely appealing) criticism.

There are points on which a reader might quibble with Faith. She, arguably, fails to appreciate fully the agenic possibilities of reclamation and reinvention (see, for example, her discussion of sadomasochism in chapter 3). She perceives Madonna's assertion that she is not a lesbian (Chapter 5) narrowly, as a claim to heterosexual privilege only (rather than possibly the refusal of categorization and fixed sexual identity, for example). Nor does Faith consider the contentious point that Madonna's representations of eroticized childhood acknowledge that children are sexual - as well as exploitively sexualized - creatures in order to refuse, rather than participate in, the myth of childhood innocence produced from adult anxieties of the very sort Faith expresses.

Still for all, this book is a useful contribution to a less reactionary and more measured discussion of

Madonna's cultural impact and will likely be read by scholars, students, cultural critics and Madonna fans and detractors, alike. With the release of a new compact disc, *Ray of Light*, and despite having been shut out of the Oscars by the Academy, Madonna continues to hold our attention. As Faith's book attests, Madonna is taken seriously in this "academy" where rigorous cultural criticism continues to reveal the political losses accrued through reactionary or reductive responses to the popular.

For those who pay attention, as fans and/or as informed critics, it is clear there is more to Madonna - and to her fans' persistent loyalty, fascination and devotion - than meets the eye. Often, the superficial public gaze on Madonna does not see beyond sex. But, as Madonna herself says of this bawdy persona: "Everybody probably thinks I'm a raving nymphomaniac, that I have an insatiable appetite, when the truth is, I'd rather read a book." This book? Or would she prefer Foucault?!

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Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader. Martha Vicinus, ed. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1996; illustrations; 273 pages; ISBN 0-253-21038-0; \$16.95 US.

Classics in Lesbian Studies. Esther D. Rothblum, ed. Harrington Park Press, An Imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc, New York, London, 1997; 286 pages; ISBN 1-56023-093-2; \$24.95 US.

In each of these texts, the editors offer us what they propose as an historical overview of some of the most significant recent writings on or about lesbian identities. Both texts offer an interdisciplinary approach to exploring lesbian identities, including essays from both the liberal arts and the social sciences. Each text operates as a sort of historical document, although these documents differ greatly in form and content. Other

than the fact that these are both edited collections of writing about lesbians, the two texts have remarkably little in common.

Each of the essays in *Lesbian Subjects* provides an overview of, or represents a moment in, the ways feminism has explored or constituted the lesbian subject. This collection offers valuable insights into the recent history of feminist discourse on and around gender, identity, and sexuality. Many of the essays take place at the level of nosebleed high theory, which may make them inaccessible for readers not familiar with pomo homo linguistics. Overall, this text provides a nicely balanced series of articles which ask (and sometimes answer) what or who is a lesbian anyway? how can or should we define the term lesbian? and what relation does this identity category have to gender, race, sexuality, and class?

Space limitations preclude critiques of all of the articles in this collection; I will highlight two that I found particularly delightful. Akasha (Gloria) Hull's essay "Researching Alice Dunbar Nelson: A Personal Literary Perspective" provides useful insights into the process of historical inquiry, emphasizing the ways in which our research cannot be dis-connected from ourselves. This essay includes a brief but eloquent statement of the fundamental principles of doing 'feminist (or critical) research and stands as an example of the importance of self-reflexivity in developing and maintaining connectedness to the subject in and of research. Hull's narrative offers a poignant reminder of the ways in which lesbian history is or can so easily be re-written (or excluded) to suit the needs of the women who write it.

In "The Gender Closet: Lesbian Disappearance under the Sign 'Women'," Cheshire Calhoun critically examines how gender, as deployed in and through feminist theoretical frameworks, has served to "closet" lesbians. Calhoun provides clear summaries and then pulls together several key arguments on the relation between gender, sex, sexuality, and lesbian subjectivity. For Calhoun, the key question is not "are lesbians 'women'?" She suggests that feminism fails as a theoretical framework for capturing lesbian experience because: it has not adequately theorized heterosexism; its political commitments blur the

distinctions between heterosexual and lesbian sexualities; and it operates within a binary sex-gender system. In short, feminist theory has produced "woman" as a category that cannot contain lesbians.

Many of the essays in *Lesbian Subjects* offer clear and concise overviews of the debates within feminist and lesbian communities around who is (or should be) considered the subject of lesbian inquiry, including the debates surrounding the politics of lesbian S/M, and butch-femme identities. The essays in this text would fit as easily in the disciplinary category Queer Theory as they do in Lesbian or Feminist Studies and would be most useful for anyone working in and through a critical feminist perspective.

The essays in *Classics in Lesbian Studies* each offer a moment in the discourse on the lesbian as object rather than subject of inquiry. The essays offered in this text operate as examples of the limitations critiqued by many of the authors in *Lesbian Subjects*. Rothblum does not articulate the criteria she used to determine that this particular collection of essays constitute "classics" in Lesbian Studies. Her aim was to "ensure that lesbian scholarship increases rather than fades away, so that theory, research, and new writing about lesbianism will continue while 'classic' pieces are reprinted and not forgotten by the new generation of scholars" (2-3). In many instances, Rothblum's selections offer vibrant examples of the ways in which the category lesbian has been constructed and deployed in late twentieth century scientific discourse. From this perspective, Rothblum's collection provides a complement to the scientific discourse on lesbians that took place at the end of the nineteenth century.

Paula C. Rust's "'Coming Out' in the Age of Social Constructionism: Sexual Identity Formation Among Lesbian and Bisexual Women" illustrates the ways in which late-twentieth-century sexology mirrors its nineteenth century predecessor. This is a classic example of the operations of totalizing categories. Rust consistently refers to the "average lesbian," but this actually denotes a young, white, urban, educated woman, a fact which is noted but never problematized. Ironically, this piece does conclude that static developmental schemata are inadequate for representing or understanding a

dynamic process like identity formation, arguing in favour of a constructionist model which is left for future researchers to produce. If this piece was, indeed, originally published in 1993, a variety of alternate approaches were already being constructed and implemented by lesbian and gay theorists.

In contrast, Margaret Schneider's "Sappho Was a Right-On Adolescent: Growing Up Lesbian" provides invaluable insight into the processes and practices in and through which young women identify as lesbians. This is a small, qualitative study of Toronto lesbian youth which still raises questions about where lesbians are now and where we have been. It is possible that the teens she interviewed are now the lesbians who have called the very boundaries of the category into question and subsequently re-written them.

The title *Classics in Lesbian Studies* offers a promise that the text fails to deliver. While there are some quite good pieces in Rothblum's collection, these are also readily available elsewhere. Some of the articles in this text could be quite useful as sites for methodological critique - for looking at the ways in which scientific discourse can construct and reify its own objects of inquiry.

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