

Book Reviews

To Write Like A Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction. Joanna Russ. Indiana University Press, 1995; ISBN 0-253-20983-8; \$12.96 (US)

I found reading this collection of essays to be enormously frustrating, not because of the content--which is everything a reader could ask of such a collection, that is interesting, challenging, opinionated and thoughtful--but because I was the only person I knew who was reading it. I had no one to talk with about it!

If you enjoy science fiction, this is definitely a book that you'll want to talk about. I found myself sneaking a few pages at times when I really didn't have time to read. It's the kind of book where, if you flip through, something will catch your eye, you'll start to read and you're hooked.

I especially enjoyed the third essay, "SF and Technology as Mystification." Russ uses the analogy of physical addiction (hypoglycaemia) to describe Star Wars as "addictive culture"--it partially satisfies a need but at the same time exacerbates it.

Publishers and movie-maker's formulas for a "real hit" are obviously those of an addiction: not just enjoyment or desire but *intense* craving (lines stretching around the block), not just intense craving but *sudden intense craving that must be satisfied at once* (opening in sixteen million theatres tomorrow, at a theatre near you!), not just sudden intense craving but *insatiable* craving; thus people see the film many times and--this is a dead giveaway--a minor industry grown up around the film: buttons, sweatshirts, TV programs about how the film was made, TV programs about how the first TV programs about the film were made and so on.

From this she proceeds to define technology, and to point out that endless discussions of technology are themselves an addiction, and besides, are missing the point. That is, talking about technology in and of itself allows us to focus on it in isolation without considering the social, political and economic interests the technology serves.

Russ's review of the film *A Boy and His Dog: The Final Solution* is another high point of the collection. This is a particularly hateful movie--though much-beloved by enough young males that it has achieved "cult movie" status -- and I have often had difficulty in making these boys see why I find it so offensive. (The fact that the male "hero" kills the female protagonist and feeds her to his dog doesn't seem to be enough for them. "But it's only one girl and she was bad. She deserved it.") Russ's analysis is thorough, dead on and riddled with controlled anger.

I could go on, as the range of topics included here is large, varied and interesting. Other essays include: "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction"; "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write;" "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic;" and "Recent Feminist Utopias." I highly recommend *To Write Like a Woman*. It's a good book to keep on your nightstand to dip into when you need a quick science fiction fix.

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Solution Three. Naomi Mitchison. Afterword by Susan M. Squier. The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995 (Originally published in 1976); ISBN 1-55861-096-0; \$10.95 (US)

Solution Three, originally published in 1976, offers a vision of a future in which our world has been pulled back from the brink of disaster induced by aggression and overpopulation through the

influence of two world leaders --"He" and "She."

Solution Three is an attempt to control population growth and reduce aggression by promoting homosexuality, labelling heterosexuality as "deviant" and producing leaders by cloning He and She. Heterosexuality is permitted legally but is socially unacceptable. Only the pregnancies of "Clone Mums," who carry the replicas of He and She, are sanctioned. Children produced through "random heterosexual couplings" are considered to be surplus population.

This programmed world is threatened by the appearance of a blight on genetically engineered grains and fruits (the "best" strains are grown exclusively, reducing the gene pool and leaving the remaining strains vulnerable to the unexpected blight). To counter this threat to the food supply, a search for wild grains to strengthen the existing genetic stock is launched.

Mitchison uses this search to draw an analogy with the potential danger of limiting the human gene pool. Wild triticum stains are found to strengthen the wheat stocks. What will be available to strengthen the human gene pool if it is critically diminished by the virtual elimination of sexual reproduction and only a few selected people are cloned? Human heroes ("He" and "She") had appeared when needed. Their "excellence" saved humanity. As circumstances change, will different types of "excellence" be needed? Could the children produced by "deviants" be the source of the genes needed to enrich and possibly save humanity in some unforeseen future? This is the beginning of a groping toward "Solution Four."

The society resulting from *Solution Three* is earnest and humourless. Unfortunately, the book is also pretty much earnest and humourless, although the author has some sly fun in the reversal of societal attitudes toward homo- and heterosexuality. This book is interesting in light of the recent explosion of interest in genetic technologies and the ethical and moral dilemmas they pose and can be recommended on this basis. However, the plot was minimal and the characters little more than representatives of various political positions. It was a worthwhile read but not much fun.

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Changing Our Lives: Doing Women's Studies. Gabriele Griffin (ed.). Pluto Press, London, England, 1994.; x + 196 pages, ISBN 0-7453-0752-3; \$16.95 (US)

The Journal Project: Dialogues and Conversations inside Women's Studies. Dana Putman, Dorothy Kidd, Elaine Doman, Patty Moore (eds.). Second Story Press, Toronto, 1995.; ii + 224; ISBN 0-929005-69-4; \$12.95.

These two texts provide an account of women's experiences of studying and teaching Women's Studies in the UK and Canada. As a general introduction, both books are informative in their attempt to tell the stories of what teaching and studying Women's Studies is about.

The UK contribution, *Changing our Lives*, is organized in two parts. First is a compilation of taped accounts of the experiences of students. The second part of *Changing our Lives* consists of short academic essays by Women's Studies tutors that examine some of the issues involved in teaching the subject. Topics discussed by students include why they became involved in Women's Studies, and their aspirations before, during and after the Women's Studies experience. For example, Elspeth began an MA in Women's Studies to gain academic recognition. However, she became disillusioned at the way that other students preferred independent learning to working collectively. A previous tutor of Women's Studies courses, she fantasized about being part of a group of radical feminists sitting together discussing French feminist theory.

At the beginning of *Changing our Lives*, there is a section called "Notes on Contributors." The female academics are listed with their titles and academic credentials while the students are presented in the following manner: "Suki, a mixed race woman with a history of modelling." The editor, Gabriele Griffin, states that many of the students did not want to be identified--hence the use of pseudonyms. Yet,