

Shortly after her mother retires back to the Cove and the big Corrigan home, Tessie receives a phone call from the Corrigan's next door neighbour: her mother has died. Tessie heads back to the Cove for the funeral, opens a letter from her mother to learn finally about her mother's marriage and her grandmother's rape. Tessie had planned to sell the Corrigan house, but "in her letter, Carmel had suggested she keep the house because as she put it, 'everyone needs a place to come back to'" (192). She proceeds up to the cemetery for the funeral, and we return to the beginning of the novel.

If Dohaney's writing style often borders on simplicity, this style works in the overall context of these straightforward women's lives. Dohaney employs metaphors and descriptions which evoke the raw environment of Newfoundland life and illuminate the courage and stamina of the Newfoundland people. For example, Dohaney begins her novel with this image:

Millie Morrissey and Tessie Corrigan perched at the edge of the grave like two gulls on a rock: heads tucked in out of the cold, legs stiff and unsteady from the biting wind. Powder-fine snow snaked around the gravestones and funnelled into the tops of their boots. It even curled up their coat sleeves, numbing their wrists. (7)

With these bold strokes of harsh realism and her effective dialogues in Newfoundland dialect, Dohaney colours her novel with moments of humour and sobriety, always avoiding sentimentality.

One of the most striking elements in these women's lives is the ineffectual presence of men. Vince is an adult-sized child who rapes without thought. Ned, once somewhat responsible, turns to alcohol to hide from the terrors of the war in his mind. Ed Strominski, Carmel's never-husband, is a bigamist. Dennis Walsh, Tessie's boyfriend, dominated by his mother, leaves Tessie for the priesthood. Even Martin, the most comically solid male presence, shows a deficiency in the form of tuberculosis. At one point, Bertha, rationalizing selling her meadows to buy Martin a car, explains that with the men away at war, "the women can't look after everything" (110). But in *The Corrigan Women*, we see that they must.

From the Latin *corrigo*, meaning correct, we get *corrigen-dum* or corrigible. Both mean things which must be corrected. Incurable means incurable,

something that cannot be corrected. By a fluke, the Corrigan women — grandmother, mother and daughter — all manage to keep their name, property and pride. They are a matriarchal peculiarity in a patriarchal world. However, they are not protected from the patriarchal world as outside forces penetrate their lives and alter their circumstances: the world wars, the issue of Confederation, the men that they marry and with whom they interact. Because they are a matriarchal line due to a series of male errors, these women are both correct and incorrect, correcting and corrigible. They are not victims in their harsh circumstances. They choose to survive. Tessie reflects on her mother and her grandmother as she walks through the old Corrigan house and realizes that she will keep their memory alive for her children:

She would tell them about Bertha and Carmel and Martin and the rest of the short-tailed Corrigan family that had withered down to her, Carmel's Tessie — and to them — the children of Carmel's Tessie. (192)

A triumphant story of matriarchal survival and courage in a patriarchal world, *The Corrigan Women* shows how the incorrigible past burns constantly in the present. Northrop Frye explains that the essence of tragedy is the sense of being in time: that once every action occurs, it carries with it inescapable consequences.¹ From Bertha's early morning departure from her father's house, to her rape, to World War I, to Carmel's birth, to her marriage to Ed Strominski, and right up to Carmel's Tessie, we see how each and every event, whether positive or negative, has not only created but also constantly effects the present.

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NOTE

1. Northrop Frye. *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy*. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967) 3.

Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema. Barbara Koenig Quart, *Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988, Pp. 288.*

Very few studies have been conducted on women feature filmmakers and yet, particularly since the 1970s, their works have been appreciated by the public,

acclaimed by critics, and rewarded at world festivals. Therefore, their significant contribution to cinema deserves to be studied seriously. This is what Barbara Koenig Quart sets out to do in *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema*.

In the introduction, the author stresses the remarkable vitality and historical impact of feature filmmaking by women, which dates back to the origins of cinema. French-born Alice Guy Blaché became, in 1896, the "world's first woman director and possibly the first director of either sex to bring a story-film to screen." Koenig Quart explains how, from that moment on, women kept making movies in spite of the many difficulties they encountered when entering a male-centered industry. In fact, to avoid being excluded from the industry, they often had to renounce their gender in order to obtain directorial status.

Yet, as the author points out, scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge their impressive body of work, the more impressive because created in the face of an adversity unknown to male directors. Feminist critics, particularly, have not analysed narrative films as readily as avant-garde or experimental works by women directors. Strongly influenced by theorists like Laura Mulvey, they have adopted an "anti-realist stance" which accounts for the lack of scholarship surrounding mainstream feature films. So Koenig Quart decided to fill the gap. But has she?

There are two major flaws in this study: a lack of clear focus and an approach which is more literary than cinematic. Let us first look at the lack of precise parameters, which is both deliberate and accidental. The author announces:

For this initial exploration ... of more or less mainstream feature films (mainstream in the sense of Truffaut and Bergman as well as Paul Mazursky), I have chosen the women directors and films that are in my view, quite simply, the strongest artistically.

So when she writes "mainstream," she means "narrative," and when she embarks on a personal study to analyse her favorite films, she opts out of a "neat selection of films tightly structured to support any theory or generalization." While it may be quite legitimate to avoid theory and to choose to be impressionistic, it does not amount to serious scholarship, particularly when there is no clear attempt

to define, in a rigorous manner, what is meant by "mainstream cinema," "narrative cinema," or "feminism." Therefore, puzzling and gratuitous comments, along with repetitions and contradictions, pepper a text which is not "open" but confusing, and it is then rather difficult to understand why certain films are labelled "feminist" when others are denied the privilege.

However, when the study takes nationalistic and unfortunate sexist overtones, then one can question Koenig Quart's conception of feminism. It is clear, to our author, that American cinema is "the greatest film industry in the world." To prove it, although she set out to analyse the "best narrative cinema," she includes American women directors whose works, she admits, do not have any real artistic merit, while she requires international recognition of non-Americans. However, Canadian cinema, which has achieved a world status, is apologetically reduced to two paragraphs about the "too cute and naive: *I've heard the Mermaids singing*," and is engulfed in the chapter devoted to American directors. Patricia Rozema is not the only one to suffer from derogatory remarks. Later, echoing the masculine critique from *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, Koenig Quart refers to Agnès Varda's "over prettiness" and to Diane Kurys as also being "too pretty."

Finally, there is no rationale for the choice of films. While, unquestionably, omissions had to be made, Koenig Quart should have explained how she decided to conduct her research, and on what grounds films were retained or rejected. In short, if countries like Britain are excluded, if Sally Potter is not mentioned while Germaine Dulac and Vera Chytilova have to coexist with "mainstream" filmmakers, if Lina Wertmüller is called "a recent predecessor" while Marguerite Duras is forgotten, if Wertmüller's films benefit from a fairly extensive coverage while Caviani's are briefly evoked, then some solid criteria should be provided. Otherwise, the study takes on a lightness of touch which seriously undermines its value.

If one looks now at the way Koenig Quart conducts her "study in-depth," again one is puzzled. She writes about film without using its language. This leads to comments which remain at the surface of the works, because diegesis takes precedence over discourse, and where the aesthetics of each director cannot be explored and discussed. The book is therefore poorly equipped to show "the emergence of a

new cinema." The new women cinema is not only a cinema which tells stories of "strong women." It is a new writing and, according to significant studies by North American and European theorists, this cinema defines itself by the way it addresses the spectators. Koenig Quart does not have to agree with the idea that the reading of the text is more significant than the text itself. She can go on preferring thematic to stylistic analysis, but can she avoid writing about film in a cinematic fashion?

If she had tried to use film language, she would have been able to go beyond the surface of the images she evokes for her readers. Instead, when she displays insight by referring, for example, to the "striking use of songs, largely a woman's operatic voice," by Margarethe von Trotta, by evoking more than once the novel use of the demiurgic voice-over by women filmmakers, by underlining the paramount importance of silence and of look in Marta Metzarus' works, she unknowingly and barely touches on what is the foundation of the new language she wishes to identify. The look, which functions at three levels (characters-camera-spectators) and to which she refers constantly when she analyses Margarethe von Trotta's film, is central in any scholarly work of women's filmmaking. Yet she does not attempt to discuss its fundamental significance in the "re-vision" which is the essence of feminist filmmaking. Furthermore, when she evokes films by women who are not feminist, she could have established, beyond their personal rather than collective aesthetics, other interesting parallels. In other words, without giving her book the closure of any restrictive generalizations, she could have tried to question and explore facts that she found intriguing, like the fact that most American women directors are Jewish. Instead, she remains intrigued, and so do we.

However, it may be that, beyond all its weaknesses, this is the strength of this book. It is indeed an "open book" in the sense that it is more an invitation to conduct more research on a poorly mined field, than an attempt at defining a new cinema. Barbara Koenig Quart is sensitive, knowledgeable, for the most part generally aware of the world of women filmmaking, and undoubtedly very enthusiastic. Her book, by failing to serve scholastic reflections, has the exuberant vitality, the contradictions, the diversity, the spontaneity of a cinema which exists in spite of the other, "the master narratives." It clearly reflects the endless energy and kaleidoscopic vision of women

directors. In that sense, it is a celebration. For this, it should be read, but only for what it is: a badly needed inspirational tool.

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The Warrior Queens. Antonia Fraser. London: Viking Penguin Inc., 1989, Pp. 383 hardcover.

Biographer and historian Antonia Fraser's latest book *The Warrior Queens* focuses on memorable women, throughout history and across cultures, who have wielded power and led armies and challenged the traditional male view of woman as "the weaker vessel" and women's own notion of themselves as peacemakers and nurturers. Although this is not meant to be an encyclopedia, Fraser's range is engaging. Her pantheon of women warriors, beginning with pre-Classical Amazons, includes such well-known figures as Semiramis, Queen of Babylon, Cleopatra, Zenobia of Palmyra, the Empress Maud, Queen Tamara of Georgia, Isabella of Spain, Elizabeth I of England, Catherine the Great of Russia, and the Indian Rani of Jhansi. We also learn about Tomyramis, Queen of the Massagetae, who defeated Cyrus the Great King of the Medes and Persians in 529 BC and thrust his dead head into a skin filled with human blood in revenge for the death of her son; two Vietnamese sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, who in AD 39 led the first revolt of their country against China; and the 17th-Century Queen Jinga of Angola who wore "the skins of Beasts before and behind," had a sword about her neck, an axe at her girdle and a bow and arrows in her hand" and united several African tribes in her battles against the Portuguese. Fraser also focuses on such modern "Iron Ladies" as Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher.

The central heroine of this book, however, is Queen Boadicea, the first-century Briton who led 120,000 of her countrymen against the brutal and greedy Romans who flogged and dispossessed her and raped her daughters. Like an avenging fury, she defeated them mercilessly in battle, set fire to their city of London, sacked St. Albans, and temporarily shook Rome's stranglehold on Britain. Fraser uses Boadicea's character and fate as a touchstone to illuminate the lives of other warrior queens. Ironically, each is, in Gibbon's phrase, "A singular exception ... a woman is