

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.

Josette Déléas-Matthews  
Mount Saint Vincent University

**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

often acknowledged the absolute sovereign of a great kingdom, in which she would be deemed incapable of exercising the smallest employment, civil or military." Also singular, in a different sense, is the way in which each of these warrior queens challenges male notions of the proper role and place of women. Such notions were vigorously expressed by the 16th-Century John Knox in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of Women*:

For promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion or empire above any realm, nation or city, is repugnant to nature, continuously to God, a thing most contrarious to his revealed will and approved ordinance, and finally it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.

Centuries earlier, the prophet Muhammed had declared, "a people who place a woman over their affairs do not prosper." Fraser shows how history has proved them both wrong. It is precisely because warrior queens have defied such notions, through fate, courage, intelligence and instinct, that throughout history they inspired awe and loyalty, as well as hostility and resistance.

Their lives exemplify both patterns and paradoxes. Many of the warrior queens showed early signs of what Fraser calls "the Tomboy syndrome": Zenobia and Mathilda of Tuscany disdained embroidery for hunting; the Rani of Jhansi rode elephants and Indira Gandhi deployed her dolls as freedom fighters overthrowing British soldiers. Several viewed themselves (or were viewed by others) as "honourary males": for example, Elizabeth I's famous speech at Tilbury, as the English prepared to fight the formidable Spanish Armada, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King, and of a King of England too," or the rousing battle cry of Tamara's soldiers, "To our *king* Tamara!" All were remarkable for tremendous physical courage; many, such as Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, Tamara, Catherine the Great, Mathilda of Tuscany, were well-read and skilled in several languages.

Fraser also explores the ways in which the singular destiny of the warrior queen invited extreme depictions of her as madonna and whore, from the saintly Isabella of Spain to the lascivious Catherine the Great. Another recurrent theme is the warrior queen's assumption of the mantle of the Goddess (Isis, Kali, the Celtic Great Mother, Diana) to legitimize and enhance her own power. Not surprisingly, through their audacious lives,

the warrior queens themselves were transformed into myth and legend, becoming potent symbols of their nations: Boadicea as Britannia, Indira Gandhi as "Mother India." In today's global village, such symbols and images cross time and cultures. For example, Fraser discusses the widespread depiction of Margaret Thatcher in the media as a modern Boadicea, after her resolute and vigorous conduct of the British campaign in the Falklands war and the comment of British journalist Paul Johnson in 1987, on the eve of the Conservative Party Conference, "Kali-Thatcher the Destroyer is at hand — if required."

The concept of the warrior queen both supports and challenges current feminist thought. Several warrior queens figure in Judy Chicago's celebrated 1979 exhibition *The Dinner Party*, 39 place settings symbolizing "the long history of female achievement." But in their readiness to deal death, as well as give birth, the warrior queens challenge the stereotype and the tradition of the woman as peacemaker. Few of Fraser's warrior queens showed any inclination to share power with other women or improve their position. Most had tragic personal lives. Then, as now, it was hard for an independent woman to "have it all."

This is an engaging book, replete with Fraser's characteristic eye for the evocative detail: Isabella of Spain sewing shirts for the unfaithful Ferdinand; Queen Jinga using one of her slaves as a chair. The warrior queens are not historical cutouts, but multidimensional and human. Fraser takes some care in separating fact from fantasy, although there is the occasional inaccuracy (e.g., one of Mahatma Gandhi's female disciples, Sarojini Naidu, is referred to as "a dying old man"). This book throws fresh light on some remarkable women and contributes to the discussion of woman's nature, role and place. It also provides us with heroines. As Fraser comments, "women need heroines even more than men need heroes because their expectations of independence, fortitude and valour have generally speaking been so much lower."

Chitra Pershad Reddin  
Mount Saint Vincent University