

wrote after she visited Germany. The experiences were crucial to her development as a political philosopher. Their author's later spirituality can only be understood with respect to her resulting rejection of immanent solutions such as the belief in a revolution. The preoccupation of some writers with Weil's spirituality divorced from her political thoughts gives a distorted and often hagiographic treatment, which also underrates the originality of her thought.

In the mid-1930s, Weil consciously stepped back from the theoretical work and chose to experience conditions as a factory worker. Her attempt between 1934 and 1935 to live as an unskilled worker led many to make comparisons between Weil and Dorothy Day, while others derided the brevity of her work experience and the superficiality of her attempts to adopt a working-class life. Although the experience in Germany was intellectually formative, the life in a factory was personally devastating; marking her for life, she claimed, as a slave. The experience confirmed that neither resistance nor revolution were viable options for change, since the oppressive conditions in the workplace deprived the individual of her humanity. The "Factory Journal" included in this volume speaks clearly of the suffering and annihilation Weil experienced. Yet, in the midst of this experience of suffering, her daily life as a worker offered a glimpse of the transcendent.

The final section of this book is a welcome addition to Weil's writings on war and peace. Weil's experiences in war have given rise to a caricature emphasizing her awkwardness at the Spanish Civil War or her stubborn promotion of a plan to parachute nurses to the front in World War II. This chapter reveals that her thought on these issues is more complex than these anecdotes might suggest. Weil's position as revolutionary, then pacifist, and again revolutionary, reveal the complexity of the issues rather than a vacillation. The oppression brought about by war and chauvinist nationalism were evident to Weil. Yet, even the suffering which accompanied war could offer a vision of the transcendent. These essays clarify the program for rebuilding a nation which Weil described in *The Need for Roots*². This book brings us a step closer to understanding the "dazzling realities" (p. 278) of Simone Weil's life and thought.

Weil is generally not claimed as a feminist writer. Yet, her own achievements and activities speak for a full involvement of women in politics, philosophy, and labour. It is interesting to note that the editors of this text suggest parallels between Weil's analysis of society and modern feminist thought. The analysis is tentative yet tantalizing

and one hopes that the appearance of this edition will facilitate further research in this vein.

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NOTES

1. Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, translated by Arthur Wills and John Petrie (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1973).
2. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, translated by Arthur Wills (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

Merlin's Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy. Charlotte Spivack. *New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, Pp. 185.*

In writing *Merlin's Daughters*, Charlotte Spivack claims to have two purposes. "The first is to simply demonstrate the literary quality of ten representative female fantasists." This is accomplished primarily through synopses of the fantasy works of ten women: Andre Norton, Susan Cooper, Ursula K. LeGuin, Evangeline Walton, Katherine Kurtz, Mary Stewart, Patricia McKillip, Vera Chapman, Gillian Bradshaw and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Spivack calls her choice of authors "personal, conditioned in part by my preference for certain features such as the Arthurian mythos." Beyond this, only "critical neglect"—experienced by all the writers but Ursula LeGuin—is offered as an explanation for Spivack's inclusions and exclusions. Critical neglect, of course, is not hard to find in the case of women writers, especially writers of marginalized genres like fantasy and science fiction. There is, then, no explanation for the omission of Gothic fantasy, sword and sorcery, lost-world fantasy, and "science-fiction/fantasy hybrids." While it is true that any work must define—often arbitrarily—its boundaries, Spivack fails to explain just how it is that these women are representative. All come from the United States or England, most—probably all—are white, most are university educated. Perhaps this is, indeed, representative of women fantasy writers published and distributed in the United States where Spivack lives. Spivack, however, makes no comment on this. In fact, for a book subtitled *Women Writers of Fantasy*, there is decidedly little information about the writers themselves, and certainly no reflection on their relative privilege or where it might lead them.

Spivack's extensive synopses of the works of the ten writers she features are fascinating reading. For the reader in search of a particular kind of story or other works by a favorite author, Spivack's work is invaluable. In accord-

ing these women as much space as she does, Spivack fulfills the much-needed function of raising work by women to prominence. It is somewhat disappointing that most of the work she discusses was written in the 1970s; a two-page appendix lists some newer writers and their works up to 1984. However, Spivack's retellings may be enough to encourage some readers to look for more recent work by these and other women fantasists; because of Spivack's efforts, more fantasy by women may be more readily available.

Spivack evaluates the work according to traditional criteria, focusing on plot, characterization, pace, movement, style, dialogue and so on. She also draws out many literary and mythological allusions in the work. Spivack apparently wants to show that this work can be judged according to currently-existing [male] criteria; indeed, she says in the preface that she wishes to "modify the canon." This modification, it appears, would be accomplished if the canon were to include the works she reviews. However, as Elizabeth Meese has pointed out, the value of this is questionable: "Virginia Woolf, like some later feminist critics, was never certain that women should join the authoritative community even if we could."¹ Similarly, Shirley Neuman has reminded us that admitting work into a literary canon means predetermining its interpretation, deciding how a work will be read and taught.² In many disciplines, feminists have argued that being allowed in is neither a neutral nor a sufficient step. Since Audre Lorde's now-famous words, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change"³, feminists cannot take the project of simply making women visible within male academic structures for granted. I would have preferred some indication that Spivack was engaging in this debate.

Spivack's efforts toward her second goal—that of "elucidating [a] feminist perspective...[and] underlying thematic pattern" which she "discovered" while studying these writers—reflects a similar failure to engage with feminist debates. The practices Spivack defines as feminist include: using a female protagonist, preferably one whose "aim is not power or domination, but rather self-fulfillment and protection of the community"; re-evaluation of men's roles as well as those of women; assuming a female point of view; using circular rather than a linear plot; using matriarchal societies; renouncing power; "the vindication of mortality"; breaking down polarized values; and "the rejection of transcendence in favour of immanence." All of this amounts to a rather essentialist view of

feminism and the feminine. This is magnified by Spivack's repeated use of universalizing terms with regard to both characters in, and readers of, fantasies. Spivack claims repeatedly that the reader "will notice," "will feel" and so on. But women readers, it has been repeatedly shown, are not all the same, nor is it liberating for women to argue that there is a single valid reading of a text. Added to this are Spivack's claims about the universality of some of the women characters and their experiences. We find, Spivack says, reflections of "the lives of all adolescent females," "an experience familiar to women through the ages," "an image of the Female in all her roles," "the complete circle of feminine experience". Yet many women will not find their experience here. For example, if Spivack's recounting of the stories is adequate, none of these ten women has created a lesbian character. Similarly, according to Spivack's account, race is rarely an issue or theme in these works. Katherine Kurtz's Deryni series deals with "the problem of prejudice. Because of this unique kind of 'difference' the Deryni serve as a far-reaching model of historical victims of prejudice." But only Andre Norton has characters which come from real-world races. (Of course, it could be argued that it is not the realm of fantasy to be dealing with the real, but given Spivack's claim that women writers of fantasy do deal with real-world questions of gender, an argument for excluding real-world races would ring hollow.)

In the end, it is unclear whether these omissions exist in the literature Spivack has chosen, or in her failure to present these elements of the fantasies. To find out, we will have to read and re-read fantasy work by women. This is good; it is preferable to demand another reading than to establish a claim to have the final word. By exposing this literature to view, and opening up these various debates, Spivack has performed a valuable function.

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NOTES

1. Elizabeth A. Meese, *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) p. 11.
2. Shirley Neuman, "Women, Words and the Literary Canon," in Ann Dybikowski et al., eds., *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les Femmes et les Mots* (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1985) p. 141.
3. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in Cherre Moraga and Gloria Anzalda, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Second Edition (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) p. 99.