

better able to articulate why this is the only research approach with which I feel comfortable. This work also represents for me the cognitive bridge between my consciousness as a feminist and my understanding of individual psychology. As a feminist I habitually identify, critique and challenge assumptions and practices of male dominance which I personally experience as objectionable. As a psychotherapist working with women, I identify, critique and challenge all individual assumptions and practices which women use to impede their own attainment of personal autonomy. It is clear to me that the individual must, and can, free herself from internally held constraints (regardless of where they originate) which typically exert far more cruel limits on her potential than do any external, societal barriers. In helping women move through this process, I predictably encounter initial anger and resistance. Stanley and Wise provide an explanation which concurs with my own:

structural explanations...enable people to hide in collectivism, in the sense that they can avoid taking responsibility for their own lives and actions. (p. 107)

*Breaking Out* offers to any woman who cares to hear the message a vision of how to break out from oppression in her own daily life without waiting for something to change externally. For the feminist researcher there is much more revealed about what not to do than recipes for good feminist research. Stanley and Wise devote most of the book to explaining their total revolt against positivism and determinism; a heavier emphasis, perhaps, than was needed. Their protracted paradigm-smashing was felt to be necessary, I suspect, because of the intimidating force of conventional structuralist assumptions about social reality. In this regard the authors note, "Many women appear to be very wary of standing up to Marxist-feminist heavies who in all circumstances appear to remain absolutely convinced of the rightness of what they say" (p. 107).

*Breaking Out* attempts to show us how we can make sense of our lives and our milieu as individual women. Yet, we are still left with the problem of structure, even if it is people who oppress people, structures do exist in consensual reality and at least at the macro- or policy-level must be dealt with in their own terms. To pursue the liberation of women, we must work together for changes in social policy; but, above all we need to strive for the kind of personal insight which will guide us to improve our private lives.

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**Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction.** K.K. Ruthven. Cambridge University Press, 1984..

If nothing else, K.K. Ruthven has done a commendable job of anticipating objections to his work. Indeed, most of the positions from which one might choose to respond to this survey of feminist literary criticism seem already to be occupied by the various straw women of the author's imagination. One may question the motives that impel a male academic to analyse the feminist project, but only at the risk of joining the nameless "vulgarians" (p. 9) and "vigilantes" (p. 93) who make their appearances in this book. One may object to the harshness and lack of discrimination that cloud many of his appraisals of standard feminist arguments, but only at the expense of being identified with the practitioners of "feminist terrorism," an extraordinary company which enjoys "the vicarious satisfactions of retaliation and reprisal in the war of the sexes for which the only end is unconditional surrender of all power to women" (p. 10). One may assent, of course, to some of his judgements, but, thanks to the intimidatory rhetoric of radical feminism, even this option is open only to those brave enough to risk association with a contemptible figure branded as the "patriarchally brainwashed traitor to her own sex" (p. 14). Whom is Ruthven writing for, one wonders.

Given his obvious contempt for feminist readers, it is with particular trepidation that I confess that, until Ruthven raised the issue, I had never been greatly alarmed at the prospect of a man's writing or commenting on feminist criticism. The proposition that only women can speak on matters that concern women strikes me, as it does Ruthven, as both a betrayal of the precept that feminism concerns everyone and a replication of the most objectionable feature of prefeminist exclusionism. Ruthven is quite right to point out that if, as many feminists have argued, all those characteristics associated with female thought and expression are acquired and not innate, it is unjustifiable to declare *a priori* that gender alone should disqualify anyone from thinking or expressing anything. Had he pushed the argument a stage further, moreover, he would surely have seen that the hypothetical protest he is so anxious to discredit is self-contradictory as well. That is to say, for a woman to maintain that a man, simply because he is a man, can know nothing about femaleness is to presume that she herself knows enough about maleness to see that his ignorance is hopeless. This confirms precisely the possibility of a knowledge of the other sex that this imaginary objector to Ruthven's claim is attempting to deny. Instead of seizing on what seems to me a conclusive demonstration of his right to publish his opinions, Ruthven harangues his readers with a series of circum-

stantial arguments designed, it seems, to alienate even the most impartial.

He takes heart from the fact that "feminist criticism is heavily dependent on men to articulate its position" (p. 11). Those who, out of resentment at this unpalatable truth, would denigrate the contribution of John Stuart Mill (for example), constitute a "cynical warning to any man who tries his hand at feminist criticism: if you have to do it, make sure you don't do it better than women" (p. 12). Himself undeterred, Ruthven points out that, as a potential contribution to knowledge, feminist criticism must be prepared to entertain and profit from the reasoned objections of professional scholars—and this in spite of the disposition of many feminist to react to this challenge as though it were "a threat to an immutable truth" (p. 14). Men are as well qualified as women to administer the acid test since, "it is no more necessary to be a woman in order to analyse feminist criticism as criticism than it is to be a Marxist in order to understand the strategies of Marxist criticism" (p. 15). Stripped of bravado, what this amounts to is simply a proposal to evaluate feminist literary studies objectively, as it were, from the supposedly neutral territory of the academy.

Though perhaps naive, this would not be truly objectionable had Ruthven made a more convincing show of scholarly impartiality. The burden of his complaint against feminist criticism is that "it constitutes itself as a faith to be fortified rather than a truth-claim to be investigated" (p. 13). To ask of feminist criticism, "Is it true?" is surely already to make a special case of the object of inquiry, to demand of it what no theory of literature is equipped to provide. Though the rallying cries of the various schools may sometimes be couched as truth-claims—"a poem should not mean but be," "the Author is dead," "there is nothing outside the text"—it is difficult to see how any of them could be judged on the basis of truthfulness. What would the standard be? What would constitute proof? Literary theories, by and large, cannot help but appear to outsiders as matters of faith; it is only at the level of their interpretation of specific texts that their claims are ever open to the sort of empirical investigation that Ruthven appears to have in mind.

Yet, it is in his discussion of textual interpretation, potentially the most fruitful area for rigorous debate, that his case appears weakest. Having noted the propensity of feminist criticism to privilege feminist explanations of literary date over others that seem equally plausible, Ruthven attempts to demonstrate the arbitrariness of images of women criticism. Feminists account for the reverential treatment of the female figure in the conven-

tional Petrarchan sonnet, for instance, by showing that it functions as an effective strategy for delineating and fixing women as the mute objects of male desire. Ruthven's reply to these critics is that the Petrarchan convention arose simply because it satisfied an artistic need, "the literary imagination is stimulated far more productively by sexual frustration than by gratified desire" (p. 78). Somehow it escapes him that this is precisely the circumstance that the feminist critics were seeking to explain. Their interpretation of the data is more satisfying here because it is more comprehensive, as well as recognizing an ostensible need to depict women in a specific way, it explores the underlying reasons for this need.

The dismissiveness and irritation evident in this book are traceable, in a curious way, to its conception of feminist literary studies as "just one more way of talking about books" (p. 8). As such, feminist criticism ought to be absorbed as quickly as possible into what Ruthven envisages as the diverse but harmonious company of all academic critical practices. Failing to appreciate the reasons why feminists should find such a prospect undesirable, he can only express his dismay at the many issues on which feminism pits itself deliberately against the combined forces of traditional criticism. The days have long since gone by when various critical approaches could coexist under the comfortable illusion that they were supplementing and enriching one another. Whether one approves or laments this fact, Ruthven's book is evidence that there is little to be gained by pretending it isn't so.

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**Pandora's Daughters. The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity.** Eva Cantarella. *Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.*

This book is a must on the reading list of any serious curriculum in Women's Studies; this English version, translated by Maureen Fant, first published in 1981 by Editori Riuniti, is long overdue. A legal historian, Eva Cantarella brings a new approach to the study of the codification of sexual roles and attitudes. Traditionally, this type of study has been based largely on the emotionally distorted evidence of mythology and literature. While not fully dismissing these sources, Cantarella focusses her study on the examination of more objective information, such as legal documents and their interpretation in the customs of the day. "In their abstraction and generality," says Cantarella, "the rules of law allow reconstruction of