

who have disdained the body and rejected sexuality have also hated women. Could it be that Iris Murdoch, who has been honoured by being included in the B.B.C. "Men of Ideas" series, and Dipple, who addresses the reader throughout as "he," perhaps have not too much to say to us?

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Women of Ideas, And What Men Have Done to Them: From Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich. Dale Spender. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982. Pp. 586.

This is a work of ample scope, bold and stimulating analysis as well as impressive research. After an introduction explaining the basic approach taken ("Why didn't I know?"), the book continues through successive discussions of individuals, from Aphra Behn (1640-80) to the 1970s. Further theoretical discussions are interspersed in the main text, which is followed by an Appendix ("Life in Prison", an excerpt from Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette Movement*), a chronological table of the women discussed or alluded to and an excellent bibliography. Most women discussed are English, American and French, with occasional references to Canadian, Australian and Russian figures; they encompass a wide variety of literary and political activities.

Dale Spender's book deserves to become a classic, one which will and should be used by everyone active in Women's Studies, irrespective of individual disciplines. The issues Spender raises may not all be new, but they deserve the most serious consideration. Her main thesis is stated in the following passage:

I am advocating the premise that knowledge is political. I am asserting that in a male-dominated society women do not control the uses that are made of knowl-

edge. I am asserting that a fundamental use of knowledge in a patriarchal society is to enhance the image of men and to negate the image of women. I am asserting that women's resources are appropriated and used to find in favour of men and against women, and that much 'valuable' use is made of any negative evidence we may construct about other women. While it is not in our power (at present) to influence the uses made of negative knowledge about women, *it is well within' our power to refuse to make it available.* (p. 501)

All of the above points are concretized through the discussions of individual women. Since Spender is concerned with the transmission of knowledge, and since Women's Studies are by definition interdisciplinary, it is therefore clear why the implications of her thesis have relevance to a wide scope of activities, creative, political and educational.

The book has much to offer to those who are already active in Women's Studies, to say nothing of the general reader. The fundamentally feminist aim of recovering our heritage and retrieving lost figures of the past is pursued—thus the reader will encounter many fascinating figures. Everyone will have her own favourites; one of mine is the following statement from Matilda Joslyn Gage's book, *Women, Church and State* (1893):

The whole theory, regarding woman, under Christianity, has been based upon the conception that she has no right to live for herself alone. Her duty to others has continuously been placed before her and her training has ever been that of self-sacrifice. Taught from the pulpit and legislative halls that her position must always be secondary even to her children, her right to life has been admitted only insofar as its reacting effect upon another could be predicated. (p. 241)

This passage also conveniently emphasizes one of Spender's main ideas, namely, how women continually reinvent the wheel every fifty years or so, because they do not control knowledge and hence have been deprived of the ideas of their foremothers (to borrow Spender's term). The section on Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, is preceded by sections on Mary Astell, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Catherine Macaulay and some other eighteenth century women and thus underlines the fact that Wollstonecraft was not "the first feminist" that the official historical records would have us believe. In other words, ideas which appeared wholly new to feminists in, say, the 1960s, were almost all anticipated by earlier figures, but due to their erasure from history, later feminists were unable to benefit from them. For instance, "'Do we fully understand that we aim at nothing less than an entire subversion of the present order of society, a dissolution of the whole existing social compact?'" (p. 274) is not a late 1960's feminist utterance, but was made by Elizabeth Oakes Smith at the 1852 Syracuse National Convention (of Woman's Rights).

It is sobering to be reminded that a mere seven years after Seneca Falls (1848), the American women's movement was accused of failure. Here is a striking illustration of another of Spender's major contentions, that in fact the women's movement has *not* died on a number of occasions. Or as she puts it,

It is a male myth...that has led us to believe that the women's movement has come and gone on a few occasions. Since 1855 (and earlier) there has been a 'women's movement' and there have always been women who have analysed the social arrangements...and fought to change those arrangements and to end male power. *Their* efforts have been sustained and *uninterrupted*. That we have inherited a history of silences and interruptions indicates the extent to which men have written—and falsified—the records. (p. 182)

Spender argues the continuity of the women's movement and provides abundant evidence for it, which in turn underlines her point concerning the political nature of knowledge. Present-day feminists will therefore be heartened to learn that current talk in the media about the "death" of feminism (and the approach of "post-feminism") is but an antique ploy, which has been used before for exactly the same purpose, namely to intimidate and divide feminists. However, if feminists are to cope successfully with such divisive tactics, it is desirable to recognise their true nature so as to avoid being misled by them.

For me, it was a revelation to learn that there was considerable feminist activity even during such supposedly fallow times like the first half of the nineteenth century, and the 1920s and '30s. With regard to the first period, such relatively little known figures as Frances Wright and the mathematician Mary Somerville are discussed. Some new light is also shed on Anna Wheeler, best known for her friendship with William Thompson, and on the biased treatment she has received. (Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, London: Virago, 1983, probably appeared too late to be used by Spender; it contains a good discussion of Mrs. Wheeler.) It may be interesting to note that Mrs. Wheeler was the great-grandmother of the suffragist Lady Constance Lytton. The influence of Mrs. Wheeler on William Thompson, and that of Harriet Taylor on J.S. Mill, both provide striking parallels and examples of scholarly bias in the treatment the two women have received. Further bias is seen in the discussion of Margaret Fuller's *Memoirs*, which were distorted and changed by the editors (one of whom was Emerson).

The second supposedly fallow period, namely the time between the two world wars, was in fact an active time for feminists. The reader here finds plenty of new information concerning Lady Rhondda (founder of *Time and Tide*), Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain, Rebecca West and others; interesting details of the activities of

the Six Point Group are provided. It is depressing to realise how many of the issues taken up by the Six Point Group—for instance, equal pay and equal opportunity—are still unresolved.

Another corrective provided by Spender is in the area of the suffrage movement. It has long been received wisdom that this was a single issue movement, concentrated solely on the obtention of the vote, which then dissolved once this aim was achieved. The members of the suffrage movement were women of diverse interests, who, once the vote was obtained, continued to pursue these issues. The suffragettes also enable Spender to take up again a recurrent theme of the book, namely, the harassment of women who formulate feminist or anti-patriarchal ideas. Indeed, the harassment of the suffragettes, especially the Pankhursts and the WSPU, is so blatant that it becomes emblematic of the fate of all women who protest. Furthermore, it calls into question the relationship of women and politics. As Spender states,

Because it is fundamental to the frame of reference in a patriarchal society that men are the political creatures, the political activists and theorists, women's activities in relation to power are *denatured*, classified as something else. Either it is denied that the women are concerned about power (the women have got the issue all wrong) or else it is asserted that the women are not real women (the women themselves are wrong), for it is mandatory that the deficiency be found in the women and not in the means of interpreting the world. (p. 396)

It would seem that feminist activity implies the most radical shift of perspective in one's view of society and that such a realignment exacts a heavy toll from those who are committed to it.

It is commonly supposed to be the reviewer's duty to point out flaws in the work under discus-

sion. Naturally, it is possible to do this with *Women of Ideas*; however, in mentioning shortcomings, one is really stating that the work is not perfect. In a book of this scope, there are bound to be some errors; since there is no attempt at specialisation, those expert in a particular discipline or especially knowledgeable about a particular individual may find some minor deficiencies. Nevertheless, I do not think that this in any way invalidates the overall achievement of the book. In addition, it may be argued that Spender is repetitious in driving home her main ideas. Yet this is, given the basic premise and the methodology of the work, quite unavoidable; on the contrary, it enables Spender to lend weight to her argument through the cumulative examples of the historical suppression of women's ideas. In sum, this is an exciting and thought-provoking work.

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Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880. Edited by Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland; Associate Editor, Francine Krasno. *Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. Pp. 583.*

Lydia Maria Child, like many others of her era, was an inveterate letter writer. She commented in 1855 in a letter to a literary admirer that she would welcome correspondence between them "just as it bubbles up—gas, steam, or diamond water drops" (p. 273). Fortunately for us, thanks to the painstaking and judicious editing work of Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland, readers of *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880*, now have the opportunity to savor the "diamond water drops" produced by Child's pen over a full, rich lifetime which spanned most of the nineteenth century.

Child is perhaps best remembered in history books as an abolitionist. She irreparably dam-