

books on the best seller list (*Reduce with the Low Calorie Diet*, 25 printings since 1953; *Dr. Atkin's Diet Revolution*, 3 million copies in print; *The Doctor's Quick Weight Loss Diet*, 5 million copies sold; *the Cheater's Diet*, 500 million purse books sold) and various other pop culture indicators of the extensiveness of the tyranny. In short, she demonstrates her competence at traditional positivist analyses, as well as deeper symbolic ones. And of special interest perhaps to a Canadian audience, she makes wide use of Canadian novels in which heroines explore their relationship to their bodies and consumption, specifically the works of Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood. Speaking of Marian, in the *Edible Woman*, who is beginning to reject food, Chernin writes:

She is eager to please, self-effacing, submissive, and eventually anorexic. Thus her body will have to express whatever uneasiness she feels about her life...(p. 66-67)

Then, as Marian begins to eat again, after breaking off her engagement to Peter:

For Marian, as she begins to chew and swallow, is symbolically reclaiming her hunger and her right to hunger. By eating up this cake fetish of a woman's body she assimilates for the first time her own body and its feelings. (p. 71)

Chernin moves deftly from *Edible Woman* to *Lady Oracle*, and thus exposes the deeper meanings of both books so definitely that I am sure that Atwood herself was unaware of the closeness of their connection:

The sisterhood between the gaunt and the obese becomes dramatically apparent when we place next to Marian another heroine of Margaret Atwood's...*Lady Oracle* through her gluttony lets us in on the secret strategy of being fat. (p. 72)

The obese woman, like the anorexic one, reveals fear of sexuality, fear of men and her general powerlessness. Such assertions are wholly consistent with the only other piece that I can think of on the topic of women and consumption, Susie Orbach's *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, which is also referred to by Chernin. The latter, though an excellent attempt to pinpoint the problem, is basically a therapeutic 'how to' book rather than a thorough analysis of the issue.

In sum, *The Obsession* is a profound and wonderfully integrated work. It is an excellent example of the sort of wide ranging personal and systematic perspective that is much needed in the area of Women's Studies. Finally, if there is such a thing as feminist scholarship in a methodological sense, I would like to think that this is it.

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The Lost and the Lonely: Homeless Women in Montreal. Aileen D. Ross. *Montreal: The Canadian Human Rights foundation, 1982. Pp. 105.*

Aileen D. Ross, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at McGill University, has undertaken to inform us about "a new social problem," namely that of homeless women in our cities. In this case she portrays the plight of approximately 500 women who during 1977 and 1978 came to two "shelters," Chez Doris and Maison Marguerite, situated in two Montreal Skid Row areas. In separate chapters she describes the shelters and the surrounding area, the main problems of the women, the depths of their misery, the lack of community resources, and the hopelessness of efforts at "rehabilitation." This is a pioneer work in the study of Canadian urban life, its underclass of disaffiliated or "unjoined" women, and the disorganization of our social welfare institutions. It is important as a beginning rather than as a definitive statement on the situation of homelessness for women.

Professor Ross has relied heavily for her conceptualization of the problem on the 1968 article in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* by Theodore Caplow, Howard M. Bahr, and David Sternberg. She has, therefore, organized her materials around the concepts of "deviancy," "homelessness," and "support systems." The method used for collecting the data was participant observation combined with interviews with the women, the shelter staff, and the professionals in the community who have worked with homeless women over the years. The data are presented descriptively, in simple tabular form for demographic characteristics and percentage distribution of "main problems," and as "vignettes" which illustrate the women's lives and the attitudes of both the women and their "helpers." She compares her findings with those of other investigators, relying heavily on a 1965 study by Samuel E. Wallace on *Skid Row as a Way of Life*, a 1970 collection of essays by Howard M. Bahr on *Disaffiliated Men*, and a 1976 report by Howard M. Bahr and Gerald R. Garrett on *Women Alone: The Disaffiliation of Urban Females*. She also cites journalistic accounts in Canadian newspapers and magazines.

The picture which emerges is a clear and extremely sad one. It is sometimes surprising and at other times too much in keeping with our stereotypes. On the one hand, the average age of the women, approximately 37 years, is younger than is to be expected; on the other, the main problems of almost half the women being "emotional disorders" and "alcoholism" and "drug abuse," and another 15 percent "family," fits our image of those who are considered "deviant" by society. They are encountered by the shelter staff as lonely, depressed, fearful, angry and violent, suicidal, and murderous. Professor Ross discusses with much sympathy the survival techniques used by women who do not have the resources and coping mechanisms required to make friends, retain family relationships, or even manage to keep body and soul together. In some sense their strategies are those which have

always been available to destitute women — prostitution, conning, and manipulation in various forms. Perhaps the most profound touch in the entire story is the early but inevitable disillusionment of the shelter staff, the nadir of which was the reversal of the initial open policy that no one should be banned from the shelter. Professor Ross says,

This decision (to refuse shelter) was reached only after a great deal of anxiety and anguish and after there had been several incidents in which women had been violent or impossible to handle or had seriously disturbed other women...Thus...the shelters found themselves forced to reject some of the women who most needed their services. If the shelters will not or cannot take a woman in, if the hospitals will not admit her, if the social agencies cannot help her, and if the police do not want to jail her, she is completely abandoned by the community. (pp. 94-95)

As is to be expected, many of the women so denied disappeared completely and were never seen again.

Professor Ross concluded that indeed the common denominator of all shelter women was that they had been "rejected." Although their behavior was judged as never as demoralized as that of the Skid Row men, their situation is worse because of the stigma attached to any kind of deviance from the societal construction of "womanhood," and because of their invisibility. Unfortunately for them, "help services" geared to the special problems of homeless women have not been institutionalized in Canadian society.

As much as one admires this attempt to add to what Alexis Kates Shulman, in the preface of Ann Marie Rousseau's *Shopping Bag Ladies*, has accurately characterized as "a handful of studies...mostly short, local, and very recent," it

is important to warn the potential reader that problems will be encountered in this book. They concern the method of study, the presentation of the findings, and the adequacy of the theory and conclusions. Only a few will be mentioned, and briefly, since this is a book review and not a critique.

Most apparent is the style of writing, which is not only lacking in elegance but also correctness. Requiring much effort and patience on the part of the reader are an excessive use of punctuation (notably commas which are randomly scattered throughout sentences), long sequences of pages comprised of short disconnected paragraphs, and endless repetition. Annoying are errors, such as a reference to the work of a G. Litman on page 16 without a corresponding item in the References at the end of the book. More serious, however, is the failure to describe carefully and fully the data-gathering process. It is especially important to know who was observing and interviewing, and under what conditions they were doing it, since the orientation in the presentation is toward the perspective of the staff rather than of the women themselves. Why, one wonders, were these women so inarticulate and unable to speak on their own behalf? Professor Ross's explanation that many are confused and mentally disturbed seems reasonable enough until one observes that despite the same drawback, in two other accounts, Bahr and Garrett's older women in New York shelters, and Ann Marie Rousseau's photographed shopping bag ladies on the streets of San Francisco and New York City, the women's words and viewpoint assume priority.

My greatest disappointment in the book is Professor Ross's failure to conceptualize the problem in wider terms than that of a model which dates back to the early 1960's. Even Bahr and Garrett, in an article in Bahr's 1973 book *Skid Row*, deal with the concept of the *powerlessness* inherent in the disaffiliation of Skid Row women. Consideration of the question

"Why have homeless women received so much less attention and care than homeless men?" must certainly point toward an analysis of female places, female roles, female oppression and vulnerability, and female invisibility and powerlessness. Although Professor Ross sets the problem in the context of the so-called "community" and its failure to provide supports, one would like to have seen her relate it to the wider social structures and processes, especially the gender structure and the process of deinstitutionalization. No one has yet investigated the relationship between the "dumping" of mental patients and prisoners into a disinterested or hostile environment, the essentially economically motivated (albeit with humane rationalizations) policy of about 15 years ago, and the gender structure of our society. This study of homeless women reveals only the tip of that iceberg. It does not plumb the depths of the societal forces involved in surviving and aging familyless and friendless, a woman's issue which may be eminent. Even so, feminists, social scientist investigators, and organizers and workers in women's shelters will welcome the publication of *The Lost and Lonely*, and thank Professor Ross for the contribution she has made toward bringing the deplorable plight of homeless women in Canada to light.

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