

tive. In this sense the anarchist black flag did not wave more positively for women in that period than the red flag would once appropriated by Stalinism and the Soviet Union.

While Louise Michel was friends with some of the main feminists of her time, like the Duchesse d'Uzès, she seems to have seen herself as different from other women. Speaking of other female prisoners when she was in jail she wrote, "They have the usual strengths and weaknesses of womankind, and that is exactly what I do not have" (p. 109). Her education set her apart from lower class women, and her political positions from middle class women. She does not seem to have had a feminist support network which could have provided her with the basis for an autonomous feminist vision.

Edith Thomas's biography provides us with a useful view of Louise Michel's dreams and aspirations. Unfortunately the work which was originally written in French for a French audience presupposes a basic understanding of French history. It would have been helpful if the translator could have provided some historical notes on such topics as the Commune, the Dreyfus affair and other historical developments. It is quite irritating for the English reading audience that Louise's poetry, which was so important to her, is left in its original French and never translated into English.

The biographic account could have paid more attention to the various shifts in her political thought; for example, her transformation from a supporter of violent revolution in her youth to a believer in the possibility of a peaceful change in her later years. The historically important debate about the sexual orientation of Michel is referred to in only one brief paragraph. A fuller exploration would have been in order although the existing sources are few. The suggestion that she may have been a lesbian and what this would have meant in that historical period could have been approached through an examination of

Louise's intimate relationships with her women friends. The companion for the last fifteen years of her life was Charlotte Vauvelle, for example, and more of this relationship needs to be rediscovered. Emma Goldman's adamant denial of allegations regarding Louise Michel's lesbianism could also have been reported (see Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 378-380).

Edith Thomas's biography of Michel deserves to be read by all historians of the relation of feminism to the left, of women and various social struggles and movements. It gives us an important account of her life. It provides us with an inspiring story of a woman who remained true to her convictions and who always sided with the oppressed and maligned. As Thomas puts it, "Her glory is that she never lost her faith in, or her passion for, the destiny of humanity." (p. 401)

Gary Kinsman

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914. Karen Blair. *New York and London: Holmer and Meier Publishers Inc. 1980. Pp. 119.*

Women's clubs embrace a diversity of form and action, some more notable than others. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries top marks for excitement have always gone to those groups promoting suffrage, sexual purity, temperance, clothing reform and equal rights. Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Women's Trade Union League, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman's Party, all of the United States, won maximum attention in their day and ours. Such devotion, enshrined for example in the three volume *History of Woman Suffrage* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton *et al* (Rochester: Susan B. Anthony, 1881-6) and Page Smith,

Daughters of the Promised Land (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1974), largely ignored the experience of the majority of organized women in the United States. This experience was, broadly speaking, of two types, cultural and religious. The first has always been especially difficult to define, encompassing as it did everything from the study of Shakespeare and Mozart to consideration of immigration policy and America First. The variety of cultural clubs, their large number, their usually small size and low profile meant they rarely roused much interest in any but their own adherents. Recognition of their significance awaited the discovery of "domestic feminism." This term, coined by Daniel Scott Smith in 1974,¹ directed interest to the ways in which women employed ideals of "ladydom" or the cult of true womanhood to augment both personal and public authority. Karen J. Blair's *The Clubwoman As Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* applies just this perspective to her analysis of culture or literary clubs in the United States. She finds in them, or at least in a selection of them, "a significant and popular strategy for achieving autonomy" (p.1) in face of an ungenerous and dictatorial male world.

Blair traces this struggle for autonomy in an introduction, six brief chapters and a conclusion. Annette K. Baxter provides a valuable introduction. Her stress on the "sisterly communion" and "female self-expression" found in clubs captures the essence of Blair's contribution. Feminism might have been present in America's culture clubs but it is the fact of feminine community which leaves the strongest impression.

The six chapters document extensive efforts to legitimate women's claim to an equal share in the heritage of western civilization and an equal voice in its proceedings. Culture clubs hoped to expand female influence without incurring male wrath and thus jeopardizing the financial security of middle-class wives and mothers. The result,

according to Blair, was "proper ladies" who were in reality "feminists under the skin." (p.1) The first chapter, "Origins of the Culture Club Movement 1800-1868," outlines in a few pages the significance of moral reform societies, female colleges and seminaries and pioneer career women for the founding in 1868 of Sorosis and the New England Woman's Club. In the following chapter, these two prominent "culture" clubs are evaluated as path-breaking exponents of domestic feminism. The role of Jane Cunningham Croly, an early female journalist, the founder of Sorosis and representative of the reform-minded career women who at first dominated its ranks, is discussed in sympathetic detail. Despite members' interest in suffrage and temperance, Boston-based Sorosis devoted itself to self-help and personal growth, functioning much like a middle-class consciousness-raising group and drawing criticism from those who feared any sign of female independence. The New York City NEWC women, considered in about one third of the chapter, had similar interests but a more activist orientation, establishing such projects as a women's horticultural school. Another brainchild of Croly's, the Association for the Advancement of Women, created in 1873, is treated in Chapter Three as the national expression of the same domestic feminism. Women's influence, essentially maternal in nature, was to be employed to uplift and rationalize public society from coast to coast. A developing sense of sisterhood and social activism among well-educated middle-class housewives in particular encouraged new recruits. The AAW could not, however, maintain the momentum and was succeeded by the General Federation of Women's Clubs. By this time too the early influence of women professionals, often pioneers in their field, had waned considerably. Chapter Four somewhat arbitrarily returns to a general discussion of literary clubs. Despite their role as passive consumers of culture they provided many members with opportunities to recognize and challenge women's inferior position, albeit in a lady-like way. Members were generally older, married

women for whom public speaking, higher education, however diluted, and the right to their own time, were frequently hard won privileges. More adventuresome were the Women's Educational and Industrial Unions of Boston and Buffalo examined in Chapter Five. Distinguished by their search for a cross-class sisterhood and their espousal of a more activist domestic feminism, identified here as municipal housekeeping, the WEIUs articulated a female self-consciousness heightened by decades of work in culture clubs. Unfortunately, in the struggle to improve the City, women's mission to women evidently got mislaid. Middle-class members rarely took the opportunity to view poorer women as anything more than the clients of their benevolence and influence. Chapter Six returns to the prestigious General Federation founded in 1890 which continued the shift from programmes of self-culture to urban reform activities. Its efforts helped confirm women's much debated right to public influence. Within this loose federation, however, many member clubs had at best limited sympathy for even the mildest of feminist causes. Black and working-class women, for instance, found few supporters anywhere in its ranks. A brief conclusion completes the picture of a mild-mannered domestic feminism tempered by the hostility of male society and alive to the benefits of a greater, if still far from complete, sisterhood among women.

Blair's contribution is in some ways an important counter to too ready dismissals of the more conservative clubs. Their role in recruiting the timid and the conventional to a new experience of sisterhood was critical in creating the more sympathetic environment in which their more radical sisters could also function. The success of culture clubs in comparison with early suffrage societies for example indicates not only the appeal of polite methods and proposals but the immensity of the task facing women who attempted either to broaden or to reject traditional forms of behaviour. Blair's contribution reminds us how essential even the most cautious of "boring from within" can be.

Despite such strengths the volume is finally rather unsatisfactory. This begins with the matter of terminology. Blair describes the clubs selected as literary, a characterization which seems too narrow, and culture, a term which becomes merely a catchall in its usage here. Blair fails to define either term adequately. She clearly favours the cultural epithet but its effectiveness for describing bodies like the Women's Educational and Industrial Unions and the General Federation is not at all clear. What emerges, at least from this text, is an assortment of organizations of varying interests and proclivities for whom culture included so many things as to be meaningless analytically. The fact that each chapter is brief and the whole text only 119 pages compounds this descriptive problem. Brevity means that the nature and role of the GFC, for example, is never adequately clarified. Undeveloped comparisons with the National Council of Women add further to the confusion. With the partial exception of Sorosis, none of Blair's clubs emerge fully enough for us to appreciate except in a limited way, their meaning for a middle-class women's network and certainly not their role in the evolution of American feminism as a whole.

In conclusion, the evidence of these pages confirms the emergence of an important sense of collective interest and common predicament among a relatively large group of rather well-to-do women. There is little doubt too that these clubs, however hidebound they subsequently appeared, did challenge some of the assumptions, laws and institutions, new and old, which sought to oppress women. Their advocacy of women's rights was at best a modest proposal but they, like their sisters in church auxiliaries, were valuable footsoldiers in a campaign led by the more flamboyant and the more radical. The two groups were nevertheless essential to each other and it is important not to ignore either's contribution to the development of American feminism. Unfortunately, Blair's volume falls short in its goal of balancing the account. Her

ladies, with the exception of Croly, emerge finally as a pallid, timid, imitative and rather uninteresting supporting cast for the real suffrage, temperance and sexual purity stars. Had Blair extended her manuscript to examine the details of club membership more fully, to discuss too how the assertion of new rights affected the functioning of the middle-class family and to treat more systematically the economic and cultural restraints which forced most women in clubs as elsewhere to acquiesce, at least publicly, in the subordination of their sex, she would have served her subjects better. *The Club Woman as Feminist* takes only the first step in rescuing clubwomen from the oblivion to which they have commonly been assigned. The major work of recovering the extent of their feminism remains.

Veronica Strong-Boag
Simon Fraser University

NOTES

1. "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America" in *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner, eds. (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1974), pp.119-36

Living Together: Unmarried Couples in Canada. Lynn Fels. *Toronto: Personal Library, 1981. Pp. 208.*

According to the author, the intent of this book is to "explore both the personal experiences of cohabiting couples and societal response in the hope of appraising the character of non-marital cohabitation and its status in society." (p. 25) It is based on the author's master's thesis at Carleton University, Ottawa, *Legal Recognition of Non-Marital Cohabitation in Canada*. The book consists of three parts: 1) Introduction: A Social Statement; 2) Part One: The Experience of Living Together; and 3) Part Two: Living

Together and the Law. Also included are *A Survivor's Guide to Living Together*; two appendices (Sample Budget Form and Sample Cohabitation Agreement), and a bibliography.

Early in the book, the author recognizes two important problems. The first is the difficulty of defining "living together." Although she suggests that social science offers "no clue" to a definition, she reports several definitions used in social science research or in legal contexts, and states:

While any definition of living together is arbitrary, the following is proposed: Non-marital cohabitation is the intimate relationship between two individuals of the opposite sex living together in a common residence outside of marriage. In general, sexual activity is presumed, although it may in fact be a minor part of the individual relationship in question. (p. 21)

The author makes no mention of a time period (as some definitions do), asking, but appearing not to answer, "Is there an essential difference between a couple who has cohabited for three years and one who has cohabited for two months?" (p 21) This reviewer believes that this question should be considered as more than just a rhetorical question; to answer it would likely contribute to a greater understanding of the nature of non-marital cohabitation.

The second problem is a more serious one. Although this book is subtitled "Unmarried Couples in Canada," the author states that the Canadian covivant (her term for non-marital cohabitants) is an unknown statistic. While relevant data were to be collected in the 1981 census, demographic and statistical information on this life-style was not available at the time this book was written. Nevertheless, the author goes on to say "Non-marital cohabitators are located in all socio-economic levels of society. They are not exclusively rich or poor, illiterate or college-