

of winter, two women working overtime  
to understand their lives-  
the word "men" hits the floor like a smoke  
bomb,  
a grey perplexity in which we lose  
our way.

Diane Dawber's style is in many respects similar to that of Glickman's. Again there is a detached intelligence at work that speaks with an accessible, yet distinctive voice. Characteristic are the opening lines of her mother's suicide:

I'm good at makings things,  
repairing things, built this house but  
it didn't do any good when she killed her-  
self downstairs.  
I've been building boats  
getting better all the time  
taking them out  
at sunrise and sunset to fish  
just afloat on the red water  
safe in what I have made  
solid wood, solid steel.

*Cankerville* explores the woman artist in a rural setting. The people of the community come alive in her poems. The opening poems serve as an introduction to the town and the following five sections are devoted to the people and events of this community. *Morning*, the first section, introduces different neighbours, such as the Cooks and the McGintocks and closes with a shift to a more introspective point of view. "Intrusion" introduces a secondary theme concerning the suicide of the poet's mother and the poet's reflections on this event. *Afternoon*, the second section, looks at different women, different areas and finally, different children. The arrangement of this section is effective in developing the poet's thoughts on this rural community. The reader is carefully drawn into this world and again the death of the mother is introduced in one poem, "It was a Near Thing." This poem, followed by a selection about children, such as the poet as school teacher remembering

past pupils, emphasizes the importance of this early, even premature experience with death.

In the third section, *Evening*, the sense of darkness and terrors of life suggested in the earlier sections now becomes central. Dark memories from childhood, adolescent sex, illegitimacy, child abuse and death are topics. *Repercussions*, the following section, is devoted to the fact of her mother's suicide. The poet examines it from many sides and in conclusion is able to find some comfort, "Verification," by looking at her own young daughter. This section is followed by the final grouping, *The Breakaway*, in which death is again central. But, as though the poet has learned something through the other stories, death is presented as a fact of nature, an unavoidable part of life. The acceptance is suggested by the fact that death occurs here not as a result of human violence but of nature, the rising water of the local creek.

Glickman and Dawber are poets that write from personal experience, but the worlds that they move in are very different. The two collections *Complicity* and *Cankerville*, reflect two perspectives, one rural and one urban. While Glickman explores the individual in isolation, Dawber peoples her pages with several neighbours. The collections work together in an interesting manner and the role of the modern artist is seen in different contexts.

**Falling From Grace.** Elly Van de Walle. *Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1984. p. 49.*

**Bernice: A Comedy in Letters.** Georgia Jo Ressmeyer. *Chicago: Metis Press, 1984.*

The use of one dominant voice characterizes two very different works: Elly Van de Walle's *Falling From Grace* and Georgia Jo Ressmeyer's *Bernice*. Each work begins with a foreword and introduction and both writers move the reader through a specified period of time. The similarities cease when one considers the subject matter, style and tone. Walle's *Falling From Grace*, a

collection of short poems, recounts the poet's thoughts about and reactions to a mastectomy. Ressmeyer's *Bernice*, a series of letters and journal entries, is a portrait of a delightfully eccentric lesbian who struggles with the end of a love affair, a court case and subsequent imprisonment, her position in her parents' world, and her role in society in general. While both writers use one voice to lead the reader through a particular period, the results are very different. Walle is concerned with an emotional reaction to a mastectomy and she recounts the process from the hospital and operation through the following six years. Ressmeyer, spanning about eight months, has a much wider range. Not only are the emotions of the speaker explored, but she also scrutinizes the women's movement, the artistic community and the legal system from a homosexual point of view. Both works are published by feminist printers. Although they are very different, they each satisfactorily stimulate the reader's imagination. In the one, the experience of a woman with breast cancer is marked. In the other, a young woman's struggles with conventional society is charted. Both speak to all women.

*Falling From Grace* is introduced with a foreword by Patricia M. Rebbeck, a surgeon. She stresses the sense of fear that accompanies the discovery of breast cancer. The introduction which follows, written by Walle, explains her reasons for writing this collection. She found her own writing an excellent therapy. At the close of the collection, there is a list of further reading on the subject of breast cancer. The forward, the introduction and this list serve to emphasize the need for greater understanding of the fear and trauma that a mastectomy generates. As Walle says in her introduction, some women find comfort being with others in a similar predicament, some withdraw and some, like Walle, become obsessed with understanding the process of the disease. At the end of the collection, one realizes that for Walle there is no simple solution, no full recovery. A sense of loss lingers. The collection

with the opening comments and the closing reference list appears to acknowledge and welcome this sense of loss. A mastectomy, *Falling From Grace* suggests, is part of a horrible reality of women that will not disappear in time and will not be ignored.

*Bernice* likewise begins with a preface and introduction but the tone of these prefaces warns the reader to be on guard. The first speaker is a lawyer and the author of the collection, Georgia Jo Ressmeyer, who says that she advised against publication. *Bernice* apparently disregards her warning and we meet this woman in her next section, the introduction. Georgia does not appear in the book again but her presence as author stands in the wings of the main action, serving as a grand director. Through letters received, letters sent and not sent and journal entries, Georgia explores the eccentric, lovable *Bernice* in various circumstances.

Several letters are sent to and received from Aurelia. This woman, it becomes apparent, had been living with *Bernice* and has left her to develop her skills as a poet. While *Bernice* slowly realizes that her lover will not return, her absent Aurelia offers some of the shrewdest insight into *Bernice's* complex character. In *Bernice's* own letters, particularly those letters she writes but does not send to her parents, a sense of the young woman's uncertainty and frustration is revealed. She feels apart from and isolated from a society that condemns or ignores the needs of a homosexual or an artist.

One of the linking devices that Ressmeyer effectively uses concerns *Bernice's* parking violation fines. As she will not pay them, she goes to court and subsequently to jail. Her lawyer, Lily Barnstraw, offers a balanced, realistic opinion of *Bernice's* actions. It is Lily who complains to her client about her dress on one visit to court. The flamboyant *Bernice* apparently wore a 'pencil through head contraption,' 'swim fins' and a 'high school strapless prom dress.' It is Lily who

explains that happens in court the day that Bernice is finally sentenced to jail. Although Bernice, in a letter to Aurelia, promises to give her account, characteristically she cannot bring herself to relate the story. It is clear that Bernice was unprepared for the implications that resulted from her failure to conform to society's regulations. In fact, after her jail sentence, correspondence between Bernice and Lily reveals a more thoughtful but still delightfully eccentric young woman.

The letters to the Salon des Muses, a satirical attack on a feminist artist group, and a proposal to Wisconsin Arts Conclave are entertaining reading. They reveal Ressemeyer's own very shrewd insights into the artistic lesbian community. Bernice's submission of a dusty and dilapidated xerox machine with a poem, 'Ode on a Xerox Machine,' etched in the dust, to be published in its entirety, is only one example of Ressemeyer's cutting, fond attack on the artistic community. When the collection draws to an end, the reader wishes the eccentric Bernice an affectionate farewell.

These two collections compliment each other. While *Falling From Grace* explores a sensitive and terrifying issue, mastectomy, from the point of view of one woman's painful experience, *Bernice* examines the lesbian artistic community with lighthearted humor. Both works together provide balance and perspective.

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**Women Against Censorship**, Ed. by V. Burstyn.  
*Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., 1985.*

### *The Censorship Trap Revisited*

*Women Against Censorship* is an interesting group of essays that reflect quite accurately the position of the anti-censorship feminist con-

tingent. The thesis of the book, well articulated by editor Varda Burstyn and reiterated throughout by many of the other contributors, is that censorship, even pornography is not the issue, but rather "Sexist pornography is a product of the economic and social conditions of our society—not vice versa." (p.24) In principle, of course, it is impossible to quarrel with such a position. No one is naive enough to believe the implied reverse position i.e. that pornography per se causes sexism. It does help to perpetrate it however, and this is a point barely alluded to in the present volume. After struggling with the book for some time, and carefully considering its variety of anti-censorship essays, I am left with an uncomfortable, gnawing feeling that something is not quite right. This something, however, is not so much a problem with the book as it is with the Women Against Censorship movement, which has been gaining in respectability as a legitimate political perspective on the feminist horizon. The book, like the WAC movement, is a Catch 22.

As Burstyn herself points out quite clearly, the book looms as a warning, directed in particular I suspect at feminists who have fallen into the "censorship trap." It reiterates over and over again that pornography is only a symptom. "Censoring pornography is like using an Aspirin to cure cancer." (p.79) "Censoring pornography is like killing the messenger who brings bad news." (p.97) More importantly, WAC argues that pornography and censorship are distracting us from more important problems relating to women's inequality. Yet the very focus of the book, like the energy orientation of the WAC movement suggests rather clearly that these women haven't sidestepped the censorship issue at all. In fact, they are obsessed with it. As someone who agrees with the book's basic premise that censorship is indeed a red herring, it is disappointing to see many articulate feminists attending to it so intimately. While the book pinpoints some of the crucial questions which are embedded in the pornography/censorship