

criminating ignorance that you make your professor's assignment openly shabby and suspect. If Helwig had scaled down her ambitions and used a map of developments in feminist and psychoanalytic theory, she might have produced a very good critical article about an awful group of Jello-cultural feminist poems by Jan Conn, Susan Glickman and Rosemary Sullivan in the 1984 Mary di Michele edited collection *Anything is Possible*. However, Helwig quotes from these poems and others to try to convince that all feminist poetry is "weak" (ideological), and that feminist poets are afraid of "strong" sexual imagery. Given the essay's endnote references to the work of poets Daphne Marlatt and Lola Lemire Tostevin, and critic Barbara Godard, Helwig cannot be innocent of *jouissance* or *l'écriture féminine*. Rather, she chooses to ignore brilliant explorations of subjective sexualization and women's bodies for the conservative ideological category "sexuality" (panting, de-panted Irving Layton).

Marco LoVerso's antidotal Bakhtin/formalist reading of the intelligent, powerfully public works of Margaret Atwood also suffers palpably from his editor's weirdly sensitive/insensitive blindspot to feminism. LoVerso's inclusion of *The Handmaid's Tale* in his discussion of Atwood's art is quite problematic given the novel's serious jab at the masculinist genre of science fiction from a conscious, ironic place beside a small tradition of feminist utopias. *The Handmaid's Tale* is obviously the least serious of Atwood's creations and the edgiest, most despairing of her works, predicated as it is on a huge nuclear-ecological disaster that not only stops but weirdly mocks essential liberal change in patriarchal power relations. Here, LoVerso's precious reminder that Atwood has not created a "living evil character" is misdirected given the horribly bent complacency in the discourses within this strangely formulatic tale.

How did ECW come to publish this weird, usual selection of contemporary academic essays? Some roundabout comments.

I think there is a "nice," orderly, superficially political notion of progress in ECW Press editor Robert Lecker's post modern criticism. I cannot link this feeling to anything more concrete than Professor Lecker's silent ease in *On the Line*, with the slovenly sense of fun found in so many of John Metcalf's otherwise conventional short stories, next to his delicate, abstract admiration of the tragic troping fun of a "nice" extensive Robert Kroetsch. Too, Professor Lecker and John Metcalf might agree that fiction and its criticism are primarily safe from very useful,

less textual, factual connections that strongly appropriate or deviate.

But just consider *The Literary History of Canada* or *What is a Canadian Literature?* It would contain the writers who are read and were read in this country — the women. And it would use the tools of sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history, sometimes in a feminist Foucaultish way, together with feminist literary and psychoanalytic theory, autobiographical writing, biography and emotionally considered Derridean strategies. Such a book would be plainly ruptured at times and dotted with brilliant canny insights. (What riches Canada has for late twentieth-century cultural criticism in its women writers!)

Canadian literary neo-conservatives cannot seem to feel how amazingly forward such a modest intellectual territory is. We are supposed to find *Carry on Bumping* a very interesting or a very useful game and for everyone. Golly.

Anne Hicks  
Waterloo, Ontario

#### NOTES

1. Robert Lecker, *On the Line: Readings in the Short Fiction of Clark Blaise, John Metcalf and Hugh Hood*, Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1982.

**The Stairway.** Alice A. Chown with an introduction by Diana Chown, *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, Pp. 273 paperback.*

*The Stairway* is a reprint of an important Canadian feminist classic. It was published originally in Boston as the diary of Alice Chown, covering the years from 1906 to 1919. Although many of the entries were written for the publication, several years after the events happened, this does not detract from the piece. Alice Chown published her diary not so much for its merits as an autobiography, but in the hope that it "might give individuals faith in themselves" (p. 4). If her thoughts on feminism, pacifism and socialism were as challenging for her contemporaries as they are for the modern-day reader, she was truly successful in her goals. This edition includes a lengthy essay written by her great-great niece, Diana Chown, chronicling Alice's life right up to her death in 1949. Throughout the book and the introductory essay, Alice's implicit belief in the goodness of humankind comes through and Diana's essay places Alice's thought and activities in the context of Canadian reform history.

At another level, *The Stairway* is important as the historical account of one woman's coming of age, for Alice might as aptly have called her book "Life Begins at Forty." When the story opens, Alice's mother has just died. Alice, now forty, has spent the past twenty years of her life caring for her semi-invalid mother, but life is far from over for Alice. That day, she wrote: "Today I am free. My first day of freedom! It is my new birth!" (p. 5) New birth for Alice meant testing her radical ideas and, as she did so, she found herself estranged from the established Kingston and Toronto societies to which her family belonged. Thus it seems particularly appropriate that her great-great niece had the opportunity to research and write the introduction to this new edition of *The Stairway*. Diana remarks that her aunt Alice was labelled as eccentric by the family. She says it was only through her own research in Canadian reform history that she became interested in her aunt's contributions to Canadian society.

As one reads *The Stairway*, Alice's idealism and her efforts at creating a better society stand out. During those years, she threw off what she perceived to be the fetters of tradition, including her relationship with the Methodist church in which her family was active, and the trappings of the Canadian society where she was born and raised. Her beliefs developed outside of the church's teaching, to a belief in the human spirit and a mysticism close to the Theosophist idealists of that time. She spent much time in the eastern United States and Britain with friends who shared her non-traditional feminist, pacifist and socialist views.

Alice was particularly delighted to find male friends who shared her feminist ideals. True to herself, though, Alice refused to tie herself to a marriage relationship. Perhaps because she spent so many years caring for others, including her ailing mother, she came to view marriage as oppressive. When she was forty-five, she forfeited a romantic attachment in favour of her own autonomy. Her beau proposed marriage and, although she "wanted his love," she feared that marital ties would result in her becoming subject to him. After much "torture" and "uncertainty," she "sent him word" that the marriage was off (p. 89).

Alice's ideals and independence of spirit were at the root of her varied career. Alice worked at various points as a settlement worker, a suffragist, a writer, a home economics advocate, a journalist, a labour activist, a labour college teacher and a peace activist. She marched with the British suffragists in 1910 and joined the Canadian Suffrage Association in 1911. Alice believed that education was the key for women to escape their subordinate role in society and

family life and it was her emphasis on women's right to economic and social independence that separates her from the majority of Canadian reform women of that period. Even though she had severed her formal ties with the church, Alice wrote in the Methodist *Christian Guardian*, criticizing the inadequate education and low wages of the deaconesses in 1911. Five years later, she set out her beliefs on pacifism in the *Guardian*, suggesting that women, especially, should work for pacifism. In the 1920s, Alice was active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the League of Nations Society. Her interests were not limited to political and organizational activities, however. She loved people and hosted many dinner parties and teas for her friends and was interested in the plight of the less fortunate as well. She became involved with workers involved in labour disputes, immigrants who were trying to make better lives for themselves, and lived for a period in a cooperative arrangement.

Alice continued to live her ideals and promote her beliefs in feminism, pacifism and socialism until she died in her seventies. The story of this woman's life, its significance largely unrecognized until recently, is a welcome addition to biographies of other reform women like Flora MacDonald Denison and Nellie McClung. It also provides inspiration for women and men today who, like the reformers of the early twentieth century, are working for peace, justice and a better world.

Lucille Marr  
University of Waterloo

**Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914.** Kathleen E. McCrone, *Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988, Pp. 310 hardcover.*

In 1913, enraged English suffragists vented their fury on the prominent male sporting establishments and sportsmen of the day. They vandalized race courses and bowling greens, tennis, croquet and golf clubs, as well as cricket and football grounds. One combative woman was apprehended on the centre court at Wimbledon carrying explosives and a note that read, "No peace till women have the vote." Another more spectacular martyr killed herself under the hooves of the king's horse at the running of the Derby.

The relationship between feminism on the one hand, and sport on the other, has always been tenuous, disturbing, and contradictory. For some of the most militant of