

stereotypes of older women and advising women of all ages to unsubscribe to the misogynist and ageist beliefs imposed by cultures that are so often male-dominated and youth-centered. There is no grieving for "being old" or for the feeling of "getting into a dead-end" in this collection. Rather, each page is about celebrating women's experiences of "conquering Mt. Everest," acquiring wisdom as one ages, engaging in just causes, self-definition or counting blessings. Compassion, creativity and hilarity are vividly written on every page of this book.

On the whole, readers can witness women's personal growth and fulfillment in each piece included here, illustrating the positive aspects of being aged and contesting popular images of mature women as fragile, dependent, disconnected, malicious and/or unproductive. Indeed, the stories and poems documented in this collection exemplify and broaden feminism; they tell stories about the "I am" or "we are" rather than about what others think or say about "us." In cultures where definitions of women and women's values are so often based on their looks, physical attractiveness to the opposite sex, reproductive capacity, ability to comply with socially constructed sex roles and the size of the "supplementary" paycheck that a woman can bring home, women's subjectivities, mental powers and a whole range of other admirable qualities - sharpness, wittiness, persistence, humility, perseverance, assertiveness, expressiveness, and joyfulness - are very often dismissed. Being able to define who one is and to talk about aging in ways that are both humorous and victorious appears to be a liberating process for older women. This sets the stage for women located in other social categories to find liberation in refusing the socially constructed meanings of their "woman-ness"; be it in relation to age, racialization, sexuality, or ability.

While many authors in this collection acknowledge some of the limitations and losses that go along with

being "older," the title of this book - and the title of one of its collected pieces - suggests that getting older means "Still going strong." This, it is implied, is a true "declaration of independence" for women.

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Swooning Beauty: A Memoir of Pleasure.

Joanna Frueh. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2006; xiii + 289 pages; ISBN 0-87417-672-7; \$29.50US (paper).

In Freud's poetic "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), he tells us that mourning is a painful labour in which the mourner retreats deep within her interior to process the loss of a person or ideal by sifting through her memories. We do this work to prepare for new connections with the world and for loving once again. *Swooning Beauty* is a luscious delicacy that documents art historian Joanna Frueh's passage into her grief following the deaths of her parents and the dissolution of her marriage over a two year period. This book chronicles the epic journey of a hero who is supporting herself through these great losses by clutching pleasure close to her heart and then letting go, opening herself to blissful new possibilities. It is a testament to the hard and exhausting work of mourning that honours the deep and difficult knowledge that can come into being only through bereavement.

The essays in this memoir are enrobed in chocolate, an actual and figurative object that trumpets the virtues of beauty and eroticism in the flesh that are experienced through eating, sex, gardening, spending time with animals, exercising, friendship, learning and art. Chocolate is a physically, emotionally and intellectually nourishing and comforting substance that is an anchor to the hope and fear that new joys and happenings can emerge from beyond the dusky devastation of grief. With a memory that is finely tuned to the opulence of sensory experience, Frueh explores the history of her family, girlhood,

sexuality and femininity in both their everyday and extraordinary manifestations. To live through the loss of her parents and marriage and maintain faith in pleasure's return, Frueh describes the discovery of her heroic manhood which makes it possible for her to embody the qualities of strength and bravery that are commonly attributed to men in western cultures. The memoir's hero creates Mel (a character who bears a resemblance to Gibson's fictional and visual persona and also embodies the lovely and valiant aspects of masculinity) after the death of her mother as a way of fashioning another hero with whom she can identify and love as she heals and transforms.

At the conclusion of the book, Frueh makes the incisive observation that feminists frequently expound upon the trauma and difficulty of - and longing for - embodiment at the expense of lavishing time, talk and written words on the pleasures of the body. This autobiography refreshingly resists this tendency and celebrates embodied pleasure as a means of living with and accepting loss as a vital part of living, rather than trying to overcome it. In many ways, this reflection on the juicy enjoyment of fleshiness guides the hero of this book through her voyage. At the same time, this reflection encourages the reader to think about her own relationship to the pleasures of beauty and love and the intimate affiliation that these pleasures have with loss and letting go. For those of us who have experienced heartbreaking loss as well as deep, beautiful delight, this memoir is a treat to savour slowly or quickly, according to your pleasure.

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A Mieke Bal Reader. Mieke Bal. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006; illustrations; xxiv+491 pages; ISBN 0-226-03585-9; \$32.95US (paper).

This monumental collection of scholarly work produced by the Dutch critic and theorist best known for her contributions

to narratology and innovative application of literary theory to the visual arts is comprised of sixteen essays written between the years 1977 and 2004. The volume is organized into five sections corresponding with major areas of Bal's intertwined interests in literature, interdisciplinary methodologies, visual analysis, postmodern theology and cultural analysis. Whether she is analyzing Shakespeare, the Bible, Proust, museum spaces, the practice of collecting, photography, feminist politics, Rembrandt or Caravaggio, her overriding concern is with different forms of boundary crossing, challenging borders traditionally drawn around disciplines and genres, texts and images, social history and works of art, and aesthetics, politics and ethics.

The author makes a strong argument for interdisciplinarity. An integrative, interdisciplinary approach constitutes for her an indispensable framework for the study of culture as well as for any study within any particular discipline. Allegorically speaking, interdisciplinarity encapsulates the demands of doing academic work within, for example, the European Union or in a transnational frame. Bal's rigorous, intellectually demanding criticism is grounded in precisely defined concepts and "thick" knowledge of disciplinary and contextual issues. Rather than fixed categories, concepts are cognitive and intersubjective tools that "travel" between individual scholars, across disciplines, geographies and histories. She insists on the importance of the past to our understanding of the present and on the "preposterously" anachronistic use of contemporary discourses to illuminate the past.

Bal's book is about theory-making through the practice of reading. She treats texts and cultural artifacts as "theoretical objects," interlocutors for theorists and critics. Literature and art do not reflect or illustrate pre-existing reality, but are productive in the anti-mimetic sense of being "meaning producing machines." They cannot be viewed solely in terms of