

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.

Rachel Hurst  
York University

---

***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

representation, but must also be regarded in their institutional, performative and framing aspects. Bal's method of postmodern cultural analysis relies on close reading, which allows her to address the complexity and specificity of particular texts or images while foregrounding their relationship to ideologies, politics, and aesthetics. Her readings demonstrate the instability of intention, agency and subjectivity, at the same time as they problematize a common tendency in feminist, queer and cultural studies to "naturalize" visual and textual constructs by referring them back to the outside world. She finds formal equivalents or encodings of such naturalizing readings in narrative, rhetorical and tropological structures.

Another unifying thread found in this volume is Bal's feminist concern with gender, articulated through the recurrent themes of rape and violence against women, violence of representation, or epistemic violence. Even her interest in biblical narratives derives from a desire to study the recorded beginnings of patriarchy and misogyny, supported by her optimistic belief that we are now witnessing the "unstable end of patriarchy." Of particular interest to Women's Studies is her essay "Enfolding Feminism," in which she proposes a rallying metaphor of the fold to repair severed links and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts in feminism.

Bal's work has a role to play in the general critique of what makes culture constrictive and limiting, exposing the abuse of power, embracing ethical non-indifference and deconstructing the supposedly "unmarked" dominant modes of perception of reality through whiteness, Christianity, and colonialism. In the end, this *Reader* is a form of "life writing," the text writing the life of a thinker, philosopher and academic who acts as our guide and who occasionally lightens up her theorizing with humour, playfulness and personal anecdote.

Eva C. Karpinski  
York University

---

***Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred.*** M. Jacqui Alexander. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005; xii +410 pages; ISBN 0-8223-3645-6; \$23.95US (paper).

M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* is a comprehensive, extensive exploration of Alexander's journey through migration stories (including her own), through academe, the academy and teaching, and through African and Caribbean colonized identities and sexualized politics. Her collection contributes a great deal to the feminist examination of the need to remember, to communicate the experiences of women of colour, including the spiritual survival of women of colour by finding room for the inclusion the Sacred and sacred experiences, as she steps away from the secularized view of experience and power that post-modernism has brought about.

Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* is an incredibly ambitious undertaking as she pulls together a decade of her writing (her critiques and reflections) into this one collection. Alexander's theoretical approach brings together intersections of feminist, queer and critical race theory while also strongly contributing to a critique of colonialism, neo-imperialism and modern empires. Throughout *Pedagogies of Crossing* Alexander relies on a radical feminism influenced by feminist activists and critical theorists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, and especially Gloria Anzaldúa, among many others who the reader can recognize as inspiring her efforts.

Alexander's collection weaves together themes ranging from the need to teach for justice - that teaching the life stories of women of colour is essential to understanding the oppression of colonialist forces - to the need to question the control of empires, including corporate empires, and their violent traditions pressed upon