

community. Readers of Toronto citizen-developer confrontations written about in the early 1970's by noted journalist and author Janice Dinneen, or activist, columnist and bureaucrat John Sewell, may be put off by Ms. Helman's style. In keeping with her position as Director of Audio Visuals for the National Film Board of Canada, the author seems more interested in presenting a spectacle than in outlining a basis

of traditional economic thinking standing in the way of social values. Economics is not the big obstacle; it is the way people think. People have to be made to realize that they can have an effect on their own environment.

Unfortunately, their move toward pressure group and task-oriented community action was too little, too late. By the early 1970's the fire in this movement of students

Corporation and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Section 56. of the National Housing Act) who bought the remaining property from the cash-poor Concordia Estates. Finally in 1976 a by-law, "backed by local merchants who could no longer afford the huge costs associated with high-rise construction," was passed by a pressured Montreal City Council. The by-law, which limited the height or bulk of new buildings to 4 storeys, prevented Concordia from completing La Cité with any capital it might access from private sources. With Concordia Estates out of the way, the focus of the book shifts to a handful of Milton-Park leaders entering into boardroom negotiations with those beauraucrats and decision makers who eventually underwrote the costs of the Milton-Park project. To this day, deals are being struck between representatives from senior levels of government and Milton-Park. Ms. Helman notes that the Milton-Park project, which officially opened in September 1983, is by no means problem free. Yet, she goes on to elaborate that the project itself helps us understand how even a semi-active community can serve as the means of bringing power back to the citizenry. Certainly this self-proclaimed urban historian gives us some useful history and a call to action comparable to struggles, past and present, in inner-city Toronto; however, it provides less of a basis for action than we might have hoped for. Reading Helman leaves us with the same uneasy feeling shared by concerned Torontonians during David Crombie's vague but winning "Save Our Neighbourhood" mayoralty campaign in 1972. Then, as perhaps now, our uneasiness was well-founded. Shortly after the election, the "tiny, perfect" mayor and the majority of his prodeveloper Council used the "Save Our Neighbourhood" platform to accede to the Meridian Group of Companies' plan to add three more twenty-nine storey towers to the St. Jamestown development. This development for affluent singles had been erected on the site of a well-publicized battle between long-time residents and radical reformers on the one hand, and Meridian and City Hall on the other. Unlike the fairy tale conclusion to the Milton-Park struggle, the story of St. Jamestown ended in compromise.

The neighbourhood retained twenty-five of their own houses in South St. Jamestown. The developer built eighteen apartment towers in St. Jamestown, which made this one-tenth of one square kilometre area the most densely populated block in Canada. Fifteen years later (thanks to a Toronto City Council who supported the wholesale destruction of entire neighbourhoods), more than 11,000 people are forced to live like rats in a rapidly deteriorating and downwardly mobile St. Jamestown. Toronto City Council's neglect of the plan for a just and humane city is similar to the neglect Ms. Helman seems to project for the Montreal of tomorrow. She avoids a discussion of future implications for affordable housing in Montreal, and overlooks the necessity of expanding the city's non-profit housing sector. In addition, she completely locks out any mention of the urgent demand for Montreal's citizens' movements to question who benefits from the ownership of property. By so doing, Ms. Helman fails as an urban historian for us. And, she may well end up falling into bed with those women and men who don't give a damn. Whether it be Montreal or Toronto, a city must be planned, and any affair, illicit or other-wise, must be exposed and analysed in order to address the future needs and rights of the majority of the non-owning public who find themselves city bound.

A community activist since, 1979, Larry Morris has worked with the First United Church in Vancouver, and is presently of the Open Door Centre and Rooms Registry Service in downtown Toronto. He is currently working on a book which focusses on issues underlying homelessness.

THE SOLITARY OUTLAW
Bruce Powe,
Lester & Orpen Dennys,
Toronto, 1987.

Bruce Powe's *The Solitary Outlaw* demonstrates two things clearly: that alarms over the state of literacy are generally poorly conceived, and that the influence of McLuhan is occasionally pernicious. McLuhan's "message" (really) was that a literate man in a post-literate world has found

himself suddenly of a realm. His supersedes electronic media, Powe has led to a dangerous cultural level and even, of individual identity. Powe's remark the writer exploit himself as an "outlaw" to the evening, probing, punning a solitary individual irritating and attractive bringing "the crowd" to a reflection.

What this means is when we look back at book, *A Climate Change* (Press, 1984), a collection of provocative essays of Canadian writers, the political environment quarter-century in work largely appears role of government, and the universities production of literature. The book is framed by opposition between styles, the one between Marshall McLuhan (the other by Northrop Frye better the contradictions of excesses of McLuhan inviting controversy involvement, than the contained "theoretic" and "Themes" of Frye "slow, logical and precise" whereas McLuhan, the tempered critic, is "urgent and immediate," right times.

The dichotomy is can personal extremes. W. McLuhan is eulogized in introductory essay the *Phaedo*, Plato's text of the last days of Socrates Frye is rendered from a bush. Powe on Frye's after class:

Thus we see him ambling along a briefcase in hand, entering into his obscure reveries, his minor archetypes, the mythical. He shyly stares and stutters of students and his office with his books, leaving chalkboards varied and grids, a system of concepts and categories without moral judgment himself perhaps now, a fiction, ha Northrop Frye, a

Try to do and say only that which will be agreeable to others. In conversation, as in

for community activism. The on-again, off-again rhythms of her prose however, suggest both the themes of the Milton-Park Citizen's Committee (MPCC) in its various lives, and the "generational class split that plagued the whole Milton-Park movement". Initially and perhaps somewhat naively, the MPCC of the 1960's expressed its "raison d'etre" in terms of the abstract concepts of structural conflict which immobilized the largely non-politicized majority of residents. While "on occasion the young idealists became anxious and uneasy about what they were doing and for whom," it wasn't until the late 1960's that the movement, frustrated by repeated failures at confronting class inequalities in and around the development issue, began to articulate a more radical perspective:

We have to overcome the problems

and professionals had all but gone out. Unhindered, Concordia Estates proceeded with phase One of La Cité, and 255 units were lost to the wrecking ball. From the ashes of the movement, however, an economic, political and social phoenix rose. Quebec's poor economy, when combined with the fact that Concordia could not lever any capital from the public coffers of its civic lover (unlike the Olympics, La Cité was not a monument to Jean Drapeau), created a series of financial crises for the developer. At that time the pro-development *Montreal Star* unintentionally published a single, pivotal story about the struggle from the citizens' point of view. The article raised the question, "Can developers do what they want?" and introduced the idea of a Non-Profit Housing Co-operative — financially supported by the Quebec Housing

himself suddenly outside the realm. His supersession by electronic media, Powe maintains, has led to a dangerous drop in cultural level and endangerment, even, of individual human identity. Powe's remedy asks that the writer exploit his new position as an "outlaw" to the age, threatening, probing, puncturing sleep, a solitary individual at once irritating and attractive, capable of bringing "the crowd" into momentary reflection.

What this means is a bit clearer when we look back at Powe's first book, *A Climate Charged* (Mosaic Press, 1984), a collection of provocative essays on major Canadian writers, the literary-political environment of the last quarter-century in which their work largely appeared, and the role of government, the C.B.C., and the universities in the production of literary reputation. The book is framed by a heroic opposition between two writing styles, the one represented by Marshall McLuhan (as hero) and the other by Northrop Frye. Far better the contradictions and excesses of McLuhan, Powe says, inviting controversy and audience involvement, than the self-contained "theoretical packages" and "Themes" of Frye. Frye is too "slow, logical and professorial"; whereas McLuhan, the better-tempered critic, is "urgent, sharp, and immediate," right for the times.

The dichotomy is carried to quite personal extremes. Where McLuhan is eulogized in an introductory essay that reads like the *Phaedo*, Plato's tender account of the last days of Socrates, poor Frye is rendered from behind a bush. Powe on Frye going home after class:

Thus we see him after class, ambling along Avenue Road, briefcase in hand, disappearing into his obscure inward reveries, his mind enclosed in archetypes, the timeless, the mythical. He shyly avoids the stares and stuttered "hellos" of students and vanishes into his office with his typewriter and books, leaving behind on chalkboards various diagrams and grids, a system of concepts and categories, a world without moral judgement, himself perhaps a construct now, a fiction, hardly existing, Northrop Frye, a catalyst for

vast impersonal schemes that exist a priori, like one of Jorge Luis Borges' creations, a man who dreamed himself out of reality, away from the sordid streets and hideous suburbs, in his inaccessible den, with Apollo, and the other great gods of dreamland.

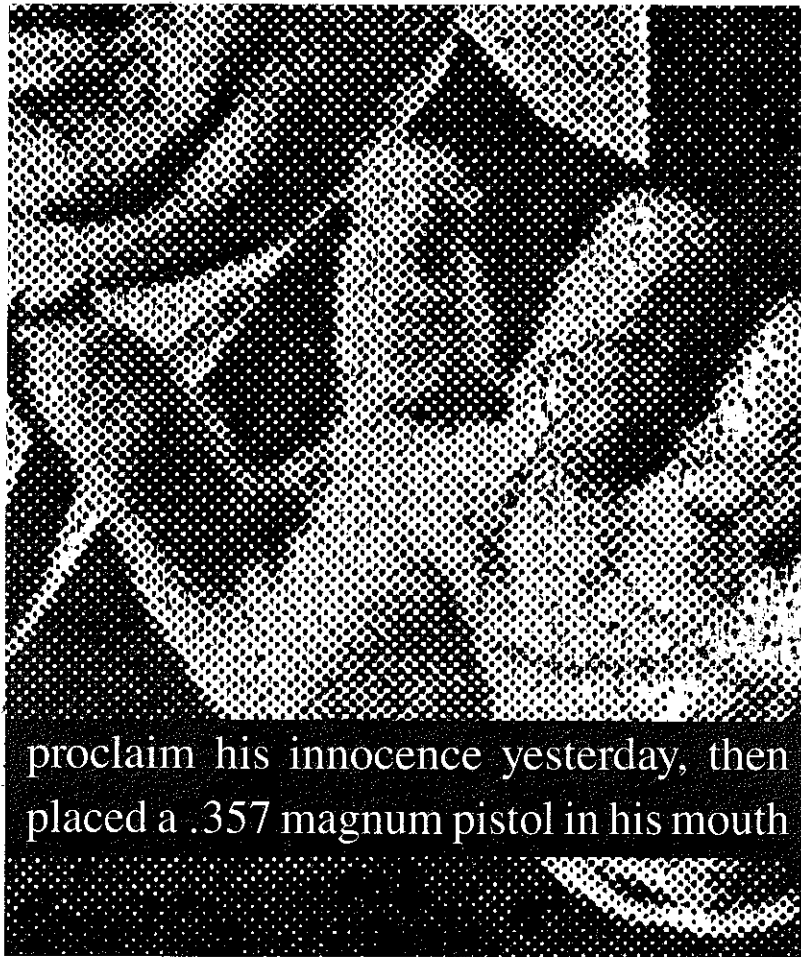
With much less pretty flourish, this sort of abuse is repeated in the new book; bad manners evidently form part of the new writer's etiquette.

Of Powe's motley group of knights exemplar, none demonstrate his point about the special efficacy of the new bandit style. Wyndham Lewis, the original "solitary outlaw," was not read even in his own day. Pierre Trudeau and Glenn Gould, provocative and elusive individualists, highly literate, nonetheless had their effect not as writers but as performers in the electronic media. While Powe borrows from Elias Canetti only an image, the burning of library books, deploying it as the romantic backlight for his many "live" locations: a London flat, a Montreal restaurant, Keith Davey's livingroom, a nightclub somewhere else.

What Powe's outlaw band have in common (apart from the fact that McLuhan hand-picked them all) is a certain adept blend of the personal and the intellectual, whether as writer or media personality: not any blend of this, but one which combines elements of gesture, confrontation, brooding, and puckishness as the modus operandi for communicating issues of moment to modern man. Powe's own performance in this style is enlightening. He broods, certainly; he makes notes to himself (by parentheses, mostly); he declares, he stops abruptly at a word or phrase, copies out lists; he makes a sentence of a word or phrase; he dialogues, he meanders, he turns over "broken bits"; he muses; he takes us to see the sites (sic), analyzes, satirizes; he experiments, he puns (terribly), he mimics Vico (terribly), and above all, he warns. He observes that no single writer in Canada has availed himself of the "exciting promise for contemporary writing" of the malleability of prose. Perhaps; but if Powe's own prose is an example of this malleability, we must look forward to the return — with a vengeance — of the personal letter, which is what

this style resembles. That the essay form, with its power to present arguments, should ever be replaced by a public personal letter, in whose malleability I read 'lack of discipline', strikes me as a) untrue, and b) exceedingly odd. It is a symptom of the strain of sympathy for this kind of anti-intellectualism that Powe's book has been again well-received. I leave the *Globe and Mail* and

effects of the new mass media and generally raising everyone's consciousness of them. Coping with the novelty of this sensible approach was part of the difficulty of coping with McLuhan, to say nothing of the dazzle of his insights, the strong, forward drive of his rapid prose, the sudden turns and dips in his kandy-colored road, and the many bizarre views. He was an intellectual well-suited to the psychedelic



proclaim his innocence yesterday, then placed a .357 magnum pistol in his mouth

Books in Canada to reflect on this. But for this reason Powe's assumptions are worth glancing at. His project founders, in my view, because he uncritically accepts the idea that literacy is somehow in crisis (as though the electric environment could only be inimical to it) and because he takes the whole of McLuhan more or less at face value, something no one else could ever do.

McLuhan's value is well-acknowledged. He made popular the idea that human culture was dependent in invisible ways upon its technologies and that it was generally good practice to try to see ourselves better by making these dependencies visible. It could not be too late in 1964, he wrote, to sort out the effects of print, first introduced into England in 1476. But of course he was also spelling out the new

sixties.

McLuhan's problems with his critics may be put down to two overriding tendencies: the one to make great, sweeping generalizations, and the other to argue by metaphor. McLuhan was never forthcoming with the complex detail that makes a generalization supportable. What he appeared to rely on was his sheer intuition and his power to make arresting claims. Similarly with his metaphors.

To give one example: McLuhan (following Innis) argues that the invention of the phonetic alphabet, in conjunction with the use of papyrus (as opposed to brick and stone), transferred political power from the priests to the military. The alphabet was easily learned, i.e. not so easily monopolized by a priestly class,

and papyrus was transportable, so that commands over distance became administratively practical: hence ancient empires. He illustrates this development in terms of the myth concerning Cadmus, a semi-historical king said to have "introduced the phonetic letters into Greece." It was Cadmus who sowed the dragon's teeth that sprang up as armed men. McLuhan observes (suddenly) that the teeth and the

The term 'literacy' has various senses. For Cicero, a 'litteratus' is a rhetorician, someone with a flair for the right word. In the modern sense, the literate person is first of all someone who can read and write; and secondly, perhaps, someone who has achieved through language some degree of lucidity. By lucidity I mean a certain awareness of the power of language, as language, to symbolize and measure out the world,

writing are secondary enhancements of oral literate skill, printing a further development (in the way of a mass medium), and the communications media of the 20th century greater enhancements still (in the way of more mass media). In other words, there is no pre-literate or post-literate, only greater and greater resources for the communication of the "right word." What makes people think that literacy is in danger in the 20th century is that the "word" has become so active; it is not, for the moment, easily circumscribed.

With regard to the *perception* of literacy, television, by establishing in the home a form of ongoing public world, has had two important effects. It has first of all made popular culture so very visible, and in its own way coherent, that it has acquired the power of a public norm. In this atmosphere, it is not hard to think that books and their authors are being shunted to the side — an optical illusion, I think. But, along with the other oral media, television has, secondly, brought us a public language which has evolved for itself an oral standard. While hardly equivalent to prose, this oral standard has had the effect — good, I think — of informalizing all communication, including written. The majority of good writers seem to have adjusted their "sets" to an idea of the reader as "tuned in" to this standard. This does not mean that writers write less intelligently or that they write conversation, as Powe does partly; but it does mean that in the making of their prose they draw on the oral public language as an expressive resource.

A notable casualty of this development is formal propriety in written English expression, often seen as deterioration or loss of grammatical standard. This is wrong, as linguists keep trying to impress upon secondary school teachers. Powe's idealization of the 18th century as a golden period of expression is purely pastoral. Even at the mechanical level, the world becomes more literate. If there are nearly a billion illiterate today, it is also true — as UNESCO reports — that the illiteracy rate has dropped from about half the world's population in 1950 to a quarter in the present day. People adjust.

Literacy in one form or another belongs to every distinct community. Its relation to that given community's sense of itself is clear whenever we see two literacies competing. An interesting example today is the fundamentalist criticism of secular humanism in the schools; according to the former, teaching the child to have a "positive self-concept" prevents the child from "coming to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin." This example makes clear that if human identity is somehow dependent on literacy, we must look to literacy itself as the greater danger (a point opposite to Powe's). McLuhan noticed that the acquisition of lettered skills tended to separate an individual from his home community. We have a resonance of this when a country neighbour complains that a local son has gone off to university and got himself "ideas."

From the "culture" which the sophisticated literacy of today is producing, we do derive a secondary kind of identity. The more primary kind of identity, rooted in localized community and in an individual's emotional life, goes begging meanwhile. The challenge this presents to the world society we are becoming lies in how we find opportunities to re-form communities stable enough to allow our emotions, still tribal, to be authentically and fully communicated to our fellows. The problem is complex, and well beyond the grasp of the quixotic masked man, who cut a figure and demonstrated his proficiency in letters, shows us nothing more than a flamboyantly slashed, bare "Z."

The widening perspectives associated with greater literacy, the mathematization of sense and humanity, have tended to make personalities abstract, and perhaps overly contemplative. A heresy from our point of view, but it does seem clear that "personal" satisfactions have had to retire somewhat from the central arenas of human activity, to positions eccentric to the edifices of knowledge. Surely, this is where Powe's alarm really belongs: to the pressure on "individuals" to become servants of our knowledge, integers of meaning in an all-repeat pattern of universal culture. We must hide our boasts, unlike the barbarian saga kings, who we recognize now, bemused only in the television wrestling ring.

most things, the popular "middle ground" is best. Certain subjects, even though

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phonetic letters are one and the same. And as teeth are for grasping and devouring, he continues, so letters are for building empires. Teeth also have a lineal visual effect. And so on. One wonders: Does this apply to the 500-year Hittite empire of the 2nd millennium BC, or the Akkadian empire of the 3rd BC?

"I don't explain," McLuhan said, "I explore."

What clearly McLuhan's sense of literacy was, besides the mere existence and use of letters, we don't know. An image arises of a man fond of books, with a ready facility for quoting Shakespeare. Such nostalgia forms the operating bias in Powe's book. No discussion of the concept of literacy anywhere appears.

whether in literature, folktale, philosophy, or conversation. This second sense, which advances us beyond the mechanical power over the word to a more general power over the body of words, is closer to Cicero's original sense, which locates literacy in the context of rhetorical speech. It is this locus in the speech base which suggests (to me) what should perhaps be literacy's fundamental sense: the power, broadly, to employ language to good effect, to communicate more or less well. Homer, whether or not he could read or write, was certainly not illiterate.

The emphasis on orality restores to literacy a primary sense, and permits us, incidentally, to return to oral cultures, past and present, a basic human respect. Perhaps we can say that all human cultures are oral. On this view, reading and

The above article is (with additions) from (November, 1987). It has been submitted for Journalism Award in the review category.

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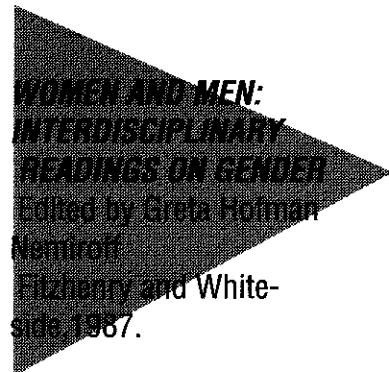
This is a big book. My duty to prepare a review was on duty than desire. a life's work, and, ge speaking anthologies those intended for th markets of undergrad my favourite read.

I should not have be that it turned out to book. The editor, Grace Nemirow, is a formid feminist and teacher cajoling and threaten authors to submit ma interesting manuscri wide range of theoret odological and subst — might well have le undaunted. Way bac 1970's Nemirow co-t Women's Studies cou Montreal with her cl (and contributor to th Christine Garside Al Sister Prudence Al Religious Sisters of M several years the stud from the rafters in th and together the two scholars mobilized co staff and students to Concordia University Beauvoir Institute.

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The above article is re-printed (with additions) from COMPASS (November, 1987). It has recently been submitted for a National Journalism Award in the book-review category.

Roger Langen is in the English PhD. program at York University.



This is a big book. My decision to prepare a review was based more on duty than desire. It looked like a life's work, and, generally speaking anthologies, especially those intended for the compulsory markets of undergraduates, are not my favourite read.

I should not have been surprised that it turned out to be a very good book. The editor, Greta Hofman Nemiroff, is a formidable Montreal feminist and teacher. Persuading, cajoling and threatening thirty authors to submit manuscripts — interesting manuscripts covering a wide range of theoretical, methodological and substantive ground — might well have left her undaunted. Way back in the early 1970's Nemiroff co-taught the first Women's Studies course in Montreal with her close friend (and contributor to this volume) Christine Garside Allen, now Sister Prudence Allen of the Religious Sisters of Mercy. For several years the students hung from the rafters in their course, and together the two feminist scholars mobilized colleagues, staff and students to found Concordia University's Simone de Beauvoir Institute.

Then came the dark days of the counterrevolution. Hours after Allen went on sabbatical in August 1979 Nemiroff, who was director of the New School at Dawson College, was informed that her services would not be required at Concordia that September. Nemiroff was too energetic, too political, too charismatic and most especially too committed to student centred teaching for many of those in the

new institute she had been so instrumental in founding.

The entire episode raised, and many said answered, the question: to what extent will a university incorporate oppositional practices and perspectives? In this case, the university was prepared to tolerate plummeting enrollments in the women's studies course to save it from radicals and democrats. Students protested; so did some colleagues, and Nemiroff was indefatigable in struggle, stoic in defeat. And why not? As she puts it in the last chapter of *Women and Men*, "We are living in a mass revolution which has been especially active for over a hundred and thirty years. When we remember this, we will not lose hope or patience."

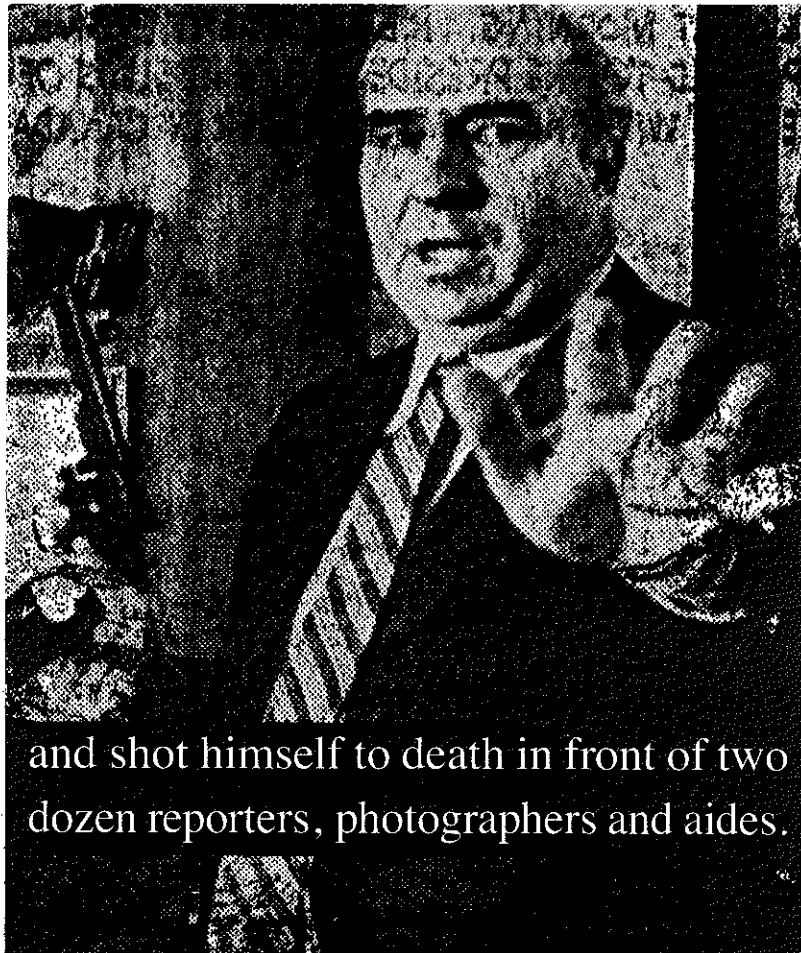
Through this book Nemiroff has found another way to reach students with her tough-minded but eclectic feminist scholarship and politics. The book's unadventurous title belies its contents, for here, in one article after another, students are introduced to the wide wide world of feminist critique. And the overall message conveys Nemiroff's view that the feminist struggle takes place everywhere, that it is a struggle between the powerful and the powerless, and that it is a *process*. The ultimate goal is successful revolution, but the only serious question is, which side are you on?

More than half of the articles in the collection are reprints, but most of them appeared in small journals with limited readership. Pat and Hugh Armstrong's "Beyond Numbers: Problems with Quantitative Data" moves beyond the now standard critique of sexist bias in data gathering and selection towards an exploration of the limitations of number-crunching for capturing the dialectics of history, daily life and oppression. Margrit Eichler's creative use of Kuhn's work on paradigms in scientific work is useful for new students and veterans alike. That her article ends with a question: how is it that work done within a sexist paradigm (eg. Kuhn's) can be useful for feminist social science? is a wonderful antidote for students who expect their books or their teachers to have "the answers." It is a question, moreover, that has preoccupied a whole generation of socialist feminists, unwilling to discard

marxism, and a growing number of feminists who are now raking over the works of Freud for insights into the perpetuation of patriarchal society.

Cerise Morris, on the other hand, in "Against Determinism: The Case for Women's Liberation" (written for this text), argues that feminists must discard both Marx and Freud. As a psychotherapist, Morris is properly interested in

provisions in the Canadian Constitution, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg's descriptions of the women's peace movement. There is also an innovative article by Jill McCalla Vickers on the patriarchal roots of nationalism. Drawing on the work of Mary O'Brien and others she provides a devastating critique of the current stock of theories on nationalism in which she uncovers the centrality of control of reproduction, and,



and shot himself to death in front of two dozen reporters, photographers and aides.

helping her clients become willing and able to make conscious choices, to abandon the protection racket that keeps us in our place. But her commitment to phenomenology leaves her with no analysis of the subtle interplay between structure and agency that, in my view, has been the hallmark of not only the best of feminist scholarship, but also the leitmotif of the no longer new social historians.

Absent from the text is the work of the feminist historians. Only in Pat Armstrong's excellent synthesis of her own work, "Women's Work, Women's Wages" would students derive any historical sensibilities. Nor is the challenging work in feminist jurisprudence represented. There are accounts of feminist encounters with the state, notably in Chaviva Hosek's account of the taking of 28, women's struggle for the equality

therefore, of women and their sexuality to national and state interests.

In her concluding chapter Nemiroff also provides an account of the taking of 28 which differs sharply from Hosek's account. But she does not explicitly draw attention to the difference, and, herein lies a major fault with this anthology which it shares with so many others. For it should be the editor's role to bring the contributors into dialogue with each other, pointing out what they share, and where they differ. This work is left to the reader, and because this is really an introductory text, this is problematic. Students are not initially in a position to recognize different sets of assumptions, let alone to judge between them. If there is a second edition Nemiroff should consider being more of an editor, both in this way, in