

Women's Studies in the High Schools

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Sourcebook on Canadian Women, Philomena Hauck. Canadian Library Association. 111 pp. \$15.00 pp. ISBN 0-88802-126-7.

Women in Canadian Literature; a resource guide for the teaching of Canadian literature, The Atlantic Work Group. The Writers' Development Trust, 93 pp. \$2.00 paper.

Women in Canadian Literature, M.G. McClung. Preface by George Woodcock. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 96 pp. ISBN 0-88902-378-6.

With Women's Studies firmly established in most Canadian universities and colleges, reference and resource books are making their appearance. Some of these are designed to encourage and support the teaching of Women's Studies at the high-school level. Two of the three books examined in this review are of this type, directed to the teaching of "Women in Canadian Literature" in secondary schools, while one is a more general guide to resource material in all areas of Women's Studies.

The *Sourcebook on Canadian Women* by Philomena Hauck has as its purpose, in the words of its author, "to provide a convenient access to Canadian materials about women. It is an annotated guide to books, periodicals, pamphlets, audiovisual materials, and general information services directly or indirectly related to women and their concerns. Since it reflects the attitudes and social forces of the time, imaginative literature by and about women is also included . . . The book should be useful to schools, junior colleges, women's groups, and all those interested in the socialization of women and in their (largely disregarded) role in Canadian life and history." Hauck lists and annotates a broad range of useful books under such headings as "Women's Rights," "Women and the Law," and "Biography," and in her annotations briefly describes the contents and provides assessments. The sections listing periodicals and audiovisual materials, and the final section on "General Bibliographies and Information Sources," are especially helpful.

While recognizing the author's need to be selective, I cannot forbear questioning a few omissions from those areas that are my own particular interest, "Biography" and "Literature by and about Women." In biography I should consider it essential to include Clara

Thomas' *Love and Work Enough: The Life of Anna Jameson* and, since journals and diaries are included in this section, *The Journals of Anne Langton* would be of more value, I think, in revealing a woman's life in Ontario in early settlement days than, say, *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary*, should a choice have to be made. Maria Tippett's *Emily Carr: A Biography* (1979) was, unfortunately, too recent to be included. In literature, I should have liked to see Laura Salverson's *Viking Heart*, which vividly portrays some of the problems of Icelandic immigrants to the west. Salverson's autobiography, *The Stream Runs Fast*, presumably was omitted because it was out of print. It has since been republished by the University of Toronto Press, 1980. Of recent writers, I am amazed that Margaret Avison, a major poet, is not included, and wonder why the drama section, which includes Marie Claire Blais's only play, does not include any of the translated plays of Michel Tremblay. Among periodicals, one might include *Signs*, an American interdisciplinary journal which publishes important articles on feminism, including articles on contemporary French and Quebecois criticism and feminist literary theory.

These are minor points. The only serious reservation I have is the number of factual errors in the section on literature, among them the following: the ascription of the name Judith to the protagonist of Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*; the confusion of names in *The History of Emily Montague*, as a result of which Arabella Fermor (whose surname is misspelled) is described as "delicate, refined," and Emily Montague is described as "lively, articulate, and flirtatious"; the assertion that Marion McAlpin in Atwood's *Edible Woman*, "feeds her cake to her insensitive fiancé and watches him consume it with relish" when, in fact, he refuses the cake; the description of the subject matter of Gabrielle Roy's *Garden in the Wind* as "the bittersweet life of the French-Canadian community in Manitoba" when, in fact, only one of the four stories of the volume (not the title story) concerns a French-Canadian family (not a community) and the three other stories deal with Doukhobor, Ukrainian, and Chinese immigrants to the West.

Despite such errors, and despite the omission of some texts which strike me as important, the *Sourcebook* is a valuable adjunct for anyone teaching Women's Studies. Most of us profess to some expertise in one area of this interdisciplinary field and welcome a resource book which provides us with a wide-ranging reading list in related areas.

Of the two resource books on women in Canadian literature, one is directed to secondary-school teachers, the other to students. *Women in Canadian Literature: a resource guide for the teaching of Canadian*

literature is one of a series of texts developed by The Writers' Development Trust in a project set up by the Writers' Union of Canada. Writers worked with regional groups of teachers to develop a series of guides directed to such topics as Family Relationships, Immigration Experience, and The North/Native Peoples. *Women in Canadian Literature* was prepared by teachers and writers of the Atlantic Work Group.

The text develops four outlines for courses on women in Canadian literature: images of women in early Canadian literature, societal roles of women; the emerging female; and women writers as innovators. For the teacher lacking a background in Canadian literature, the text provides a useful guide to reading material and suggests ways in which the material may be used. For the works recommended in the course outlines, a summary of content and theme is given. It is disturbing, though, to read through these summaries and see in how many instances they appear simplistic, sometimes containing highly debatable generalizations, and sometimes, in my view, blurring or distorting the focus of the novel. I am thinking of such entries as those for *Kamouraska*, *Swamp Angel*, and *Surfacing*. Looking at the comments on *Surfacing*, we see that a passage cited to demonstrate the narrator's distress over her abortion is actually a passage referring to an aspect of her falsified past, the supposed birth of her child. The passage occurs before the reality of the abortion, which she has been suppressing, has reached the conscious level. When speaking of the same novel later, the resource book tells us: "A crisis occurs when she [the protagonist] is diving to find them [rock paintings]. A long suppressed memory of her aborted baby surfaces. She has killed unnaturally. At this point she begins the conscious shedding of her past and plans her rebirth." What has really happened is that she has found the body of her drowned father. The effect on her is too complicated to explain in a couple of short sentences. *Surfacing* is not an easy novel, and the teacher reading it for the first time would be well served if even so much as its essential facts were clearly explained, or if the reader were directed to critical articles which explicate the text.

The prose style of this book leaves much to be desired. It is surprisingly flat and unvaried, and the tone strikes me at times as patronizing. It is written in such a simple style that I had to keep reminding myself as I read it that it was indeed meant for teachers, not for students at a relatively lower level. Grammatical errors are surprising in a text by and for literature specialists. Note these examples of faulty parallelism: "Mrs. Bently and her husband, Philip, are faced by many problems - financial, marital, and those

created by the hypocrisy of the community they serve,” and, “Anna is imaginative, competitive, and works hard. . . .”

In contrast, M.G. McClung’s *Women in Canadian Literature* is written in a lively, varied prose style. This book, too, is one of a series – *Women in Canadian Life* – which includes books on such topics as *Women in Politics* and *Women in Law*. The series is directed to students. McClung has organized her text partly by genre and partly by chronology. The first two chapters are chronological: chapter one, literature before confederation; chapter two, from confederation to the early twentieth century. The twentieth-century novel is examined chronologically in two chapters, as is poetry. French-Canadian writers Gabrielle Roy, Marie Claire Blais, and Anne Hébert are examined in one chapter; Atwood and Laurence merit individual chapters. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for discussion, research, and further reading. The layout is impressive; there are photographs of writers, manuscripts, and illustrations from books; in the margins there are thought-provoking questions and quotations. Accurate, lively, and imaginative, this text demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Canadian literature. It is an impressive achievement and an appropriate text for study in senior high schools and community colleges.

A difficulty in developing any text such as these is how to update it. So much good writing by and about women is appearing today that the only solution would appear to be the publication from time to time of appendices. Atwood is a good example of the problem. Her last two novels are not mentioned, nor is her last book of poetry, in any of these resource books. Important recent books by Alice Munro, Marian Engel, Miriam Waddington, and Phyllis Webb, among others, are also absent.

There are always additions one would like to recommend. For the two high school resource books, I shall content myself with one: Eva Zaremba’s collection of writings of early Canadian women, *The Privilege of Sex*, seems to be ideal for those who wish to include a little early literature while spending most of the time on more recent literature.

Despite minor reservations, all three texts can be recommended. High-school teachers will find the Atlantic Work Group’s *Women in Canadian Literature* helpful in its suggested course outlines and in its organization of material into units. McClung’s survey of *Women in Canadian Literature* from its beginnings is a thought-provoking student text. Hauck’s annotated *Sourcebook* is useful for any course in Women’s Studies.

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Female Characters in Children's Books

DONNA O'CONNOR

Stone Soup, Carol Pasternak and Allen Sutterfield. Illus. by Hedy Campbell. The Women's Press, 1974. 29 pp.

Overnight Adventure, Frances Kilbourne. Illus. by Ann Powell. The Women's Press, 1977. 27 pp. ISBN 0-88961-047-9.

The Recyclers, Frances Kilbourne. Illus. by Ann Powell. The Women's Press, 1979. 28 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88961-060-6.

Sex-role stereotyping has been acknowledged for more than a decade. This awareness has prompted some authors to create characters specifically to counter the passive image of females found in textbooks and literature. When well crafted, such stories can serve an educational and literary role in the lives of young readers. Three titles from The Women's Press will be examined with this criterion in mind.

In *Stone Soup*, the equal status of the girls involved underlines a story about overcoming prejudice. Two young girls deal independently with problems that arise in *Overnight Adventure*. The girls who are the main characters in *The Recyclers* are innovative and creative in their selection and reconditioning of the found objects which they share with others. In all three books qualities such as self-reliance, decision-making, active involvement and successful outcomes are stressed.

Stone Soup, a successful re-telling of an old European folk tale, is set in an urban school. Those familiar with downtown Toronto will