

NEWS FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS

By Anne Burke, Chair

An inventory was done by the staff of the titles from the Living Archives chapbook series which are housed at the League office in Toronto. Some back copies are still available and there are also master sheets from others. This inventory will be posted on the Feminist Caucus web page, as well as a complete list of the annual publications, available for sale. Each chapbook costs \$10 and proceeds will go toward future publications. Coutts Library Services has been ordering the titles for libraries, a sampling of which provides participating authors with Payment for Public Lending Right.

As The Simone de Beauvoir Institute celebrates the Centenary of its namesake's birthday, as well as 30 years of Women's Studies and community activism, it is probably an appropriate time to comment on a few matters. It should be noted that the co-founders of the first course in the discipline, "the Nature of Woman", offered through the Department of Philosophy, "They were made fun of; they were praised. But it was then that people started building courses in women's studies." (reported by Rhonda Mullins, M.A. 96, a Montreal-freelance writer, in *Concordia University Magazine*, Spring 2008, p. 18) "Today it boasts 160 programs students pursuing a Bachelor of Arts with a major, minor, certificate or specialization in women's studies. It has about 700 more students enrolled in courses. It's clearly flourishing. Courses cover a diverse list of topics, such as pop culture, black women's culture, lesbian issues, globalization, body modification, Ireland, First Nations, peace and urban issues—all combining the traditions of inquiry and action for which women's studies, feminism and de Beauvoir herself are known." (pp. 18-9.)

First, the good news: Female employees are better educated than ever, and women now make up almost half of the employed persons in Canada, up from one-third in the 1970s. Now, the not-so-great: We still earn less than men, at every level—about 71 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Even

worse, for jobs that require a university degree, we've rolled backward, with the gap widening since 1995.

According to a study done by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, seven per cent of Canadian women have been abused by their spouses in the last five years. An abused woman is hit an average of 30 times before she calls police. Every year, 100,000 Canadian women and children seek shelter from domestic violence. A recent family annihilation occurred here in Calgary, when a husband murdered his tenant, Amber Bowerman, a young journalist, before killing his wife and children. He then committed suicide.

According to Rina Arseneault, associate director of Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, "We've achieved a lot; it's against the law to physically abuse your wife; we have specialized family violence courts in many jurisdictions; we have more than 350 transition houses and shelters; and we've started to talk about violence more frequently and openly... We need to do a better job of listening to survivors of violence and of educating young women—and men—about dating violence. And we need to understand just how complex this issue is, when someone who tells you he loves you also abuses you."

According to Marilou McPhedran, (lawyer, activist and one of the architects of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms), "[Women] can take the credit for changing the law regarding sexual assault, sexual harassment, and discrimination on the basis of age, sex and pregnancy. These were cases where women decided they simply weren't going to take it anymore."

According to Lisa Rundle, coeditor of *Turbo Chicks*, "Feminism isn't just for women anymore, and it probably never was. But now more than ever, we're comfortable saying that it's about making the world better for everyone."

Thank you to Sonja Greckol for offering to serve as liaison between the Feminist Caucus (through the League) and the **Women's Writing In Canada Project**, spearheaded by the University of Alberta. The initial phase of the project is envisioned as building on the on-line biographic information about women poets which is included

on the League's web site, using much the same terms: a biographic sketch which includes the standard information. This includes: date of birth and place of birth, education, career as a poet and other information relating to career (such as information about how the individual earns her living given that poetry is not the most lucrative of professions.) Perhaps the clearest way of understanding the biographic component is that each would be a profile of the poet which is factual rather than evaluating the poet and her work. Additionally, the profile would include bibliographic information for published collections and individual poems which might appear in journals. The bibliographic information is within the public domain and so does not infringe on the poet's privacy nor her receiving royalties. If, in the context of a profile, some portion of poem is included, the inclusion will be on terms that meet copyright which allows for inclusion of short excerpts (usually two or three lines.)

The advantage for the poets---and the League of Canadian Poets more broadly---is that the tagging will allow searches through various categories which are not currently available. So, by searching using one or more of the tags, it will be possible for researchers to create groupings. For example, by putting in the tags: "date of birth 1962"; place of birth "Montreal", given that the project includes the Playwrights Union of Canada and, we hope the Writers' Union of Canada, a researcher will be able to access profiles and bibliographic information relating to all women writers who were born in Montreal in 1962. The profiles (including bibliographic information) will be open-access and so anyone can access the information and its searches through the project's web site. It offers a remarkable tool for heightening attention to their work by allowing researchers to access information, and to group it, with ease.

From the Spring/Summer 2008 backlist, check out *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada*, by Janice Fiamengo, who is an associate professor in the department of English at the University of Ottawa. Six women came to prominence through their writing and public performances: Agnes Maule Machar, Sara Jeanette Duncan, E. Pauline Johnson, Kathleen Blake Coleman, Flora MacDonald Denison, and Nellie L. McClung. *Critical to Care: The Invisible Women*

in Health Services, by Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, and Krista Scott-Dixon. The authors stress the invisibility and undervaluing of 'women's work as well as the importance of context in understanding how this work is defined and treated."

There are some Fall/Winter 2008 titles to watch for. *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada*, by Candida Rifkind, about the significant role that women writers played in this period and examines a group of writers that included Dorothy Livesay, Anne Marriott, Irene Baird and Toby Gordon Ryan. "The gender hierarchies of socialism and literary modernism...continued long after the thirties came to an end." *Women's Health in Canada: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Policy*, edited by Marina Morrow, Olena Hankivsky and Colleen Varcoe. "In recent years, greater attention has been paid to the distinctly different health care needs and concerns of men and women. Women's health, in particular, has emerged as a distinct concept and discipline in the last two decades." *The Persons Case: The Origins and Legacy of the Fight for Legal Personhood*, by Robert J. Sharpe and Patricia I. McMahon, is available in paperback. A mix of biography, women's history, and book history can be found in *The Scribes for Women's Convents in Late Medieval Germany*, by Cynthia J. Cyrus. This is an assessment of genres common to women's convent libraries and how manuscripts of women's libraries came to be copied.

All of these titles are from the University of Toronto Press, 10 St. Mary Street, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2W8.
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