

commentaries on French feminism and economic thought. The subversive potential of Still's book is however impeded by the rigorous adherence to contemporary theoretical paradigms. And while Still adds a new dimension to the intricate relationship between feminism, critical theory, economics, and the state, the gesture towards the economic as a future utopian horizon might have benefited from a closer reading of women's location in the contemporary economic text.

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Chandrani Biswas. *Women and War: A Study of the Novels of Emecheta, Ekwensi and Amadi*. New Delhi: Books Plus, 1998. Pp. viii, 133. Rs. 250.00, US\$20.00.

In the last two decades, many Indian universities have started offering courses in Postcolonial Literature in English. Indian students generally appear to be keener on African or Caribbean literature than on the literatures of such white settler colonies as Canada or Australia. Perhaps the historical experience of colonization provides a common ground (even though the consequences differed from country to country—it was not the same for India and Nigeria, for instance). In *Women and War: A Study of the Novels of Emecheta, Ekwensi and Amadi*, Chandrani Biswas the Indian scholar examines some Nigerian novels about the war in Biafra in the larger context of women's empowerment.

Biswas provides a useful survey of the changing status of women in Africa over the years. The status of women was (and is) not the same throughout Africa. Some societies had no distinct gender-based division of labour. In the hunter-gatherer society of the Mbuti pygmies of north-east Congo, "women are not alone or even chiefly responsible for childcare. Mbuti language distinguishes the sex of individuals only at the parental level, in the terms for 'mother' and 'father'; the language has no terms for 'male' and 'female,' 'boy' and 'girl'" (3). It is likely that women in Africa enjoyed a high status in antiquity, Nebet was a prime minister in the Old Kingdom in Egypt. But in recent centuries, women in Africa have suffered the same exploitation as their sisters in other continents. The process of colonization made their situation worse; in the traditional economy, women had an equal role. When property was communally owned, women's role as co-producers in the household was recognized. But with the creation of private property, man as the wage-earner in the cash economy was considered superior to the woman.

Biswas is very conscious of the collaboration between capitalism and patriarchy. The second chapter is devoted to "The Nigerian Civil War: A Historical Perspective." Literature does not exist in a vacuum, and Biswas takes care to study the history of the women's movement in

Nigeria; as early as 1929, Igbo women had participated in the Aba riots against British taxation. The genesis of the Biafran war is described clearly—most students reading Nigerian fiction for the first time have little awareness of the complex ethnic divisions in Nigeria. The next chapter, "Woman and War," deals with the role of women in the public domain in Nigeria, and the changes wrought by war, when all able-bodied men are away at the front. Just as the two World Wars had an effect on women's empowerment in the West, the Biafran war in Nigeria had a similar effect on the women. It acted as a launching pad for women's emancipation.

There are many stereotypes in African literature: the mother figure, the passionate and sensual lover, the sophisticated city girl, and the rural woman. The city and the village are often juxtaposed to dramatize the conflict between the modern and the traditional. The city woman is often depicted as a prostitute while the rural woman is usually (but not always) static and unresponsive to change. Biswas considers Debbie, the heroine of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*, as the archetype of the "new woman." Debbie, a sophisticated, well-educated, Westernized woman, undertakes a mission from the Nigerian government to Biafra to persuade the Biafran leader to end the war. The men in Emecheta's novel, whether Debbie's father or her English lover Alan Grey, seem to be strangely weak and dehumanized. The crowds of refugee women she encounters on the way present a graphic picture of the horrors of war. Being subjected to rape by soldiers, Nigerian and Biafran, she realizes that the enemy is man; which side he is on does not make any difference to the exploitation of woman. However, all women do not experience repression and exploitation equally: class affiliation makes a big difference.

Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* and Elechi Amadi's *Estrangement* show women as victims, fighters, and survivors. Ekwensi recreates the post-war situation in Nigerian society. The protagonist, James Odugo, a senior news reporter on the Biafran side, leaves the radio station in search of his wife and children. Odugo, separated from his wife by the war, develops relationships with three women: his colleague Vic Ezenta, Benne (who uses her sexuality to obtain cash and food from soldiers), and Gladys Nwibe (who becomes the mother of his child). Meanwhile, his wife Juliette, forced to fend for herself and look after the children, develops a relationship with a soldier and is pregnant with his child. But he refuses to accept her, though he is perfectly happy with Gladys bearing his child. The same double standards are shown in other novels, such as Amadi's *Estrangement* and Francis Imbuga's play *The Married Bachelor*. Faced with these situations, women start questioning accepted values. Alekiri, a young woman who has joined a teacher's training programme, wonders, "Why should the success of a woman's life be reckoned strictly in terms of marriage? . . .

Men were not so limited" (*Estrangement* 136). Though the war is over, the status quo cannot be restored. Forced by the war to take on the burden of the family, women stepped out of the domestic domain. When peace was restored, many women refused to go back to the confined private sphere.

Women and War: A Study of the Novels of Emecheta, Ekwensi and Amadi provides a good introduction to Nigerian war novels, especially for students approaching the field for the first time. The production and printing values are good, but for one flaw: the numbering of the footnotes is missing; this is probably part of the teething troubles of a new publisher.

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Sam Solecki, ed. *Imagining Canadian Literature: The Selected Letters of Jack McClelland*. Toronto: Key Porter, 1998. Pp. 300. \$26.95 pb.

Is it possible to imagine Canadian publishing over the last half-century without the dominating influence of Jack McClelland, son of McClelland and Stewart's founder, the company's driving force over four decades and its president from 1961-82? *Imagining Canadian Literature: The Selected Letters of Jack McClelland* edited by Sam Solecki, reminds one how difficult it would be *not* to imagine Canadian literature with this ambitious and highly influential publisher.

This collection consists of 172 pieces of correspondence (or 171, depending on how one counts a 1978 "reply" to Pierre Berton) selected from "nearly two hundred boxes [of correspondence] in the McClelland and Stewart archives at McMaster University" (xi-xii), as well as an afterword of sorts by Margaret Laurence. The first letter in this essentially chronological collection is from McClelland to Earle Birney, dated 4 May 1949, the last from McClelland to Margaret Laurence, dated 17 June 1982. Solecki notes that he has edited several of the letters but has not indicated any of the deletions in what is intended to be a non-scholarly edition (291). He has been judicious and helpful in his use of annotations.

Overall, the correspondence paints a vivid picture of arguably the most influential figure in Canadian publishing history, but although very informative, it may not offer too many surprises. There is little in any of the selections to challenge or counter the dominant image of McClelland as an enthusiastic, energetic, tell-it-like-it-is-and-to-hell-with-the-consequences individual, who has given his heart and soul to the publishing and promotion of Canada's national literature, a publisher always more dedicated to the interests of "his" authors than to his company's bottom line. But the lack of challenging material in this carefully controlled collection may make it tempting to imagine at