

arts & culture

SUMMER READING

the persistence of women's health concerns. Articles written especially for the book are interspersed with reprints of foundational writings on topics that touch on female health staples such as abortion, menopause, birth control, orgasm, pregnancy and motherhood. Included, too, are chapters on more recent concerns such as body image, STIs, chronic illness, LBT health, women in sports, violence and rape and end-of-life issues.

I'm not sure there's any other place where one can find, within the same covers, Fanny Burney's 1811 letter to her sister about her mastectomy, Barbara Seaman's classic "A Pill for Men" and an interview with Bylye Avery, who created the National Black Women's Health Project in the U.S. And this is to select only three of the 100 or so entries in the 11 chapters of volume one. Volume two is no less rich or tempting, and includes contributions from Canadian feminist health advocates Sharon Batt and Anne Rochon Ford, as well as several others who make behind-the-scenes contributions.

In case it's not already apparent, these two volumes are must-haves for all who want to understand how women's health issues have evolved over the past century and want to read about those who contributed to this movement.

THEY SHOOT DOCTORS, DON'T THEY?

JACK FAINMAN AND ROLAND PENNER
Great Plains Publishing

REVIEW BY LISA SHAW

In 1997, I was mortified to hear on CBC that a Winnipeg doctor had been shot by a sniper in his home as he watched TV. The shooting of Jack Fainman was the third in a series of assassination attempts on Canadian doctors who performed legal abortions. The previous two were Garson Romalis in Vancouver in 1994 and Hugh Short in Ancaster, Ontario, in 1995.

They Shoot Doctors Don't They? by Fainman with Roland Penner, is a memoir that starts with that fateful night in Winnipeg but reveals so much more. Fainman pays respect to his Jewish immigrant parents, his upbringing in the North End of Winnipeg, his marriage to his beloved Fagie and their family. After working as a physician in small-town Ontario and training as a specialist in



Chicago, Fainman returned to Winnipeg to become a prominent obstetrician who attended more than 5,000 births.

It was in Chicago that Fainman witnessed, first-hand, the pain and suffering caused by self-induced abortions. "Many women were brought into Emergency, sometimes near death either from hemorrhaging or septic shock from acute infections." This heavily influenced him to favour legal abortions performed by doctors in safe conditions. Long before the famous 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case, which legalized first-term abortions in the U.S., Chicago had become a legendary pro-choice centre and was home to the Jane Collective, which campaigned to reform restrictive U.S. abortion laws. University of Manitoba law professor Roland Penner has added a valuable legal summary.

Ultimately, this memoir is about a doctor who strongly, yet quietly upheld the right to choice for women and nearly paid the ultimate price for his beliefs: A car belonging to American anti-abortion extremist James Kopp was reportedly seen at the Canadian border the night of the shooting. While he was never charged in connection with Fainman's shooting, Kopp was convicted of shooting abortionist Bernard Slepian in New York.

WRITING THE REVOLUTION

MICHELLE LANDSBERG

Second Story Press

REVIEW BY KATIE PALMER

Michele Landsberg, the award-winning pioneer in feminist reporting, has put together a collection of carefully selected articles she wrote for the *Toronto Star* between 1978 and 2003. It's called *Writing the Revolution*, and the most prevalent issues documented in the book include sex work, women's reproductive rights, violence

against women and gun control.

Readers will realize quickly that Landsberg's greatest strength in writing about the women's revolution extends beyond her superior and largely accessible writing skills. Landsberg actively participated in shaping the revolution by joining picketers, protesters and lobbyists, and these activist engagements earned her credibility as a feminist journalist.

Writing the Revolution is more than just a historical collection of newspaper articles on the women's movement in Canada. For

starters, Landsberg provides commentary on the articles presented in the book. Her witty, intellectual and grounded voice is highly apparent and consistent throughout. In addition, she animates the newspaper articles by shedding light on how she had—and, in some cases, continues to have—personal connections with the various subjects. Many times, women contacted Landsberg to ask that she pen articles on their experiences of gendered injustices.

One drawback of the book is its organizational structure. At times, the ordering of the columns, which is not chronological, is a bit choppy and leaves the reader slightly confused. Regardless, *Writing the Revolution* remains an enlightening and inspiring read.

Indeed, the book is an important text for the younger generations of feminists who might be more likely to take the right to abortion or the passing of sexual harassment laws for granted. At the same time, the book, and particularly the added commentary, serves as a reminder that despite the incredible advancements made by the women's movement we still have a long way to go before we fully achieve society-wide equality.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

The Life and Legacy of Writer Mona Gould, the Grandmother I Thought I Knew

MARIA MEINDL

McGill-Queen's University Press

REVIEW BY NOREEN SHANAHAN

Mona Gould was a prolific poet, broadcaster and journalist who profoundly touched the lives of thousands of women, especially those who lost husbands, brothers and sons in World War II. Her poem "This Was My Brother," about her brother's tragic death

at Dieppe, France, lived a long while in people's minds and memories back in the 1940s and '50s.

Sometimes she moved readers; at other times she entertained them. She held the mic out toward the Andrew Sisters in front of Toronto's iconic Honest Ed's department store. She interviewed Eleanor Roosevelt, Louis Armstrong and Irving Layton. On a visit to England, she discussed sculpture with Henry Moore.

Gould was born in 1908 and died in 1999. She left behind 38 boxes of papers and a beleaguered granddaughter to make sense of them. In *Outside the Box*, Maria Meindl discusses archiving Gould's life.

"Dust was everywhere. At the end of each day I ceremoniously gathered a pile of dust from one counter in the study carrel with a wet paper towel, swept it onto my hand and threw it in the garbage."

In the process, Meindl discovers their similar struggles as women eking out fragile livings as freelance writers, hitting similar snags and pits, but succumbing to them quite differently: Gould with a tumbler of Johnny Walker, blood red lips and tips, and outrageous hats; Meindl with sobriety, pink lips and (thank god!) feminism.

Meindl is masterful at explaining the many Monas dumped inside these boxes. Meanwhile, she comes up with some

surprises about herself. It's a good read; at times it's a great read. But the best writing is Meindl's, not Gould's.

"In a half hour period I might keep company with the menopausal widow, the spirited child, the housewife craving erotic adventures ... crowded with characters and scenes from the past, overlaying whatever was happening in the here and now."

As an archivist, Meindl gives Mona, a woman seemingly forgotten. She also shows us Mona's struggles as an independent female Canadian writer. Meanwhile, she entertains us with both the pleasures and the "why bothers?" of luxuriating in another woman's lettered past. ❀

poetry



A PAGE FROM THE WONDERS OF LIFE ON EARTH

STEPHANIE BOLSTER
Brick Books

PIGEON
KAREN SOLIE
Anansi

REVIEW BY MARIANNE MAYS

Stephanie Bolster's poetry is always a sort of wonder. Her fourth book is titled after *The Wonders of Life on Earth*, from 1960, a semi-anthropological, glossy picture book published by Time-Life that could be a prop on the set of *Mad Men*. It's apropos, given that Bolster is addressing different kinds of containment of the natural world. Her book's epigraph is taken from Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*: "At the entrance to the arcade, a mailbox: a last opportunity to make some sign to the world one is leaving."

Or the world we are leaving for future generations—Bolster's primary concern in this book. The award-winning poet is decidedly (and uncharacteristically) *unlyrical* here: The cluttered arcade humans have

made of the world may be as entertaining and glossy as a picture book (once seemed), but it doesn't offer much in the way of real hope or consolation.

Instead, "Echoes are close at hand, as in/ a can." The poem "Song for the Song of the Aviary" continues with a description of a colony of cormorants: "Plastic tassels hang./ Beyond: an expanse, a mesh sky, shit/ of the raucous. [...] decades of the pent, the bent-/ necked. Maybe they're happy/ Fish in dishes, paste smeared in a tray,/ a shallow basin, mini-hills..."

This is a book about wonder the way a taxidermed bird could be about the wonder of the bird itself. Maybe it's wonder, or something grimmer. Maybe it's wonder at the persistence and ceaselessness of human activity, "the steamer [that] forges," the undying desire for more of the "stuffed stuff."

The collection yields insights in off-kilter, uneasy ways. Half-repetitions feel *almost* like memories; doors lead to other doors; there are murky glimpses—deflections, crushed glass, the "tricky crimson" and windows of the red-light district, unsavoury performances (inside and out), trained seals, shut eyes—rainbows appear in oil slicks and the spilled, polluted guts of a plover; "heaven upon the waters" is a shallow reflection.

There are brief moments of something else: "The giant tree frog [that] croaks its diapason in the boughs." Meanwhile, "Only in blackness does the great horned owl/ soar silently through dim arcades."

If Bolster is a sort of flaneur of the wasteland, Karen Solie, in her book *Pigeon*, is the

clear-eyed daughter, the post-industrial, post-disaster, post-urbanized and -globalized child of the given world.

Pigeon is about home, and about the distance between anywhere and home. Originally a native of rural Saskatchewan, Solie now resides in urban Toronto. To an extent, this work is about the distance between the rural and the urban, and the unencroachable distance between the past and present (and future).

In the long poem "Four Factories," she outlines this ominous vein: "*Altec, Softcom, Norcan, Cancore*./ subsidiaries crawling onto the farmland./ Employees are legion, transient./ and union, turning what happened before we existed/ into something we can use, at capacity/ day and night. As we sleep, they build our future./ Which, as the signs say, belongs to all of us, is now."

"Many things were good/ while they lasted," she continues darkly in her poem "Migration."

Solie's writing is fearless and her thinking lightning-sharp, but it's the humour that lends a deep sense of compassion to all of it. In "Wager" she writes, "Off-season brings rain and new life/ to old habits. Whatever it is that we're doing, we can't help/ wanting to."

The poem ends with an image of someone driving ahead of you for 45 minutes with a left turn signal flashing, "through his jurisdiction of few exits,/ as if the hope of a left is all he's got now/ in his one chance on this earth." And maybe, for him, for the moment, it is. Or it seemed that way, at the time. ❀