

## REFERENCES

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**MARGARET GILLETT & ANN BEER (EDITORS).** *Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical essays by women associated with McGill University. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. 291 pp. \$22.95. ISBN 0-7735-1340-x.*

Fifteen years ago, in her path-breaking *We Walked Very Warily: A history of women at McGill*, Margaret Gillett provided a broad spectrum of readers with an alternative history of McGill University. The book was an eye opener for those interested in women's issues and in Canadian educational history. Indeed, for some readers, even the very existence of women at McGill came as a major surprise. Superb educator that she is, the prize winning author followed suit with another volume. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the admission of women to McGill, in 1984, Margaret Gillett and Kay Sibbald invited a variety of "McGill women" to contribute to a collection of autobiographical essays tentatively entitled "A Fair Shake." I remember the excitement of the centennial celebrations and the book launching of *A Fair Shake*. For many of us, McGill became a friendlier, more interesting place.

*Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical essays by women associated with McGill University* continues in the tradition of *A Fair Shake*. It presents an even richer variety of essays than the previous volume. From the nearly thirty autobiographies it is clear that McGill University, considered the bastion of "Anglo" higher education in Quebec, has attracted women from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds: Canada's First Nations, the descendants of European-Canadians, and those born and educated in other parts of the world, such as the Cameroons, India, and the United States.

The essays represent many life choices. Almost all of them deal with various forms of "otherness" – race, religion, sexuality. All but two were written for this volume; while the one by Judge Rosalie Abella fits beautifully, the other, by the humorist Erika Ritter, does not. It is probably unfair to single out a few individual essays from this rich collection. After all, they all present facets of remembered experience and most of them allow the reader to catch more than a glimpse behind

the author's public persona. But we react personally to books, and reviewers are no exception. I admit that I was moved by Mary-Margaret Jones's "Prelude" and Ann Beer's "On Being Lucky." I enjoyed the contributions of Monique Bégin, Frieda Paltiel, and Sally Gibbs, among others, all of whom consciously highlighted aspects of their professional life while also dealing with their feelings and fears. I love Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi's fine ironical story about her encounters with sexism and racism at McGill. These forms of discrimination, together with alcoholism and violence, and their impact on each author's life, form an important part of many essays and I admired the authors' courage in dealing with such painful subjects. Yet, other stories seemed so geared towards the public that they left me dissatisfied. Why did the authors suppress even a hint of their private life? Did Violet Archer, Canada's foremost female composer, ever experience discrimination or despair, friendship and love? Autobiographies are not simply factual documents, so why, in the mid-1990s, do many women still silence their private self?

While *Our Own Agendas* is no "autogynography" – a genre recommended by Domna Stanton in which authors explore their innermost, gendered feelings – the book nevertheless provides the reader with many examples of thoughtful feminist life writing. I recommend this anthology – moving, entertaining, and always informative – to anyone interested in women's lives. It is both educational and a very good read.

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DAVID CORSON (EDITOR). *Discourse and Power in Educational Organizations*. Toronto: OISE Press (1995). 368 pp. \$29.50. ISBN: 0-7744-0426-4.

In the last two decades the dominant positivist orientation of the social sciences has increasingly come under sustained attack from a range of competing theoretical perspectives. While this assault was initially led by Marxists, feminists, and, more broadly, critical theorists from the 1970s, scholars in the 1980s and 1990s have used poststructuralism and postmodernism to construct a theoretical critique of positivism. With the exception of mainstream economics, this critique now permeates and informs the intellectual practices of the leading social sciences, including anthropology, history, political science, sociology, and psychology.

Within education the impact of this critique has been extremely uneven. Where some fields of study have been profoundly influenced by