

These may be found in the writing of Quebec authors Nicole Houde (chapter five), Anne Hébert (chapter six), France Théoret (chapter seven), Madeleine Gagnon, Louky Bersianik, Jovette Marchessault (chapter eight), Jovette Bernier, Monique LaRue, Julie Stanton, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, (chapter nine), Elise Turcotte (chapter 10) and finally, (in)concluding, Ying Chen. Together, these writers represent a substantial selection of Quebec literature, and Saint-Martin's study of their work provides readers with important insights into this literary corpus.

Le Nom de la Mère is a valuable study. Saint-Martin writes clearly about complex issues and draws due attention to significant writing by women. Most of all, she creates critical awareness of a topic too often reduced to simplistic readings or no reading at all. The mother-daughter relationship is at the heart of women's identity formation and literary expression.

In Silence the Strands Unravel

Sybil Seaforth
Hamilton: Capricornus Enterprises, 1999

Reviewed by Dannabang Kuwabong

Sybil Seaforth once wrote that “a writer of fiction does not ... write to convert, to disturb, to instruct, to reassure, or to challenge readers” (134), but to have her muted experiences heard. She states that her priorities as a writer are to develop a “lucid, simple, euphonic, vivid, sensitive, and harmonious” style in order to achieve a balance between emotion and logic (138) and to validate Caribbean women's experiences that have been “expressly denied” (139) in Caribbean literature. In her recent and fourth novel, *In Silence the Strands Unravel*, published by an up-and-coming Capricornus Enterprises, Seaforth seeks to achieve these priorities. The novel ironically also disturbs, instructs, and challenges the reader (especially the male reader) in the opening scenes with vivid representations of betrayals in husband /wife relationships by husbands among middle-class, middle-aged couples.

The main thrust of the novel centres around the latent consequences of middle-class, well-educated, Caribbean women's choices of marriage over careers. The novel explores the experiences of four friends, Jessica, Norma, Ruth, and Dora, and hence dramatises what Leota S. Lawrence in “Women in Caribbean Literature: The African Presence” theorized as the deliberate stifling of women's “pretensions to a career, lest in doing so she outshines her

male counterpart and thereby ends up an 'old maid'" (4). Thus, the novel opens with Jessica falling into the trap of self-annihilation in the name of fulfilling the Victorian ideal of the role of woman learnt in school and church. Thirty years later, she realizes her mistake as Lionel, her husband, loses interest in her and takes another woman. Jessica's story is a replication of similar stories. The fates of these four women also instruct middle-class Caribbean women to be more aware of the material and psychoemotional dangers to which they open themselves when they choose romantic love, marriage, and service to husbands over personal development and careers.

The novel also dramatizes the nature of women's friendship and bonding. It is sisterhood that enables the four characters to survive their marital tragedies, and helps them to construct alternatives. To reflect the complex nature of the experiences and relationships, Seaforth engages a splendid array of devices including dairy entries, letters, interior monologue, direct and free indirect discourses, flashbacks, and animated descriptions in a language that is lucid in its artistic simplicity. Through this collage of movements, Seaforth has created a collaborative piece in a style that aspires to collective lamentation through storytelling. The novel does not give voice to men, but it sufficiently explores the consequences of the gaps and silence created by men's actions.

Seaforth, however, redeems the novel from the syndrome of female victimization in marriage through a demonstrated narrative capacity for balance between emotional and analytic perspectives, and between major and subplots. The subnarratives involving Ian and Amy, and the reconciliation of Norma and Dexter, enable the reader to see another side of the picture. This anticipates and eliminates any narrow representation or reading of this novel, where the men are stereotyped as villains and the women as suffering angels. It is a narrative of personal rediscoveries by women later on in life. Seaforth may be saying it is never too late for women, caught in the loop of a bad marriage, to wriggle out and breathe. She disturbs the smug comfort of both men and women entangled in the game of marriage.

Part of the growing corpus of literary works by African woman writers, *In Silence the Strands Unravel* creates aesthetic delight and difference by synthesizing theory and narrative. Sometimes, however, the over-enthusiastic pursuit of psychoanalytic and Euro-American feminist theories hampers the flow of narrative, unless we read some ironic twists into the engagement of these theories by the four characters to analyse the probable causes of their predicaments. Seaforth may be suggesting that these women's tragedies are influenced by their inability to negotiate the polarities between their immediate cultural location from which they seem estranged and the Euro-American notions of ideal wifehood by which they have been betrayed. In *Silence the Strands Unravel* will make a good addition to courses in women's studies, literature by women, and Caribbean literatures. It is a novel of the future with a positive ending.

I highly recommend it.

References

- Lawrence, S. Leota. "Women in Caribbean Literature: The African Presence." *Phylon*. 44 (1983): 4
- Seaforth, Sybil. "Writing Fiction." *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*. Ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe. Wellesley, Massachusetts: Calaloux Publications, 1990. 134-39.

Jewish Mothers Tell their Stories: Acts of Love and Courage

co-edited by Rachel Josefowitz Siegel, Ellen Cole
and Susan Steinberg-Oren
(forthcoming, Haworth Press, May, 2000)

The book contains a rich and varied collection of personal essays written by contemporary Jewish mothers from different parts of the globe. These stories reveal the choices Jewish mothers make in our post-Holocaust, non-Jewish world—the many ways of being or becoming Jewish, the acts of loving and letting go, of preserving and celebrating Jewish traditions and spirituality, of transmitting Jewish customs and rituals to their children and families.

Initiated by Susan Steinberg-Oren,
this is the third book in a series on Jewish women co-edited by
Rachel Josefowitz Siegel and Ellen Cole.

The previous books are:
Seen But not Heard: Jewish Women in Therapy
and
*Celebrating the Lives of Jewish Women:
Patterns in a Feminist Sampler.*