

Women's Review of Books

Africa's New Women Writers
are Transforming the
Literature of the Continent



Volume 27,
March / Apr



(Clockwise, starting top-left) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tricia Nwabani and Petina Gappah.

See

CHECK IT OUT!
WOMEN = BOOKS
The WRB Blog
www.wcwnline.org/W

US \$5.00 Canada \$6.00



LETTERS

To the Editor:

Regarding the review by Susan Feiner (WRB, Nov/Dec 09) about Kirstin Downey's *The Woman Behind the New Deal*, Feiner wonders why it took "65 years" to give Frances Perkins the attention she was due. It did not take that long. In fact, her story was told before that. We produced a documentary, *You May Call Her Madam Secretary*, in 1987, with major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Massachusetts Council on the Humanities.

This significant film was based on Perkins's oral history at Columbia University, for she was a great storyteller and her words gave life to the narrative, serious and humorous and clear, with a sense of place and historical time. In this documentary, the actress Frances Sternhagen takes on the persona of Perkins, not acting her, but telling Perkins's stories through the words Perkins spoke.

The point of our film was to bring this forgotten woman's remarkable story to a national audience. It is a film about conscience and politics. If history teaches values, then in Frances Perkins's life, we learn of a time when, as she said, "People cared to change the way things were." And our film is not only about her achievements in bringing about the Social Security Act and other revolutionary legislation of the New Deal, but reveals her influence on and close relationship to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

It is, we think, a timeless film. Especially now, because of the drama of Frances Perkins as a driving force behind the reforms that shaped our society—in contrast to what is happening in Washington today.

Marjory Potts
West Tisbury, MA

CONTENTS

- 3 "TELL OUR OWN STORIES" *The Thing Around Your Neck* By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie;
I Do Not Come to You By Chance By Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani; *An Elegy for Easterly* By Petina Gappah;
Women Writing Zimbabwe Edited by Irene Staunton Reviewed by Heather Hewett
- 5 IN PERPETUAL REVOLT
Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy By Marie Vieux-Chauvet Reviewed by Patti M. Marxsen
- 8 ADAM AND STEVE AND LESLIE AND EVE *When Gay People Get Married: What Happens When Societies Legalize Same-Sex Marriage* By M. V. Lee Badgett Reviewed by Emily Douglas
- 10 BACK IN PRINT AFTER 500 YEARS *Incantations: Songs, Spells, and Images by Mayan Women*
By Anbal Past Reviewed by Martha Gies
- 14 LIVING LARGE *The Tall Book: A Celebration of Life from on High* By Arianne Cohen
Reviewed by Renée Loth
- 15 THE STORYTELLER AND THE LISTENER *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood* By Ursula
Mahlendorf Reviewed by Marcie Hershtman
- 17 THE HELP *The Irish Bridge: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930*
By Margaret Lynch-Brennan Reviewed by Lauren Byrne
- 19 IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT *The Year of the Flood* By Margaret Atwood
Reviewed by Katherine V. Snyder
- 21 CALL IT WORK, CALL IT GOD *The Winter Sun: Notes on a Vocation* By Fanny Howe
Review by Kelly Davio
- 22 POETRY By Melissa Cahnmann-Taylor
- 23 CARTOON By Roberta Gregory
- 24 FIELD NOTES A POETIC RECKONING By Robin Becker
- 24 CINDERELLA'S STEPMOTHER SPEAKS OUT *Stepmonster: A New Look at Why Real Stepmothers Think, Feel, and Act the Way We Do* By Wednesday Martin Reviewed by Audrey Elisa Kerr
- 26 THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND *National Monuments* By Held. E. Erdich Reviewed by Cheryl Savageau
- 27 SHE WHO MAKES HER MEANING CLEAR *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*
Edited by Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy Sheffall Reviewed by Jewelle Gomez
- 29 THE "OCULAR ETHIC" *Missing Bodies: The Politics of Visibility*
By Monica Casper and Lisa Jean Moore Reviewed by Beth Schwartzapfel
- 31 THE EVOLUTION OF A MOVEMENT *The Politics of Sexual Abuse: Emotion, Social Movements, and the State*
By Nancy Whittier Reviewed by Arlene Stein

Women's Review of Books, Volume 27, Number 2.

(ISSN 0738-1433) (USPS 025-289)

Published bi-monthly by Old City Publishing, Inc., 628 North Second St., Philadelphia, PA 19123. Periodicals Postage Paid at Philadelphia, PA and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Women's Review of Books, Old City Publishing, Inc., 628 North Second St., Philadelphia, PA 19123.

Phone: +1 215 925 4390 Fax: +1 215 925 4371

e-mail: guy@oldcitypublishing.com

web: www.oldcitypublishing.com

WELLESLEY
CENTERS
FOR WOMEN
35 YEARS

35 Years of Research and Action

© 2010 Wellesley Centers for Women and Old City Publishing, Inc., a member of the Old City Publishing Group. Published by Old City Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved.

ISSN 0738-1433

Except as permitted under national laws or under the photocopy license described below, no part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system of any nature, without the advance written permission of the publisher.

Rights and Permissions/Reprints of Individual Articles This publication and each of the articles contained herein are protected by copyright. Permission to reproduce and/or translate material contained in this journal must be obtained in writing from the publisher.

For permission to photocopy for internal use within your organization, or to make copies for external or academic use please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, USA; telephone: +1 978-750-8400 or online at <http://www.copyright.com/>.

Any unauthorized reproduction, transmission, or storage may result in civil or criminal liability.

World Wide Web Address

Additional information is also available through the publisher's website at <http://www.oldcitypublishing.com>.



Printed with postconsumer content.

Editor in Chief: Amy Hoffman

E-mail: ahoffman@wellesley.edu

Poetry & Contributing Editor: Robin Becker

Blog & Contributing Editor: Martha Nichols

Photography Editor: Ellen Feldman

Editorial Office:

Women's Review of Books, Wellesley Centers for Women CHE, Wellesley College, 106 Central St., Wellesley, MA 02481, USA

Phone: +1.781.283.2555 Fax: +1.781.283.3645

www.wconline.org/womenreview

Intrepid Volunteer: Clarissa Atkinson

Cartoon Editor: Jennifer Camper

Proofreading: Ineke Cedar

Production & Design: Old City Publishing, Inc.

Advertising and Subscriptions:

Ian Mellanby, Old City Publishing, Inc., 628 North Second St., Philadelphia, PA 19123, USA

Phone: +1.215.925.4390 Fax: +1.215.925.4371

e-mail: ian@oldcitypublishing.com

web: www.oldcitypublishing.com


OLD
CITY
PUBLISHING

That winter sun, the presence Howe secretly called "God" in her youth, was, as she suspected even then, the source of her vocation all along. But the vocation was not to create so much as to recognize the use of work as an avenue for deepening the self. And work is dead serious, according to Howe. It is a subjectively marvelous alternative to the very real possibility of not continuing one's human existence at all:

Is life worth living when there is blindness, fear, war, torture, floods, famine, earthquakes,

and prison? The answer can only be answered case by case...a sniff of helium and you speak like a cartoon chipmunk and are gone in fifteen minutes...[a person] might decide to turn the henlock into paper and write a poem instead of dying, or write a suicide note instead of saying her prayers.

Admirers of Howe's work may be glad she chose to make paper from the henlock that at times seems to tempt her, and that she chose the writing life above other possible avenues to work out her

understanding of the self and of God. And the reader of this volume may be refreshed by Howe's unwillingness to fetishize or aggrandize the life of the writer but rather to give work—whatever its nature—it's due. 

Kelly Davio is poetry and reviews editor for the *Los Angeles Review* and the author of *Burn This House*, forthcoming from Red Hen Press.

POETRY

The Cantor in Drag on Yom Kippur

Grandfather, you and your hunched back
and angry reminders to return
Of Mice and Men to the shelf.

No one knows I stole the blue velvet pouch
when you died. The white shawl lay inside, stained
spit yellow like aged teeth. I never expected

to wear it, a waste to have kept your fabric so long
in the same drawer as panties and brassieres.
What would you think of me as Cantor?

Kissing four corners, pounding my chest
with a flapper's fringe, a finger latched to hem,
pointing toward God's book where the commandment is written

to atone, to mourn
a china cabinet filled with *kiddish* cups, one
for each son. I took one of those too,

and the vessel still sits broken on my kitchen counter
to remind me what a broken world I am, borrowing
books and cups and taking

what should not belong to me. As a girl
I sat at your table and wished for the hum of words
to stop, and the little water cup

to wash away your hands. You propped feet
on a torn footstool stuffed with discarded
women's stockings. Here I am

in wrinkled blue and white polyester.
The rough hemline settles at the back of my neck
like a hand resting there, as I sing.

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, associate professor in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia, has published in *APR*, *Quarterly West*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Barrow Street*, and won prizes from the Leeway and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Foundations. She is co-editor of the book, *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice* (2008). She lives with her husband and son in Athens, Georgia.

Workshop Advice: Take the Guru Out

He's too hocus focus for an American
poem. Orange cloth, brown flesh, another
continent enters the room when he's there,
part naked, crystal eyes, white
hair, encircled by women
who eat brewers yeast for breakfast. No, the guru

has to go. Too East, the peaceful guru,
a re-potted banana plant in American
soil. Choose a financial planner, a woman-
rabb!—anything but his bald patience smothering
the line. He hovers like a flock of white
birds over lovers on the coast, their
picnic lunch of fried chicken lying there
hopelessly exposed. Just the sound of it, "guru"
sounds too fru-fru, archaic, a white
lie for what you really want in American
art: Chinese take-out glare, sidewalk smothered
in butts, chewed gum. Hairy women

hang his picture by the birthing bed, women
who pray in private or chant their
musty breath in airport entourage; mothers
with babies in arms begging the dead guru
to bless them, inject India in American
souls. A replica swami hangs on white

walls in the ashram next to black and white
portraits: Mother Teresa, the only woman;
Martin Luther King, the only American.
His hippie dippie image belongs there,
not in your poem. Kudzu and gurus,
aurora borealis scarves and grandmothers—

big *no-no*'s. Americans make ourselves other
holy figures: they're invisible or male and white.
Woman, here's our advice: lose the guru.

NEED THE PERFECT GIFT?

Send your friends a subscription to

Women's Review of Books or Woman's Art Journal

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION CARDS ARE IN THE MAGAZINE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.oldcitypublishing.com

