



1985

## Foreword

Kirsten Holst Petersen

Anna Rutherford

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi>

---

### Recommended Citation

Petersen, Kirsten Holst and Rutherford, Anna, Foreword, *Kunapipi*, 7(2), 1985.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol7/iss2/3>

---

## Foreword

### **Abstract**

The colonial world was no place for a woman, let alone a lady; it was a man's world, demanding pioneering, martial and organisational skills, and the achievements of those in the shape of conquered lands and people were celebrated in a series of male-orientated myths: mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries. At a later stage the same skills were used to overthrow colonialism, thus reinforcing the ethos of the colonies as a predominantly male domain, both in reality and in the popular imagination which was both formed by the myths and in turn shaped reality. This male ethos has persisted in the colonial and post-colonial world long after the reality which formed it had ceased to exist. The effect of this on colonial women was no longer a question of 'no place for a woman', since they were palpably there, but of a place denied in the imagination. With regard to literature, the myths are paramount, and female achievement does not fit readily into them. As Aritha van Herk writes: 'The pun of virgin on version is deliberate. This essay stems from my position as a woman writing in the west, the need for alternate readings of our texts. Before I can write, I have to rewrite the male virgins.'

# FOREWORD

The colonial world was no place for a woman, let alone a lady; it was a man's world, demanding pioneering, martial and organisational skills, and the achievements of those in the shape of conquered lands and people were celebrated in a series of male-orientated myths: mateship, the mounties, explorers, freedom fighters, bushrangers, missionaries. At a later stage the same skills were used to overthrow colonialism, thus reinforcing the ethos of the colonies as a predominantly male domain, both in reality and in the popular imagination which was both formed by the myths and in turn shaped reality. This male ethos has persisted in the colonial and post-colonial world long after the reality which formed it had ceased to exist. The effect of this on colonial women was no longer a question of 'no place for a woman', since they were palpably there, but of a place denied in the imagination. With regard to literature, the myths are paramount, and female achievement does not fit readily into them. As Aritha van Herk writes: 'The pun of virgin on version is deliberate. This essay stems from my position as a woman writing in the west, the need for alternate readings of our texts. Before I can write, I have to re-write the male virgins.'

The African and Caribbean women suffered from a reflection of this ethos. Regardless of what role or status they had in their own traditional society, inclusion into the expanding Western sphere in their countries usually meant loss of status, as this inclusion took place mainly through the medium of education which was given primarily to boys. African and Caribbean women writers therefore exist as writers against enormous odds and under pressure of a double set of myths which seek to deny their creative existence. They are literally fighting for visibility. The difficulties of the black women writers in England are further exacerbated by the problems of racism and immigrant status.

This book is concerned with the process of mapping out the areas of women's subjugation and invisibility in the colonial situation, but much more importantly, it goes on to discuss and invent strategies of dealing with the myths and denials in a creative way so as to bring about a new consciousness which is the precondition for changing present attitudes.

One way of doing this is by retrieving lost, dismissed or maligned early women writers. Elaine Campbell discusses the unjust treatment and the arrogant dismissal on the part of male critics of the first woman writer to

make a living from her writing, Aphra Behn, and Kirsten Holst Petersen discusses the clash between nationalism and feminism in the writing of the Sierra Leonian writer Adelaide Casely Hayford who wrote before the turn of the century. Sue Sheridan deals with the same topic in an Australian context in her contribution.

A moving section is the personal statements from three African women writers, all now living in England, two of them in exile. Grace Akello, Laretta Ngcobo and Agnes Sam outline their personal difficulties in realizing their ambitions to become writers in their own countries and their continued difficulties to be recognized and published in England.

A large section is concerned with devising strategies for a new aesthetics which could form the theoretical and mythical background for a new kind of writing. Bev Brown juxtaposes Brathwaite's male-orientated 'sun-aesthetics' with works by Jean Rhys and Zee Edgell and shows how Brathwaite's theory, if applied to these writers, turns out to be invalid. Gillian Whitlock explores the possibility of using laughter as a weapon, and the creative short story by Sheila Roberts exemplifies this approach. An important aspect of feminist writing has been (a) recognizing that language itself has been colonized by the male experience, and (b) trying to find a language which can describe female experience adequately. Betsy Warland in her contribution discusses the necessity and the viability of a specifically lesbian language, and the creative contributions by Betsy Warland, Suniti Namjoshi and Gillian Hanscombe show this in practice. On a more theoretical level Bronwen Levy discusses questions of difference in women's writing and the various and at times opposing opinions and strategies in present-day Australian and New Zealand women's writing.

The book contains a large range of concerns, opinions and strategies about women's writing, and we hope that it will be a valuable contribution to the general critical debate on the subject of women's writing and feminist strategies. We also hope that the book will make enjoyable reading.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN & ANNA RUTHERFORD