sexual violence is back on the agenda, reports Ros Mills.

Crimes of Violence: Australian Responses to Rape and Child Sexual Assault, Jan Breckenridge and Moira Carmody (eds). (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1992.)

Sexual violence is on the public agenda. Not so long ago only feminists, and radical ones at that, spoke out publicly about the prevalence of male violence. Issues concerning male sexual practices which were previously shrouded in secrecy are now part of mediaspeak and government policy. Jan Breckenridge and Rosemary Berreen note Judith Allen's comment that 'domestic violence' is "a practice without a history". Writing on incest they suggest that "the effectiveness of an incest taboo is not evidenced in a capacity to prohibit the occurrence of incest. Rather its effectiveness is best witnessed in the capacity to inhibit public discussion and acknowledgment of the nature and extent of the problem". Feminists have achieved what previously seemed impossible: public discussion of men's sexual violence against women and children in the home.

'Speak-outs' by feminists are, on the whole, now a thing of the past. Non-funded crisis phones run from private homes and voluntary services in ill-equipped and overcrowded conditions have been replaced in most Australian states by funded (albeit underfunded) public services. In many instances these services are run by feminist professionals with a focus on efficient service provision and therapeutic healing processes. The general feeling is that a battle has been won. But have feminists been too hasty? Have we really dealt once and for all with the question of how, and if, to use the state (government funding, policy, legislation, policing and so forth) to bring an end to male violence? And can we keep male sexual violence on the agenda, other than as aberrant behaviour? For despite the statistics now available, and despite feminist challenges to widely held notions of rape and incest, sexual violence is still understood as the pathological behaviour of a few rather than as the actions of many ordinary men known and sometimes loved by their victims. 'Normal' male heterosexual practices have yet to come under public scrutiny.

The contributors to Crimes of Violence are sexual assault workers, researchers and policy makers involved in the area of sexual violence. The collection is, generally speaking, addressed to workers and various professionals who, in the course of their work, come into contact with sexual violence.

And, like many edited collections, it tends to be a mixed bag. Its importance for sympathetic professionals unfamiliar with feminism is indisputable. The debunking of patriarchal myths of rape and incest, the critique of the family and of mother-blame, the importance of believing women's and children's stories and giving positive feedback on responses and survival techniques, are familiar to femi-
Possession, Cacseye (Bloomsbury) with Bryan Appleyard but got roundly put off on nearly every page. Appleyard opens by telling us of his dad who replied to a question about the capacity of a container by giving a forbidably exact figure after barely a pause. Dad was an engineer. Such cocksurety can be one of the least attractive aspects of blokeish science (and engineering, with its ‘Toys for Boys’ ethos, has been among the worst offenders).

But other writers tackled that chestnut effectively years ago. Foremost among them is Steven Rose, professor of biology at Britain’s Open University. Rose showed back in 1973 how one can obtain credible views of humanity described at the chemical, physiological, psychological or ethological level. Yet you can make sense of them in terms of social policy and ‘the spiritual’ only when you put them all together with the other essays we have of the human lot—the socio-logical ones, political ones and so on. Bryan Appleyard finds the world as defined only by science to be arid and

Perhaps the title Crimes of Violence is telling. After all, can we really define rape and incest in terms of a crime of violence and leave out sex? Is it any more useful to define rape in this way than it was in the 70s to define rape as sex and leave out power? Given the nature of patriarchy as eroticised power, can rape be measured in terms of the level of violence acceptable in ‘normal’ sex acts? And, given the connection between power and sex, can a definition which recognises both be accommodated within 20th century liberal discourse which is based on the myth of ‘gender-neutral’ equality? Both Breckenridge and Carmody acknowledge these problems in various ways but slide away from confronting them full on.

Crimes of Violence is not just about men’s rapacious sexual violence, it seems to me—although this is central to the content—but about feminism in the 90s. Perhaps the importance of this text is that it highlights the necessity for more feminist debate—between feminists in service provision, policy making, academia, and, most importantly, between states. Feminists need to undertake a thorough reappraisal of ‘rape culture’, male sexuality and feminist interventions. And there is a clear need to acknowledge and locate ‘welfare feminism’ somewhere within the political grid of feminism. Some of the writers in this collection depict welfare feminism as somehow different and more radical than liberal feminism, but at the same time as offering a more useful negotiating position than radical feminism. Is welfare feminism the only way to go? And is radical feminism really such an anachronism as this collection seems to suggest?

ROS MILLS works in the Women’s Health Policy Unit of the Queensland Department of Health.

MY FAVOURITE READ

We asked seven interesting people about their most memorable reading moments of the year. These are their stories...

SHAGGY DOG DAYS

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass:

As a past worker, however, I was disappointed with the lack of critical engagement with issues crucial to feminist interventions into sexual violence. I was also disappointed with the lack of rigour concerning the history of both theoretical debates and feminist interventions in this area. Feminist engagement with the state, while rec­
ognised as problematic (Jan Breckenridge), is taken as a given. ‘Normal’ heterosexual practices, while recognised as problematic (Moira Carmody), are excused from scrutiny.

It’s been a dog of a year. I look back on dear friends who perished—ones you never dreamed would be gone by Christmas—ABC Radio’s Peter Hunt, businessman Ken Myer, and Francis James. Books were picked up and read fitfully, not in my usual unstoppable way. When we used to go to a tropical island with the kids they would ask: “Why d’you come all this way just to sit on a beach for nine hours turning pages?” “Because this is my idea of paradise,” I replied.

But I did devour Margaret Atwood’s Catseye (Bloomsbury) with its chilling evocation of young cruelty. Her writing is like perfect glass: clear and fragile yet shining in pat­
elty. Her writing is like perfect glass: