

# REPORT FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS COMMITTEE

By Anne Burke, Chair

Harriet Monroe, a long-time editor of *Poetry*, once received this advice: "A literary career! Drop it before you begin— scrub, dig, marry for a living, but for God's sake don't try to write! It's the most thankless, disappointing, utterly devastating pursuit in the world." This gem from her memoir is mentioned in *Constance Lindsay Skinner: Writing On The Frontier*, by Jean Barman (University of Toronto Press, 2002). You may not be aware that Skinner bested Ezra Pound's protégé T.S. Eliot and his first published poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" for a prestigious prize awarded by *Poetry*. "Most of the women acknowledged in Canada differed fundamentally from Constance, according to Carole Gerson: 'The women who spent time in the United States were all "New Women"; essentially unmarried... Those who stayed in Canada were almost all women with children who chose literary work because it allowed them to remain at home— that is, in their own houses and in their own country.' Women writing at home posed far less of a challenge to the male literary establishment and were thereby more easily accepted into the canon's edges, than the handful of Constances who persisted in a writing life." (cited by Barman).

Re: Women Poets in [Canadian] History, Kitty Lewis of Brick Books, writes, "You might be interested to know that we have just published a book of previously unpublished poems by Anne Szumigalski, *When Earth Leaps Up*. By the way, her dates are: 1926-1999." Lewis believes the book will be of interest to the 2006 panel chairs, Kathy Mac and Jennifer Boire. "I am planning to have someone read some of Anne's poems at the book launch at

the AGM next year." The author of 15 books, Szumigalski received the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1995, for *Voice*, a collaboration with the visual artist Marie Elyse St. George. Thank you to Kate Bitney for updates on promotional opportunities across Canada.

Cathy Ford is adding to the ongoing discussions of art and history; theory and poetics by members and friends of the Feminist Caucus, with *Poetics/Feminist/Erotics/Eroticism*. The compiling of the 2004 panel papers (with responders) will be the backbone of a larger anthology, "Sex Authors Us All", based on panels from previous years.

Marie Elyse St. George writes that she will launch her book of poetry, memoir and visual art, entitled *Once in a Blue Moon, An Artist's Life*, in October. She says she uses her visual art, poems, stories, essays, photographs, and family history to comment on our "imperfect humanity, women's rights, war and repression."

Gloria Alvernaz Mulcahy is at work on the 2005 panel papers. She suggests that art (poetry in this instance) has the capacity (energy or force) to shape our minds / intellect and to interpret and change our lives. There is a book by van Alphen (*Art in Mind*, 2005) which reflects on the idea that art is more than a reflection of our social experience. What she finds of interest is that he talks about art as finding "pain points" of cultural experience and, by presenting them to the viewer (listener), confronts and transforms how we conceive of our experience as human beings. Gloria has written about the "punctum" in photography, that is, the point of sudden and strong emotion (Barthes, 1972), which "seems to me to be the same sort of idea." That is, "the intent is to explore the conjunctions and disjunctions of past and present; and to evoke the land of spirits that, for the most part, is

unseen but deeply experienced. The images will speak to you, using a language of metamorphosis, magic and transformation, a new syntax awakening our ancestral voices.” See: Barthes, R (1972) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by R. Howard, Y.Y.: Hill & Wang (as cited by Lury, C. 1998, *Prosthetic culture: Photography, memory, and identity*, London: Routledge.) Thank you to Gloria for sharing her wisdom.

Katerina Fretwell is busy with editing volume 2 of *Poems From the Feminist Caucus*, which is open to all League members (full and associate). The subject or theme should reflect feminism or feminist experience in some positive way. A few of the many possibilities are: your own or another woman’s work, triumphs and accomplishments; responses to women’s writing; women writers and their influences; portraits of women who have been important to you, personally, and / or politically; political victories; women peacemakers; unsung heroines. Deadline: January 1, 2007. If you have News, Views, and Reviews, you can send them to [jackf@zeuter.com](mailto:jackf@zeuter.com) for publication in the “Feminist Letters” Column.

The Mission Statement of the Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets, as revised in 1991, reads: “In agreement with the LCP Constitution, the Feminist Caucus declares its abhorrence of all forms of discrimination, intolerance, and inequity, and hereby expresses its intention to take action against any manifestation of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, lesbophobia, ageism, and ableism within our own organization and in the larger community.” Thank you to Sharon H. Nelson and the League Office for their historical research in preserving this record.