

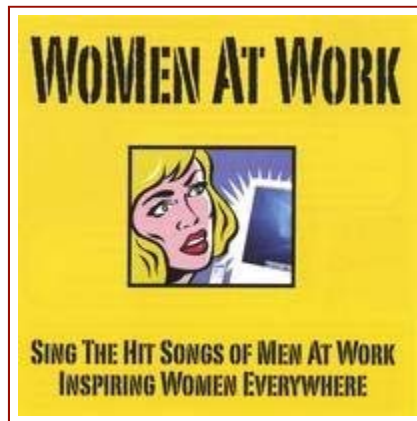
FEMINIST REVIEW

FEMINIST REVIEW BLOG BELIEVES THAT ALL OPINIONS - POSITIVE AND CRITICAL - ARE VALUABLE AND SEEKS TO GIVE VOICE TO COMMUNITIES THAT REMAIN ON THE MARGINS. OUR MISSION IS TO WRITE REVIEWS FROM FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES TO EXPLORE THE WORLD THROUGH AN ANTI-OPPRESSION LENS. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE MANY FEMINISMS AND PROVIDE A SPACE WHERE THOSE DIFFERENCES CAN BE REPRESENTED AND EXPLORED.

TUESDAY, MAY 1, 2007

Various Artists - Women at Work

MVD Entertainment Group



Women at Work did not, thank God, spin me back to 1982, the year in which I had to stop wearing my favorite wide-necked cotton t-shirt with the rainbow of teal, red and forest green behind a cartoon unicorn in repose because a certain biology class substitute teacher complimented me on it repeatedly in front of everyone and made me feel 'ooky.' And I was 12! Gross!

Although an acoustic flavor pervades this tribute to those vegemite eaters of the early eighties, it's okay to remember a band that was mostly about having fun, particularly if one considers the continuing pink-collar ghettoization and pay disparities of *actual* women at work. And these are the afflictions of the privileged in developed nations, never mind global working conditions and human trafficking, all things that would make any reasonable individual chunder.

Sigh. Get this CD if you want to remember a perhaps pleasantly nostalgia-inducing act through the vocal stylings of some lovely, Australian nightingales. You could listen to it as you soak in a tub with a little eucalyptus oil after a tough day, yes, at work.

Review by Erika Mikkalo

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[WoMen At Work Sing The Hit Songs of Men At Work](#)

AT 7:01 PM 0 COMMENTS

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KEY TERMS: 80S MUSIC, MEN AT WORK, POP, TRIBUTE

Rakasa

Directed by
Iris Rubin
Go2Films



Rakasa is a documentary about the lives of three Palestinian women who dance for joy, expression and sometimes money. Certain images come to mind when an American says, “I’m a dancer.” However, the dancing found in *Rakasa* (Arabic for “bellydancer”) comes from an irrepressible urge to rebel, to be free, and to be wholly and utterly a *woman* in a culture that would have one deny that Goddess-given gift. This form of dancing also crosses religious barriers, bringing Israeli Jews and Arabs together to dance. For this, *rakasa*—and the women whose lives are shared within—should be celebrated.

What’s missing from *Rakasa* is solid structure and clarity of purpose. It ends up coming across as a beautiful, blurry blob; *Rakasa* isn’t sure if it wants to be an overcoming-oppression film, or simply a celebratory slice-of-life.

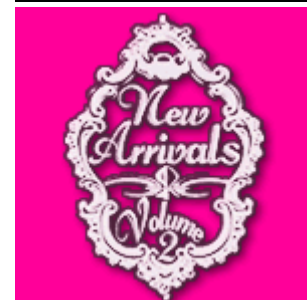
One of the women fights with her mother and grandmother over her right to dance. Another tries to overcome the apathy of her lackadaisical husband. The third, whom you might call *Rakasa*’s heroine, enjoys an adoring husband, her own dance studio and dancing passionately while great with child.

Director Iris Rubin chose to keep the tone light in a documentary that could have easily included cultural images of brutality against women. While I applaud Rubin’s decision to focus on the joy of dancing, the film might have revved my energetic investment had it displayed images of oppression that extended beyond irritating smotherhood.

Rubin does pepper in two cultural-context references. The first comes from clips of old TV shows depicting misogynist males. The second comes from a dancer’s advisor who reminds the dancer (frustrated by her mother’s objections to dancing) that things really are improving: after all, she says, 20 years ago, they would have killed you.

“They” are not specified, but this moment might have been Rubin’s way of saving her viewers from the very images I lament being absent. Perhaps there was no middle ground with which Rubin could work, and any accurate images of brutality would have crushed all she hoped to show: women dancing joyously.

Despite its wobbly structure, *Rakasa* is a luscious journey filled



with surprising and sizzling food scenes, uber-femininity and brilliant, yummy colors that is a sensorial pleasure to watch.

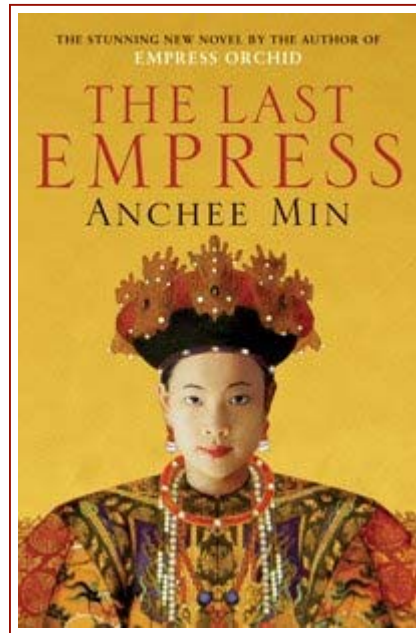
Review by Michelle Schaefer

AT 12:50 PM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: BELLYDANCING, CULTURE, PALESTINE, RELIGION, WOMEN

The Last Empress

By Anchee Min
Bloomsbury

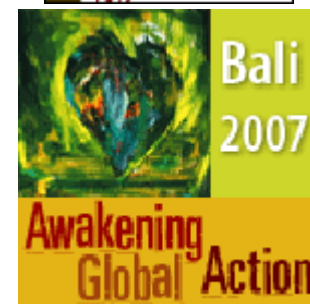
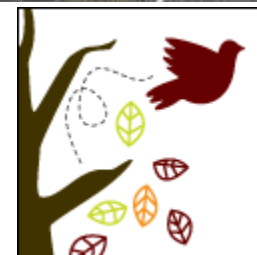


An ancient sage once foretold, “China would be destroyed by a woman.” Historians described Empress Tzu Hsi of the Qing Dynasty as an evil leader hell-bent on the usurpation of power. This much-documented image later served to affirm the age-old prophecy. *The Last Empress* by Anchee Min is the sequel to the acclaimed *Empress Orchid* (2004). Set towards the end of Imperial China, Min continues the heartbreaking tale of the country’s downfall at the hands of merciless foreigners. Tzu Hsi or Orchid, as she is previously called, first enters the Forbidden City as a concubine then reluctantly but out of necessity gains control of the throne after the Emperor’s premature death.

Contrary to history’s cruel depiction of China’s central female figure, Min successfully weaves a portrait of a woman whose love is bountiful as a mother and a ruler. The Empress portrayed in Min’s novel is truly human and is liberated from her profound demonization.

Adhering to strict traditional codes, Orchid remains a life-long widow. Prohibited to enter another relationship, her objective becomes to raise her son Tung Chih as Successor. The story not only illustrates female oppression, but also demonstrates the brutal treatment of eunuchs—the palace servants who are castrated from an early age to ensure that concubines and wives produce the Emperor’s “seeds” alone. No one is to be trusted inside the Forbidden City. Bribery and betrayal is common amongst the eunuchs and the threat to Orchid’s survival is often.

Steeped in tragedy the author crafts a fictional account of the



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Empress's private character and life, challenging the prevalent conception of her as a bloodthirsty monster and thereby restoring a sense of her dignity. Rather than causing the empire to crumble, as is history's assumption, Orchid tries desperately hard to maintain order despite outside invasions and internal rivalry. Through her strong will, wisdom and self-sacrifice, she single-handedly holds the dynasty together by its remaining threads.

Told through first-person, the narrative is written in beautiful prose bordering on the poetic. It provides an insight into late 19th and early 20th century Chinese culture and politics and unearths a deep power struggle between the sexes and, indeed, against Western Civilisation.

Engaging and intriguing, *The Last Empress* has the feel of a memoir. Lovers of *Memoirs of a Geisha* would relish this rich historical fiction that will make you think twice about accepting the male view of history as truth.

Review by Payal Patel

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The Last Empress

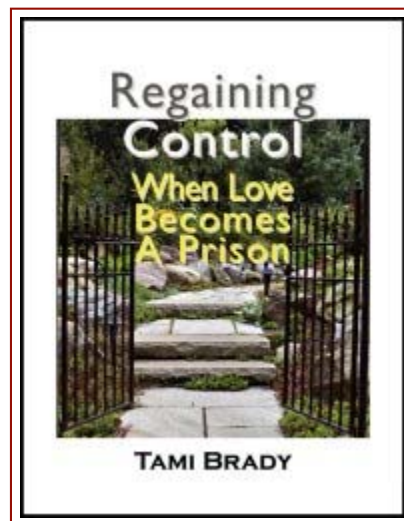
AT 7:41 AM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: CHINA, OPPRESSION, POLITICS, TRADITION, WOMEN

MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2007

Regaining Control: When Love Becomes a Prison

By Tami Brady
Loving Healing Press



Sad to say, I wasn't really too surprised by Tami Brady's intended bombshell statistic that only 1% of the world's assets are in the name of women. It has been my personal experience that I've met very few women who aren't either overt or covert aggressive, control freaks, or - at the other end of the extreme - fearful and dependent. Both types are insecure. Globally speaking, it's still a man's world out there, although thank goodness for Oprah patiently guiding jittery herds of women toward a higher consciousness!

Anyone who has experienced how freeing it is to make her own

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money, express herself and feel proud of her accomplishments wishes all woman could enjoy the feeling of personal power. To me, it is the feeling of really and truly being alive. So, in my opinion, any book that helps women lacking in self-confidence to step up to the plate of positive and balanced empowerment is a welcome contribution to the self-help section in the bookstores.

Tami Brady's book is a well-organized quick read featuring workbook pages where the reader can list her strengths and weaknesses, make a detailed portrait of her perfect world and evaluate how she feels on a number of issues. The title of the book at first made me think it was just about abuse, but the book really has to do with breaking down myths about dependence and independence. And learning how to free one's unique inner spirit.

Brady writes, "Specifically, we'll focus on reversing situations of unhealthy dependence in order to break free of control, regain self-esteem and increase self-reliance." That's a huge journey and this book is a helpful step along the way. It also features a dynamite resource list and bibliography.

Review by Cheryl Reeves

[Click here to buy:](#)

Regaining Control: When Love Becomes a Prison

AT 9:44 PM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: EMPOWERMENT, INDEPENDENCE, INSPIRATIONAL, WOMEN

Cat and Girl

By Dorothy Gambrell



Since 1999, Dorothy Gambrell's *Cat and Girl* has graced the internet with its mordant critique of consumer society, indie rock, hipsters and everything that takes itself too seriously. A volume of more than 200 of these strips was published last year, making it available for the first time in a format suitable for reading on the subway.

There are actually two girls in *Cat and Girl*, versions of each other: the nerdier Girl and the punkier Girl. (You can tell them apart by their hair - one spike, or two.) There is only one Cat -- ostensibly male, bespectacled, and often dressed in a turtleneck. If Girl is the brain of the strip, Cat is the heart; he brings in the dada with his hare-brained schemes and sailor suits.

The best thing about *Cat and Girl* is how intelligent it is. Gambrell is a master of the caustic epigram, and can take down her targets

WHO WE ARE

Feminist Review would not be possible without our wonderful writers. Each week we feature a different writer's bio so you can get to know us better.



IXTA J. MENCHACA

My hometown is Chicago, a city that has inspired many great writers whose ranks I aspire to join! I graduated from the University of Michigan (B.A. in English, anthropology, and American culture) and more recently, with an M.A. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Erstwhile, I've taught English composition and currently work as an academic advisor. My interests include ethnic, feminist, modern and postmodern literature and poetry. I also enjoy dance, music, theater, film and sports.

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with ruthless efficiency. Consider this twofer: Girl observes that calling a boy a “sissy” is an insult “typical of a society that considers the separation of male- and female-identified characteristics more important than the separation of church and state.” The gender binary and theocracy, with one well-aimed stone.

Almost all of Gambrell’s comics are good, but the best ones are soaked in incidental detail, and unravel like a pocket symphony of pop culture criticism. Take “The Blue Comic,” for example. As Cat and Girl roast marshmallows over a campfire, she decries the scandal of manufactured culture. “Marketplace of ideas!” she scoffs. “Ideas never stood a chance.” After a beat, she admits, “I wish I were popular.” “Do you know what’s popular?” counters Cat. “Christian rock!” And the strip ends with four panels of Cat strumming his guitar while singing the evangelical version of Weezer’s insipid “Sweater Song.” (“If you want to destroy my savior...”)

Some may quibble that *Cat and Girl* is formulaic. Of course it is – but it happens to be a good formula! (One could argue that all great comic strips are formulaic.) Other people have told me that they find the strip too bitter, too mean. I would argue that Gambrell’s bitterness is not just choler; it’s critique. That is, she doesn’t merely insult -- she uncovers and undermines. The bitterness of *Cat and Girl* comes not from pessimism, but from unreasonably high expectations -- unreasonable politics. If you believe in art, freedom and, dare I say it, revolution – (in other words, if you believe in Sunshine and Lollipops) – how can you maintain that sweet tone of voice when everything of value is being flattened beneath the twin steamrollers of irrational exuberance and ironic detachment?

So why not vote for Sunshine and Lollipops?

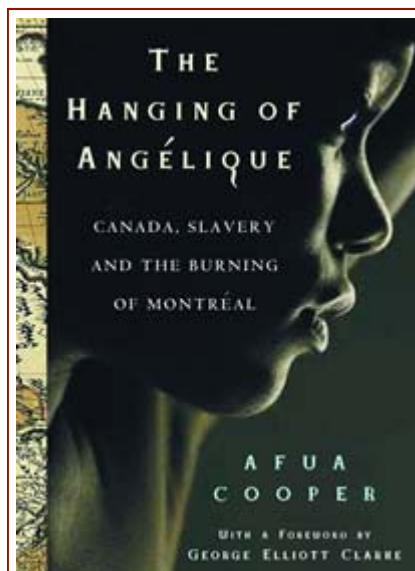
Review by Nadia Berenstein

AT 1:48 PM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: COMICS, HUMOR, POLITICAL ART

The Hanging of Angelique

By Afua Cooper
University of Georgia Press



The history of Canadian black slavery is a story quite often untold. *The Hanging of Angelique* opens the doors to the unknown. After fifteen years of research, Afua Cooper brings to light the “untold story of Canadian slavery and the burning of Old Montreal”.

Cooper weaves together crucial historical facts that are often unspoken, and similar to the many stories that Americans have heard over time. The sad and intricate life of a black woman who, at only 29 years young, was full of despair and discovered a longing within herself to be set free. But at what cost? After a catastrophic fire was set to old Montreal, Marie Joseph Angelique, a Portuguese black slave, was accused of setting the fire.

Cooper leaves the ending unspoken: “Did Angelique set the fire? Your guess is as good as mine.” But her intricately detailed research tells the story for her. It’s the writing of Cooper that is pleasantly appealing as you dive deep into a historical conundrum of right versus wrong.

The detailed filled story offers a new look into the life of Angelique and gives readers a well defined idea of exactly what slavery was like in Canada in 1734. It allows the reader to see a glimpse of the life that Angelique struggled with on daily basis and leaves the unspoken whisper in the back of your mind: Did she do it? What would I do?

Cooper tells the story of a woman who refused to fit into the role that has been chiseled for her and her sad demise while creating the big picture that shows what exactly it meant to be a black slave woman in Canada.

Considered to be the “oldest slave narrative in the New World,” *The Hanging of Angelique* will leave you with a saddened and somber idea of what a black Canadian woman’s place was at that time, and the lack of identity that you were free to call your own. Cooper gently nudges the readers through the novel and as you turn the final page, you’ll feel the oppressive hands of slavery around your ankles, slowly pulling you underwater until the light has completely dimmed.

Review by Megan Blair

Click here to buy:

[The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal \(Race in the Atlantic World, 1700-1900\)](#)

AT 6:54 AM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: CANADA, MONTREAL, RESISTANCE, SLAVERY

SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 2007

**Sister Spit: The Next Generation - Rag Tag
Cinema, April 18, 2007**

Some of you



may have heard about the original Sister Spit tours in the mid- and late-1990's. The tours were organized punk-rock band-style: a shoddy van with nights spent sleeping on floors of anarchist collectives and punk houses, but instead of music these tattoo-clad queer folks delivered words from their newly published books. Original Sister Spitters, Michelle Tea, Abi Liebegott & Eileen Myles join with five, young, twenty-something female writers, many anthologized in Michelle Tea's edited volume, *Baby Remember My Name: An Anthology of New Queer Girl Writing*, to share a new era of exciting writing in Sister Spit: The Next Generation.

The Rag Tag Cinema in Columbia, MO pays honor to its name: its insides are filled to the brim with mismatched comfy furniture for its patrons to watch movies on a large screen. For the Sister Spit tour, the space was filled to capacity with hott dykes, fags, trannies and other fans ready to take in the writings of these eight writers. Michelle Tea played the part of MC introducing each writer who read to the crowd from zines, books and folded up sheets of paper. As each writer delivered her work, she left the audience hanging in the hopes that we would buy her work to hear "the rest of the story."

Nicole Georges, author of the zine, began the performance with a hilarious tale of moving after a tumultuous break-up with her girlfriend. Canadian writer, Robin Akimbo (pictured above), delivered her work next, a story about doing laundry in public and the negotiating that takes place when a creepy guy insists on talking to you. Rhiannon Argo and Tamara Llosa-Sandor presented their work next before some of the old skool "stars" hit the stage. Abi Liebegott read from her new novel *The IHOP Papers*, and the crowd laughed along hearing about the shenanigans of pissed off diner waitresses. Eileen Myles shot poems from her mouth in caffeinated blurts, while Michelle Tea read the hot teenage-girl-on-teenage-girl first kiss section of her newest novel, *Rose of No Man's Land*. The night ended with slides and words from punk rock illustrator extraordinaire, Cristy Roads, who chose to read an excerpt from her new book, *Indestructible*.

I left the free show with a lighter wallet. Yes, I hit the merch booth with a vengeance. Don't worry, if you live on the East Coast, you have almost a dozen more opportunities to catch these ladies live. And rumor has it that they are planning an October tour. Keep an eye out on their website (www.sisterspitnextgen.com) to see if they are coming to a college or community space near you.

Review by Ailecia Ruscin

AT 9:23 PM 1 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: FEMINISM, FEMINIST, PUNK, QUEER, SISTER SPIT, ZINES

Small Note on Full Frontal Feminism

Since comments seem to have been discontinued on Feministing in order to silence critique, folks are welcome to continue discussion in the "Comments" on the *Full Frontal Feminism* review on this blog. All comments have been, and will continue to be, approved. Feminist Review blog encourages healthy and necessary debate. As our mission says, "Feminist Review blog believes that all opinions -

positive and critical - are valuable and seeks to give voice to communities that remain on the margins" and to create a space where "differences can be represented and explored."

AT 1:59 PM 6 COMMENTS

Girl Stories

By Lauren R. Weinstein
Henry Holt



A friend once described the experience of being a Smiths fan at age 12. Listening to the lyrics of "Half a Person" -- "Sixteen, clumsy, and shy, I went to London and I booked myself in at the Y... WCA..." -- he felt a pang of recognition with that teenager. Precociously morose, he told me, "I felt so old for my age!"

Reading Lauren R. Weinstein's comics, I feel a similar sympathetic pang - albeit from the far side of 16. It makes me think that the ageless adolescence of the sensitive, artistic, somewhat nerdy kid is a permanent state of being. You're born with it; you never grow out of it.

Most of the comics included in *Girl Stories* chronicle the adventures and misadventures of "Lauren Weinstein" during her last year of middle school and freshman year of high school. What kind of girl is she? The kind of girl who, in kindergarten, tells all the Christian kids that the existence of Santa Claus is logically impossible. The kind of girl who repurposes Barbies with scissors, markers, and tin-foil outfits, in order to cast them in dramatic tableaux. The kind of girl who believes Morrissey is her guardian angel. In other words, she's smart, creative, and strange -- and so, inevitably, she's also lonely.

Lauren's life is shaped by the tension between wanting something and being smart enough to know it's no good yet wanting it anyways. She wants to be popular and ends up an outcast (at least temporarily). She wants a boyfriend, but he ends up being a lame, skater dude. She wants her bellybutton pierced; it becomes massively infected.

Weinstein's drawings are textured, exuberant and enjoyably sloppy. She conveys the terrible swiftness with which triumph becomes humiliation and has a keen understanding of the arcane social logic of adolescence. Her comics are at their best when expressing the higher registers of human emotion - anguish and glee.

The other comics collected in this volume are brief funny pieces about being a girl. Of particular note is "Am I fat?" in which Weinstein describes the double-helping of guilt she feels around

food: guilt at eating and guilt at how ridiculous it is to feel guilty about eating. After the comic was published, Weinstein's inbox was flooded with emails, many from girls asking her for dieting advice. Weinstein, devastated, wrote another comic in response pleading with her readers not to obsess over body image: "Imagine what we could do (and how much more fun we'd have) if we just focused on what we loved!"

Review by Nadia Berenstein

Click here to buy:

Girl Stories

AT 11:37 AM 0 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: ADOLESCENCE, ART, COMICS, GIRLS

Alison Ray - There's Always Tomorrow

Chime Entertainment



When I opened the CD, I was first taken with the layout and colors of the cover and inner jacket. The boldness of the red and the muted blue really complimented each other and gave the sense of class and distinction. I also thought Alison could be a model if this singing thing doesn't work out. With a slender build and long, flowing reddish brown hair, she is quite striking.

When I slipped the CD into my player, I was almost immediately hit by the tone of the singer. To me she sounds a little bit like Cyndi Lauper, who I grew up listening to. She has that high pitched tone to her voice with a slight warble. Unfortunately, Cyndi Lauper is not one of my favorite singers. However, I did like the message the song embodied. I also like the fact that the words of the songs were displayed on the inner jacket; it makes for a more enjoyable listening experience.

While the message and lyrics are good, I was not drawn to the singer's voice. I think the vocals could have been stronger to really portray the message of this song, which is that no matter how you feel today, there's always tomorrow. Life is ever changing and one day is never like the next. Just hold and believe that there are better things to come. This is a message that we all should try and remember when those darker moments in life rear their ugly head.

Review by Amber A. Whitman

AT 6:23 AM 2 COMMENTS

KEY TERMS: [INSPIRATIONAL](#), [SONGWRITER](#)

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