NEWSLETTER

No. 7 / October 2010

WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION OF THE FEMINIST LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

The past few months have seen a flurry of activity at the library, with 15 volunteers taking part in the Feminist Library's Librarians for Tomorrow Training Programme. Funded by Awards for All the programme has enabled us to provide training in various aspects of radical librarianship for people unemployed and interested in librarianship and information management. We hope the programme will provide a good basis for going on to more formal training courses and for seeking librarianship posts.

This project has been extremely important and enriching for the Feminist Library and has very much been a two-way exchange. The Feminist Library has hopefully provided the volunteers with skills, training and hands-on experience of working in a radical library, and has resulted in lots of new energy, ideas, skills and input been given by the trainees to the library. And much serious progress been made with the Feminist Library on-line catalogue. We look foward to completing the online catalogue in the coming months - watch this space for futher details. It has been great to see so many enthusiastic and passionate women among the stacks and really engaging with and getting involved in the Feminist Library.

This newly revamped newsletter is very much part of this process. It has been created by the trainees, and is reflective of their passion, creativity and hard-work.

As the training programme comes to an end, the Feminist Library management committee and trustees would like to thank all those who participated in the Librarians for Tomorrow programme, including the Bishopsgate Library, the Women's Library, 56a Infoshop, the Itinerant Poetry Librarian, Anne Welsh of University College London, and everyone else who has helped made it a success. We would especially like to thank all the fantastic trainees for participating in the programme and contributing so much to the Feminist Library.



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Periodicals List

BY BECKY AIZEN



You may not be able to judge a book by its cover but you can certainly put together a future reading list of periodicals held at the Feminist Library simply on the basis of their wonderful titles. Here are the ones that caught my eye:

Catcall (UK), Dirty Dishes (UK), Bitches, Witches and Dykes (New Zealand), It Ain't Me, Babe (US), Spinster (UK), Lunch (UK), Me, Jane (Australia), Big Apple Dyke News (US), Hysteria (UK). Labour Pains (US), Red Rag (UK), Shebang (US), Shrew (UK), Mom's Apple Pie (US)

Shedding Some Light On The Subjects

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FEMINIST LIBRARY TRAINEE BY ALICE CORBLE



Thursday 8th July 2010, 6pm...

Today at the Feminist Library I engaged in some highly productive procrastination. I did not do my quota of Koha cataloguing; I did not attend to my sprawling list of emails awaiting replies; I did not work on organising the newsletter. Sitting at the librarian's desk to face this to-do list, I could not help but feel oppressed by the towering stacks of journals, papers and magazines that occupied every inch of the broad widow frame to my left. The sounds of the Southwark streets below were muffled by the precipitous piles of periodicals sadly relegated against the dirty windowpane. Surely dreams of working in library 'stacks' should not resemble this?

When was the last time this office felt the light and air of the day on its dusty furnishings? Poor Feminist Library. In the face of several years of crisis and near closure, the physical fabric of the library itself has been suffocating under the weight of organisational and financial pressures, rendering contemporary feminist theory inaccessible in dark and dusty corners. Something this new should not feel so old.

I decided to do something about it. Armfuls at a time, I transferred the jumbled heaps on the windowsill to ordered piles on the floor, gradually illuminating the room and the subjects it contained as I did so. This was a therapeutic process both for me and the library: allowing the room to breathe and the journals to be touched and opened. Through my hands-on sorting and shelving, I discovered hidden gems such as a 1989 first edition of 'Quim Magazine', back issues of Spare Rib, Bitch and Subtext Magazines, as well as a wealth of recent knowledge published in the likes of Women's History Review, Feminism and Psychology, Hecate, Women's Environmental Network

News and reports from NUS and the Equalities Commission (to name but a few).

It's going to be a challenge balancing my desire to both read and re-organise the contents of this remarkable library...

IN MAY 2010, THE FEMINIST LIBRARY WELCOMED A UNIQUE VISITOR TO THEIR TRAINING PROGRAMME, WHO EDUCATED VOLUNTEERS ABOUT THE VALUE OF AN 'ITINERANT POETRY LIBRARY'. ITALA ATTIEH REPORTS.

Uncharting Territory

Sara Wingate Gray, a.k.a. The Itinerant Poetry Librarian (TIPL), is the literal personification of a radical library. Travelling across the globe, this one-woman mobile library assumes the subversive guise of a stereotypical librarian and goes on a mission to share her love and undeniable passion for poetry and for the concept of libraries.

Hauling all the poetry she can physically carry from one place to another, TIPL has given herself the admirable task of bringing 'lost and forgotten' poetry to the masses. Not only does she collect rare and often unique works of poetry



with the aim of preserving them for posterity, she takes it upon herself to make a point of collecting numerous works by female poets and in 2006, The Guardian newspaper selected her as one of the Top 15 "most inspiring, creative, dynamic women in Britain".

TIPL oozes with the D.I.Y punk ethics of the feminist movement and challenges convention with an unrelenting urge for creativity. As a guest speaker for the Librarians for Tomorrow Training Programme, she divulged the endless joys of her project, as well as the grim realities that come with being a nomadic library. We heard tales of couch-surfing from state to state, and living off a few dollars a day, as well as anecdotes about the positive reactions and support from her dedicated members. TIPL's focus is to deconstruct the hierarchical and patriarchal, systems that exist in mainstream libraries, in order to remind us of the importance of accessible and inclusive public libraries. Sara Wingate Gray lives where her library is. With no organisational budget, she relies solely on donations and her members are trusted to return the poems once they have been borrowed, regardless of what part of the world they are in.

The success of TIPL, which is now a part of Sara Wingate Gray's PhD in Library and Information Studies at UCL, is due to the fact that it is

designed to be user friendly. Her experimentation with the philosophy of libraries and the challenging and witty ways she chooses to operate her library, reasserts the vital importance of having radical libraries. Her presentation allowed us as trainees, to consider the ways in which libraries can be politically charged and how they serve a crucial purpose in providing the public with knowledge and information that may otherwise be disregarded.

TIPL is an inspiration for those of us who want to help the maintenance and growth of radical libraries and her achievements were quite rightly recognised in December 2008, when she was awarded the Women In Publishing, New Ventures Award, "for a courageous departure into uncharted territory." Sara Wingate Gray is a poet, a writer, an independent scholar and an artist, in addition to being a librarian. She is pioneering in her ideas and through her work she is reshaping our understanding of libraries, one poem at a time.

www.tipl.info www.sarawi



Eleanor Keane, participant on the Feminist Library's Librarians for Tomorrow' training programme, muses over conceptions of feminism, past and present.

NEGATIVE IDEAS OF FEMINISM

Throughout the years, negative ideas about feminism have filtered through most strands of our culture, from fashion and literature to work and psychology, to the extent where negative stereotypes are now mistaken for the truth. A quick trawl through a dictionary, and apparently a 'stereotype' can be defined as 'lacking originality or individuality, conventional, trite.' Ouch. Nowadays, to be a feminist is apparently equal to being a feminist stereotype: broadly, a rather unattractive, hairy, man-hating, lesbian radical feminist. Sad but true, this is the demeaning stereotype of feminists that many young people have come to accept as the gospel. In a world where cosmetic surgery, glamour modelling and lap dancing clubs have slowly but surely become the norm, second-wave feminism seems to have lost some of its energy. 'Feminism' has become a dirty word, associated with those other unhappy stereotypes of women, the spinster, the crone and the bitter ranting harpy. This raises the vital question: why?

These stereotypes of feminism became part of virulent anti-feminist propaganda in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Yet the convenient stereotype of the physically repellent, militant feminist had lingered around since the early nineteenth century, where it was used against suffragettes and other militant women. Now, it is used to belittle the achievements of feminists yet again, specifically targeting feminist heroines such as Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan and Kate Millett. Despite what my dictionary states, these unconventional women were far from lacking in originality or individuality. Between them, these women gained PhDs, published iconic works of the Women's Liberation Movement, earned awards for their journalism, and inspired thousands of unhappy, unfulfilled women to improve their own lives. Suffice to say, moralists, economists, psychologists and probably countless husbands were not amused. Worst of all, with feminist milestones such as the Equal Pay Act and increased access to education for women, many started to believe that feminism was no longer relevant, and this is a view that is still in circulation today.

A New Feminism?

NEW IDEAS OF FEMINISM

Women have the vote, the right to work, the right to plan their families and the right to higher education. Seen from this point of view, women have never had it so good. Yet in reality, there is still a long way to go. Even today, women still live in poverty, are forced into unhappy marriages or suffer domestic violence at the hands of a partner. According to 2001's British Crime Survey, there are a staggering 47,000 rapes every year. In recent times we have seen a number of new feminist organisations shed light on these issues, bringing with them new ideas, a new focus and a fresh energy. For example, the relatively new London Feminist Network (established 2004) has now attracted more than 1300 members. That's a heck of a lot of bright-eyed bushy-tailed feminists joining in just seven short years. Annual events such as the 'Reclaim the Night' march, which originally began in the 1970s, and the Million Women Rise March aim to raise awareness of the devastating impact that male violence has on women. Last year, 'Reclaim the Night' saw about 2000 women of all ages march the streets of London to protest on violence against women. Organisations such as OBJECT (set up in 2003) have gathered much media attention for challenging the objectification of women in popular culture. Through examples such as these, and the campaigning of many younger feminists, a more energised feminism has emerged to combat areas of gender injustice and inequality.

WHAT NEXT FOR FEMINISM?

It is important to note that, although there has been a recent upsurge in feminist activity, it cannot be neatly categorised as 'new' or 'young' feminism. Here, dictionaries are rendered irrelevant, as feminism defies definition. Xsara Helmi, Women's Officer for Goldsmiths College, University of London, concurs:

'All feminists describe, dress, appear, behave and speak differently because we are all unique individuals...the one thing that usually unites young feminism in commonalities is the fight towards gender equality and having a voice concerning women's identities, positions and rights within modern society.'

Feminism is more than just a fight to end women's oppression – however worthy that may be – it is also a celebration: of every woman's individuality, personality and right to choose their own destiny. Feminism transcends conventional barriers such as age, race, sexuality, and gender, and exposes superficial and patriarchal barriers such as physical appeal, class and popular culture. It shouldn't matter what you look like, how you dress or who you're attracted to, as long as you believe that women everywhere have the right to live without fear of persecution or discrimination. In the fight to improve women's lives and abolish negative ideas of feminism for good, we need all the help we can get.



WHAT COULD A BOOK ABOUT KATE BUSH BE USEFUL

FOR? I am surprisingly preoccupied with the 'use-value' of knowledge, particularly research/ ideas that have been generated in academia or are presented as 'sophisticated' (great philosophical works, for example), supposedly beyond the reach of the 'everyday' person. I think my book is a product of me wanting academic - in this case theoretical-ideas to be useful to people. I had a feeling that these ideas would have to be presented in a language that people could engage with because so much theory is not. It's badly written jargon that is alienating and mentally painful to read. Yet there are important things that can be gained from engaging with different ways of thinking about the world - feminism, of course, is a prime example of this. Kate Bush herself is a useful subject for working through theoretical ideas, because she commands the attention of a wide cross-section of people and her work is incredibly pleasurable, fun and stimulating to engage with. I think they are a good combination that together increase the usefulness of both theory and Kate Bush to wider society!

BOOK, IF THERE IS ANY? I think public libraries are pretty perfect things. The idea that you can go into a building and take away the books to read at home for free is incredible. Libraries

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE PERFECT LIBRARY FOR YOUR

really come into their own when you have no money! Libraries are great places to go and research as well. I've really enjoyed my visits to Bristol Central Library which has a large, cavernous hall where all the local history information is kept. I think it's also great that libraries have wider information facilities, like the internet. Public libraries are simply wonderful things! I am NOT a fan of university libraries, particularly ones you can't get into to read all the expensive, specialist books (the ones that public libraries don't stock). As an independent researcher, not having access to university libraries is a major barrier to using those precious resources. It is a drawback that has only really come into being with the advent of fees and the wider neo-liber-

Adventures in Kate **Bush and Theory**

Debi Withers recently self-published her first book. It's an excellent read for anyone interested in cultural theory, and an inspiration for any budding authors wanting to D.I.Y! Eva Megias spoke to Debi about her book.

alisation of the academy since the late 1990s. UGH! As for my perfect library then, it would be large, like Bristol Central Library, so it could stock loads of archival material. You would be able to order any book published anywhere in the world on interlibrary loan for free (or nominal fee, i.e. 50p), free public access to all academic journals as a condition of membership (so it could be accessed online at home), a music & film library which stocked independent titles, a large exhibition space curated by local community groups, a public education programme which included workshops, film showings and lectures. There would be sofas and a lovely vegan cafe there too, and a section for zines. And beds.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO SELF PUBLISH? DO YOU HAVE MANY REFERENCES FROM YOUR GENERATION/PEOPLE **CURRENTLY DOING THE SAME?** I was inspired to self-publish because I realised I could. I had been involved in do-ityourself networks for some years before I took the plunge with books. It was the same philosophy to making a zine or a bedroom album, but just applied to a different venture. Also, selfpublishing a book is so easy these days, and cheap, if you use Print On Demand, so I saw it as a relatively low-risk venture. To make a book using this method all you essentially have to do is prepare a PDF of your book laid out in the correct way and upload it to a POD service provider (in my case I used Lightning Source which only works with publishers) who then prints the book out on a big fancy photocopier machine. Then, voila! you have a book (you can read more advice in my booklet Self-Publishing and Empowerment: A Resource for Community Groups. I also set myself up as a publishing company, HammerOn Press, but you don't have to. You don't even have to buy an ISBN as POD service providers, such as Lulu, Blurb, Createspace, etc, provide these for you. You could also buy 10 ISBNs (£108) and set up a feminist publishing collective like women did in the 1970s and 1980s. The benefit now is you don't have to spend an insane amount of time individually typesetting the words as you had to then. POD publishing is not very labour intensive but it does rely on someone having excellent design skills to do the job well - but who doesn't know a feminist who is also great at design these days? If you are interested in self-publishing I would say go for it! There has never been a better time to do it - and we really need a thriving print culture that can deal with the political issues of today from a feminist perspective. I want to read your book, I want it in my dream library! Thank you Eva for your questions, and thank you to all those who keep the Feminist Library going. Its a great resource for feminist activists. a true inspiration.

Adventures in Kate Bush and Theory and Self-Publishing and Empowerment are available for reading in the Feminist Library

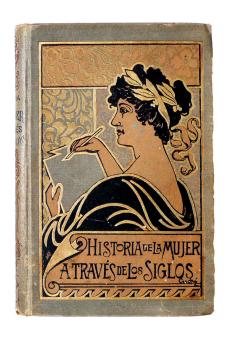
www.hammeronpress.net www.debirah.net/SelfPublishing.pdf

Biblioteca de Mujeres

Madrid has an active feminist library. Eva Megias had a chat with the founder Marisa Mediavilla to find out more about it.

How long has the library been going,/ what is its history? The idea of founding a Library came to me in 1985 because of several factors: First of all, at the end of the seventies and early eighties I used to buy any single item about women's studies I could find. Then I thought it was silly to have all those books just for myself. It also was difficult those days to find a proper public or university feminist library. I understood how necessary it was to build Biblioteca de Mujeres to preserve what the Spanish Feminisht Movement produced, history that no public library has kept safe. To be a starting point to

create that kind of library in Spain following the example of others in the European Union. Because of my profession, I am a librarian and documentalist. Can you tell us about any other feminist collections in Spain or Spanish speaking countries? At the moment there are two libraries created by feminist women or women's groups in Bilbao and Pamplona. Their collections are more contemporary. The rest are institutional ones. Regarding Latin America I know there are some but I don't know if they are made by women's organisations or institutions. Tell us 2 reasons why the feminist library is necessary in Spain 2010. The same reasons it was necessary last century. To create a space to collect diverse cultural facts and compile the wisdom of women through History. It is necessary to know, recover and build our identity. Can you describe for us one of your favourite items in BdM? It is quite difficult to give you an anwser because there are many 'treasures' in the library: like two books from the 18th century, many from the 19th century and



first 3 decades of the 20th century. Could you describe BdM with only one adjective? Necessary.

For more information about the different feminist libraries in Spain, see the following web pages.

www.mujerpalabra.net/bibliotecademujeres/index.htm www.emakumeak.org/es www.ipesnavarra.org/es/biblioteca_mujer

From the Archives

BY ALICE CORBLE

A random dip into the Feminist Library's periodical collection has revealed the following gem: BOXCAR: A Journal of The Women's Itinerant Hobo's Union. The library

holds the first three issues of the journal, dated June 1977, Winter-Spring 1978 and Summer-Fall 1978 respectively. It is unknown how these made their way into the collection, nor whether further issues were published.

The journal is named in honour of Bertha Thompson, a.k.a. "Boxcar Bertha", who, after riding the railroads in the '20s and '30s, founded The Women's Itinerant Hobos' Union, which provided vital resources, hostels and casual work for travelling women. The editorial reads: 'BOXCAR is for the exiled, the dispossessed, and the traveler, in body or mind. For those bitten slightly by the temptation to go, what can we do to push you over the edge?' This is oral history in print: an ephemeral capturing

of women on quests to dissolve global boundaries.

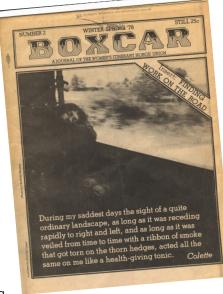
These now yellowed papers from the 70s bear a fragile yet forceful quality which suits its wayward content. Made up of di-

ary entries, letters, poems, plays and quips by women travelling from across the globe, the magazine contains news from North West US freight lines, Paris, India, Greece, Thailand, England, Ireland, Afghanistan and Japan. The stories told seem to me

> to be a far cry from the type of travel writing that dominates the publishing landscape today, much of which is written by gap-year bloggers or celebrities on quests for personal development. Boxcar's contributors are witty, creative and highly talented writers. I was captivated, for example, by Nancy Lay's quietly stunning poetic prose in her journal entries from her travels in the Himalayas. Her tales of getting lost walking in the mountains magically transport the reader into bewildering and beguiling landscapes, as her figurative descriptions of being caught in monsoon mountain rains stream down the pages until we are drenched by her words. Also noteworthy is 'Paula's Pigalle' column. Corresponding from the quarter of Paris notorious for its artist haunts and seedy sex venues, a zone "where all good sinners flock", Paula's ballsy voice tells tales of survival through scouring rich pickings from the rubbish of the National Strike, and finding scattered employment serving the catering and

cleaning needs of local prostitutes.

BOXCAR is just one small example from the hugely rich wealth of material housed in the Feminist Library, yet another reason why we need your continued support to make our collection accessible.



Powerful Imaginings

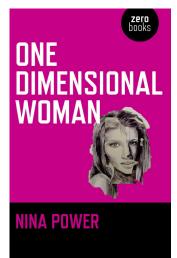
Nina Power's *One Dimensional Woman* reviewed by Alice Corble and Becky Aizen

Picture the scene: a classroom full of females. Female A takes a slim, pink, tote-worthy accessory out of her bag, aware of the power of the item in her hand. Female B catches a glimpse of said item, her eyes alight with recognition as she extracts the same product from her bag. We are not talking about two little girls and their Hello Kitty pencil cases here, nor two big little girls and their iPads, vibrators or whatever society has deemed necessary to be a "complete woman" The classroom is the Feminist Library, the two women the humble authors of this review and participants on the 'Librarians for Tomorrow' training programme. The item is Nina Power's *One Dimensional Woman*, published in 2009 by Zer0 books.

Why are we excited by this book? Because it is different, challenging, angry and critically meaningful in a way that many of

the recent new feminist texts seem to us not to be. It may be pink, compact and handbag-sized, but Power's book is no lightweight chick-lit commodity. It packs a concise and powerful punch against the 'One Dimensional Woman' of its title: the branded figure of 21st century female emancipation who, under the omnipotent logic of late capitalism, is permitted to have her cake and eat it (just as long as she pays for it first. And exercises it off later, presumably). As unemployed women ourselves, we cannot afford this kind of feminism.

One Dimensional Woman leads us on a concerted whistle-stop tour of enduring feminist issues including work, porn and monogamy. But rather than presenting these issues in terms of simple moral binaries, as so much contemporary feminist discourse tends to do, Power reframes them in the form of a radical critique of the way in which contemporary female "emancipation" is inextricably linked to consumerism and Western political agendas. Power could be criticised for neglecting to consider the range of invaluable work currently being done by feminist activists. However, her aim in this book is not to survey the practical value of the 'new feminist movement' (as can be found, for example, in Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune's recent Reclaiming the F Word), but rather to open up a new discursive space concerning what the vocabulary and ideology of feminism can really apply to, namely the material basis of our positions as women today.



Through her accessible critical theory, Power offers an alternative reading of society that implies a future feminism is possible, providing women can extend their political and critical imaginations to different dimensions. This is not an easy task however, as Power reveals how the language of feminism takes to the stage in so many different guises, from pro-life "pitbulls in lipstick", to pro-choice populists and male-mimicking warmongers. Moreover, thanks to the hegemony of gendered commodity fetishism, female identity has been colonised by objectification from so many angles that "there is no (or virtually no) subjective dimension left to be colonised". Stark insights such as this one could lead the reader to a seriously gloomy outlook; however, the inflections of humour and urgings to re-vision past and future ideals that punctuate this nippy little book can at the same time provoke a more cheery response.

No woman is truly one-dimensional, but you would hardly be aware of that from the monolithic image that contemporary Western society presents to us. This is precisely why *One Dimensional Woman* feels so timely and exciting; it is a feminist call to arms, arms laden with designer goodies, attached to an increasingly eroded self-esteem since capitalism requires from us a constant state of lack and discontent – after all, why buy something BIGGER, BOLDER, BRIGHTER if you are happy with your lot? Power's voice is an important one, particularly because there are none of these commercial interests at stake with the book (admirably, all proceeds go to the Fistula Foundation), and therefore it is a vital addition to the feminist canon in general and the Feminist Library in particular.

FOR A CONVERSATION BETWEEN FEMALES A & B ABOUT THE PARTICULAR WAYS IN WHICH THE BOOK RESONATED WITH THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES, SEE doctorplog.blogspot.com



Listings of exciting stuff happening!

12 MAY - 2 OCTOBER 2010, LONDON

Out of the Archives: New Art Inspired by The Women's Library. Exhibition of original artworks, inspired by items from the Women's Library collection.

www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary, moreinfo@thewomenslibrary.ac.uk. The Women's Library, 25 Old Castle Street London E1 7NT.

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER 2010, MANCHESTER

Regional Million Women Rise march.

Women only march to end violence against women and children. Meet 2.30 pm at Castlefield Arena.

For more information visit www.millionwomenrise.com

SATURDAY 23 OCTOBER 2010, LONDON.

Child-friendly conference organised by London Feminist Network, open to women and pro-feminist men and with talks and workshops featuring many feminist activist groups.

Find out more and register at www.feminisminlondon.org.uk or email: info@feminisminlondon.org.uk.

12 - 14 NOVEMBER 2010, LONDON.

Ladyfest is a community-based nonfor-profit festival created 10 years ago that aims to celebrate the creativity, spirit and talents of womyn.



With art, music, activism, crafts, politics and lots, lots more, Ladyfest ten looks set to be an amazing event.

For more information visit www.ladyfestten.com.

13 - 14 NOVEMBER 2010, DUBLIN

Feminist Gathering, Dublin Held by Revolutionary Anarchafeminist Group (RAG). Discuss, learn and share in a radical but supportive environment. Children welcome.

For more info visit ragdublin.blogspot.com or email ragdulin@riseup. net

SATURDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2010, LONDON

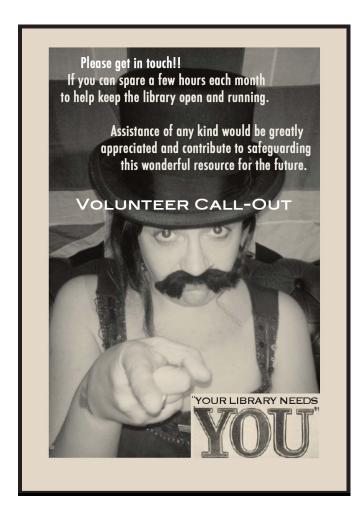
Reclaim The Night, London.

Organised by London Feminist Network.

Assemble 6pm central London for women-only march followed by mixed rally and party at the Camden Centre, Euston till late.

www.femmshbrary.co.uk

Feminist Issue Contributors: Una Byrne, Gail Chester, Alice Corble, Becky Aizen, Eleanor Keane, Itala Attieh, Katie Sutton, Emma Thatcher and Eva Megias



Coming soon!

A fundraising benefit to celebrate 35 years of the Feminist Library... featuring a glittering array of feminist performers old and new.

Watch this space for further details.

