



# Feminist Library Newsletter

---

## No. 13 Winter 2012



**A massive thanks to everyone who took part in our Summer Fête Fundraising Weekend in August, it was a huge summer highlight and helped us raise over £500 for the library.** We were delighted to be invited to appear at the Girls Get Busy zinefest at the Shacklewell Arms on Saturday 25th August. Gail Chester gave a fascinating talk on the history of self-publishing and DIY publishing, and we had a great day checking out the heaps of exciting zines and workshops. Our fête in the library the following day was also a roaring success. Armpits for August gave a fan-

tastic talk on their fundraising for the Verity Polycystic Ovary Trust and pit-power, we heard some funny and moving poetry from Rachael Allen and Catherine Madden, and chilled out with some breathtaking Iranian film-screenings. Thank you to everyone for bringing along home-made cakes and treats, helping out with cooking, serving on the stalls and helping to keep everything together (mostly with gaffer tape) amid the chaos. It was wonderful to see the library full of people sharing food, talking, laughing, arguing and celebrating a very unique place. Thanks for all the fun and generosity you brought to the day – we are already planning another HUGE fundraiser for International Women’s Day – 8th of March 2013. See you all there!

**Our Volunteer Evening on Friday 2nd November was also a great success.** Around 26 women turned up, many never having been to the library before. Gail gave a brief history of the library and explained the current situation, then other Management Group members (Una and Cathy) and our Structured Volunteers (Ruth and Beatriz) described some of what they do in the library. Cathy organised everyone into four teams, and sent us all off to do an orientation exercise in order to learn a bit more about the library. As the first team to complete the exercise would get a prize, an element of competition was apparent and the winning team ran upstairs to the meeting room to ensure that they got theirs! After that we shared some food and the Management Group and our SVs circulated and found out what skills the women had to offer the library. We’re hopeful that lots of them will either apply for the new Structured Volunteer roles (Fundraiser, Office Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, Librarian, Outreach & Networking assistant, Marketing assistant, Website assistant, Newsletter assistant) or that they will want to be general volunteers.

**The next day saw our Zine in a Day event** which attracted many new visitors to the library, including some of those involved in the House of Brag social centre and 56a Infoshop, for a range of drawing, cut & paste, and zine-making activities, focused around the topic of female representation in the media. There was discussion around the fetishising of shallow one-dimensional female characters, access to women’s self-defence classes and local queer spaces, and the ultimate guide to not shaving your legs, including the many fulfilling things that could be done with that time instead - suggested activities including drinking tea, masturbating, and bird watching!

A variety of mixtapes were played throughout the day, encompassing genres including Riot Grrl, Queercore, all-girl Post-Punk and No Wave, alongside more contemporary feminist bands such as Grass Widow, Trashkit, and Skinny Girl Diet.

Feminist Library bags and FemCells zines were available for purchase, as well as cakes and snacks. Concluding the event was a screening of “Grrrl Love and Revolution”, Abby Moser’s documentary, which included footage shot in NYC between 1993-1996 and more recent interviews. The film deals with the excitement, frustration, and noise that united feminism with subculture at the peak of third wave to make girls active, self-aware central participants.

The first Feminist Library zine will soon be available in both PDF and paper format, and we are looking forward to seeing what comes out of all the new friendships that were made, as well as putting on further related events in the near future.

## Book reviews



***Bonds of Love: psychoanalysis, feminism and the problem of domination* by Jessica Benjamin, (Pantheon Books, 1988).**

With a sense of morbid panic, the recent *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon encouraged me to take up this classic feminist text. I wanted to know the cultural consequences of absorbing and

celebrating a publishing sensation that seems to be so politically regressive.

Benjamin attempts to explain the persistence of domination and submission in erotic life; asking why it still appears to be so difficult for men and women to meet each other as equals. The work differs from other feminist works in its lack of a utopian hope for change. Benjamin does not assertively break with academic traditions to forge a new, female-orientated, utopian path. Rather, she subtly weaves through the psychology tradition, challenging the inherent misogyny and drawing out what she considers to be the true and dangerously engrained psychological processes that keep women from asserting their sexual equality. She argues that culture mirrors the psyche, and that to change culture means to challenge the psyche too: a daunting task.

This study feels like a reassuring affront to the tradition of psychology, where the female has faced being depicted as a passive receptacle for the infant subject, or else being ruthlessly judged as either a 'good enough mother', or not good enough. Yet Benjamin's work also feels entirely necessary reading for the current moment. Often, *Fifty Shades of Grey* is described as harmless, romantic escapism that exists in a realm beyond gender politics. However, the Channel 4 documentary, *Sex Story: Fifty Shades of Grey* draws the conclusion that the book is so popular because it addresses 'a lot of women's need to be involved in non-consensual sex'.

Declaratory and unexamined statements like this are a painful reminder that the book is far from promoting a post-feminist agenda. As Benjamin states in a slightly different context, 'thus we are often confused by the way gender difference floats in social reality, inconstant but never truly eliminated' (Benjamin, p. 217). It may be the case that books like *Bonds of Love* will be very necessary in both understanding the current fascination with this erotic novel, and for answering some of the insidious attacks to hard won feminist battles which may follow in the wake of this publishing phenomenon.

*Reviewed by Katherine Parker-Hay, Library volunteer.*

***Mothers in Fiction: The Marvellous, The Mean and Everything in Between*, by Carrie Dunn, (Crooked Rib Publishing, 2012).**

**MOTHERS  
IN FICTION**  
THE MARVELLOUS, THE MEAN,  
AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



This is an adorable revisionist trail through literary history in search for "the mother" in all her narrative guises. Starting with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, ending with Sarah Walters and visiting many Victorian novels on the way, Dunn takes us on a tour of her personal favourites. She searches out mothers with personalities and personal flaws, and where she finds information lacking she projects and builds upon what the author left under-developed.

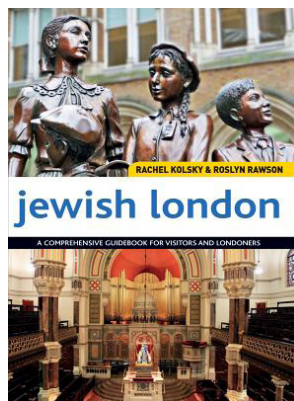
The book is liberating in the sense that it confirms some of our deepest suspicions about classic texts and ask us to really ponder them afresh. Suddenly, instead of asking ourselves what Hardy is saying about the whole social structure in *Jude the Obscure*, we are asking ourselves if Sue Bridehead really was a repressed lesbian. Dunn has the ability to energise classic texts and bring them back to a human level. She reminds us never to be intimidated as critics, or as leisurely readers.

Having said this, the book works best when it is discussing a text in which the author seems genuinely interested in developing the mother as a well-rounded individual, rather than using her as the platform for the real subject of the story. It is a delight to be retold the narrative of *Little Women* from Marmee March's position, mainly because Alcott gave her readers something to work from within her book, and so Dunn had a lot of material from which to project and tease out her inner workings. Where the source material is sparser, it is nevertheless interesting to see Dunn rise to the challenge of creating a tangible sketch of an allusive character.

This is a fun and concise read. It is not subtle, and it is playful to an extent that it cannot be taken seriously. However, it is recommended to anyone who wants to get back into the mind-set of reading the classics, or wants to be reminded of some familiar tales from an unfamiliar perspective.

*Reviewed by Katherine Parker-Hay, Library volunteer.*

***Jewish London*, by Rachel Kolsky & Roslyn Rawson, (New Holland Publishers, 2012).**



This new guidebook to Jewish London published in 2012 by New Holland Publishers has been beautifully put together. The fantastic photographs bring the areas to life and make you want to rush out and visit all these places. Rachel Kolsky has been a Blue Badge guide in London for over ten years and her walks form a large part of this book,

with clear directions and maps to guide you. The text is incredibly informative, explaining not only the history of the places, but also of the people who have been

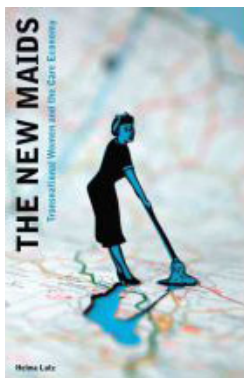
most influential in the Jewish community of London. Some years ago Rachel was commissioned by the Women's Library to put together two walks about famous women living and working in the East End. One was called 'Wonderful Women of Whitechapel', and the other was 'Battling Belles of Bow'. Both of these walks remain hugely popular and some of the women mentioned on them feature in this book. We learn about Miriam Moses, the first female mayor of Stepney in 1931 and the UK's first Jewish female mayor. Then there's Minnie Lansbury, a communist and suffragette, and the first woman councillor for Poplar in 1919; and Stella Isaacs who founded the Women's Voluntary service. You can see a picture of the outside of the Jewish Maternity Hospital (also known as Mother Levy's), founded by Alice Model and opened in 1911. By the 1930s around 800 children a year were born here. [It was finally torn down this year with the connivance of Peabody and Tower Hamlets council (ed)] The book also mentions artist, and Auschwitz survivor, Naomi Blake, the internationally-renowned sculptor Dora Gordine, and Rosalind Franklin, a researcher at Kings College, London, who missed out on a Nobel Prize for Medicine despite contributing to the isolation of the double helix of DNA in 1953. There's a classical pianist, Dame Myra Hess, and a 1970s songwriter with top ten hits, Lyndsey de Paul. We also learn about Lily Montagu, co-founder of what is now Liberal Judaism, who wanted women to play an equal role in Judaism.

If all the walking and concentrating on the history makes you tired, then the authors have thoughtfully provided information on cafés and restaurants to stop at along the way. There is also information on the various art galleries and museums that you can visit, and details of all the London synagogues. This is an essential guide to Jewish London, for visitors and Londoners alike, in which everyone will discover something new to them.

We are very grateful to Rachel for donating this lovely book to the Feminist Library!

*Reviewed by Cathy Larkin.*

### **The New Maids: Transnational Women and the Care Economy, by Helma Lutz (Zed books, 2011)**



In this book, Helma Lutz provides a thorough investigation of the broad spectrum of issues surrounding migrant domestic labour. While illuminating the various aspects of migrant women's paid care work, Lutz relates her often intriguing findings in a concise, clear and captivating manner, making this book an easy-to-read and essential-read-

ing piece of non-fiction.

Lutz explains that, despite the achievements of feminism, the male breadwinner model has maintained its normative power within Western society, and that the development of an 'adult-worker society', i.e. full-time work for all employable adults, appears today as an economic ne-

cessity as well as an essential movement towards gender equality. However, despite resisting multiple attempts at professionalisation, domestic labour/ care work remains gendered and structurally devalued due to the impossibility of measuring the required skills and productivity of the sector.

As a result, in Western countries, domestic labour has been outsourced from the woman now working as full-time employed adult in the public sphere to the socially and ethnically 'other' woman, in a process called the 'new gender arrangement' - within the scope of Lutz's survey these are primarily Eastern European women, most being mothers who had to leave their children behind in a quest to earn money for their well-being and education, commuting back and forth between countries and thus leading transnational lives.

Lutz's methods of study include a mix of expert interviews with social workers, doctors and church officials fighting for migrant women workers' rights, qualitative interviews with some of these domestic workers and their employers, and participant observation at and away from these women's work.

This book provides a thorough picture of an issue that affects us all in an age of the privatisation of care work, a return to conservative gender roles, and the globalisation of labour. Lutz provides a fertile ground for discussion and calls for a renewal of feminist debate and a re-imagining of the world of work especially with regards to gender and ethnicity.

*Reviewed by Anne Korff.*

This review has been edited due to space constraints. The full review is available at [feministlibrary.co.uk/reviews](http://feministlibrary.co.uk/reviews), along with lots more reviews. All the books mentioned in the newsletter are available for use at the Feminist Library.

### **Recent acquisitions**

*Rosalind Franklin: The Dark Lady of DNA* - Brenda Maddox (Harpercollins, 2002)

*My Porch Is Not A Stoop, My Porch Is Not A Verandah* - Anonymous (The S Press, 2011)

*Don't Leave Your Friends Behind: Concrete Ways to Support Families in Social Justice Movements and Communities* - Victoria Law and China Martens (eds) (PM Press, 2012)

*Votes For Ladies: The Suffrage Movement 1867 - 1918* - Sheila McNeil (Bristol Radical Pamphleteer #15)

*The Bristol Strike Wave of 1889-1890. Socialists, New Unionists and New Women Part 1: Days of Hope* -

Mike Richardson (Bristol Radical Pamphleteer #21)

*The Bristol Strike Wave of 1889-1890. Socialists, New Unionists and New Women Part 2: Days of Doubt* -

Mike Richardson (Bristol Radical Pamphleteer #22)

*Adventures in Menstruating - a chart your cycle zine* (Issue No.1 August 2005)

*Restart* (Issue 1 October 2012)

**The Feminist Library Ephemera Collection** has been fully digitised by the Bishopsgate Institute Library and is now available to view on-line. To view and search the collection of fliers, leaflets, posters and letters, visit the Bishopsgate online archives page at [www.bishopsgate.org.uk/content/1412/Archives-Online](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/content/1412/Archives-Online), and then click on the Feminist Library Ephemera Collection link.

**The Feminist Library has recently hosted coordinating meetings for feminist students in London.** Called by Royal Holloway Feminism Society, feminist activists from many London colleges and universities, meet to discuss ideas and campaign tactics, work towards building connections for future activities and create a support network across campuses.

Issues have included experiences of sexism on campuses, 'lad culture', and the growing anti-choice movement across the country.

The participants of the Feminist Students' Coordinating Meetings are now rapidly building towards a feminist students' conference in the spring of 2013 – one that will be rooted in intersectional feminism, built around discussion-based workshops and free to attend. The meetings have been highly productive and positive, and we are delighted to be able to facilitate such an exciting network in our library's meeting room. We plan to hold the meetings once a month, varying the day slightly each time. Please email [office@feministlibrary.co.uk](mailto:office@feministlibrary.co.uk) for further details and the date of the next meeting.

**The Feminist Library is delighted to announce an exciting initiative, Women's Studies Without Walls**, which is intended to return Women's Studies to its rightful place -- informing and encouraging women to take radical feminist action through learning and sharing skills and information. WSWW will be launched with a weekend gathering of assorted workshops, talks, and skill-sharing at the Feminist Library on the weekend of 19th and 20th January 2013, to be followed by a weekly series of one-off evening events. But the sky is the limit! We are very open to all your input, and we want to broaden out to include a wide range of contacts, and indeed, geographical areas -- we are, after all, without walls.

The next planning meeting will be Tuesday 27th November at 7:30p.m. at the Feminist Library. Contact us at [wsww@feministlibrary.co.uk](mailto:wsww@feministlibrary.co.uk) if you would like to find out more or get involved, and keep an eye on our website for further updates.

## Listings

**Saturday 24th November 2012**

**Reclaim the Night pre-march social and book sale.**

From 2pm at the Feminist Library. Bring-and-buy book sale, zines, refreshments, agitprop and more. All genders welcome. Wheelchair accessible.

**Saturday 24th November 2012**

**London Reclaim the Night**

Women-only march to mark the UN Day to End Violence Against Women. Assemble at 6pm in Whitehall Place and march through the centre of London to an all-genders rally at the Camden Centre. [www.reclaimthenight.org](http://www.reclaimthenight.org).

**29 November – 2 December 2012**

**London Feminist Film Festival, Hackney Picturehouse, Mare St, London, E8 1HE.**

Feminist shorts and feature films from women directors around the world, including films by up-and-coming directors as well as some feminist classics. [www.london-feministfilmfestival.com](http://www.london-feministfilmfestival.com).

**30 November-13 January 2013**

**Music & Liberation: Women's Liberation Music Making in the UK, 1970-1989.**

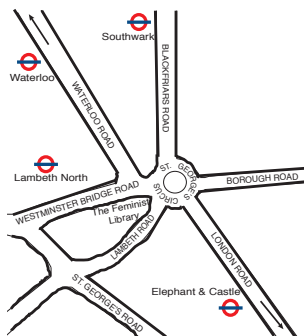
Space Station Sixty Five, Building One, 373 Kennington Road, London SE11 4PS.

Exhibition showing how feminists used music as an activist tool to entertain and empower women during the 1970s and 1980s. Featuring the work of Jam Today, the Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band, Feminist Improvising Group, Ova, the Fabulous Dirt Sisters, Abandon Your Tutu, the Mistakes and many more. Lots more information including other venues for the touring exhibition at [www.womensliberationmusicarchive.wordpress.com](http://www.womensliberationmusicarchive.wordpress.com).

**Saturday 16 February 2013 9.30 am - 4.30 pm**

**Guildhall & Guildhall Art Gallery, London EC2V 7HH  
Brave New World :Tenth LGBTI Archives, History and Culture Conference**

The conference opens up a range of historical and cultural ideas from community projects, academic research, access to archives, international LGBTI history movements, new writing and theatre, and will be packed with panels, talks, breakouts and workshops. [www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma)



**Feminist Library, 5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7XW. Registered Charity No. 272410**

**Phone 020 7261 0879. Email [admin@feministlibrary.co.uk](mailto:admin@feministlibrary.co.uk).**

**Visit [www.feministlibrary.co.uk](http://www.feministlibrary.co.uk). Follow us on twitter @feministlibrary**

**Opening hours: The Feminist Library is open every Monday 2-5pm Tuesday 10am -6pm, Thursdays 6.30-9.30pm and the 1st Saturday of the month 1.30-5.30pm, and at other times by arrangement.**

**Please check [www.feministlibrary.co.uk/hours](http://www.feministlibrary.co.uk/hours) for the most up-to-date information, including changes to opening hours.**

**The Feminist Library Newsletter, Winter 2012 - ISSN 0951-2837.**

**Contributors: Una Byrne, Ballu Koroma, Anna Pigott, Ruth Nicholson, Cathy Larkin, Anne Korff, Scarlett Pimlott-Brown, Katherine Parker-Hay, Gail Chester.**