



Feminist Library Newsletter

No. 20 Spring 2015

The Feminist Library Needs a New Home!

In 2015 The Feminist Library celebrates 40 years of archiving and activism. But the future is uncertain – the building that has been our home for the past 30 years is no longer viable and we are facing unsustainable increases in rent. The Feminist Library collective are launching a campaign to find a new, permanent and secure home to house this unique resource and community space, currently at risk of being lost forever.

What we do:

- We have an incomparable collection of over 7,000 books, 1500 periodical titles from around the world, archives of feminist individuals and organisations, pamphlets, papers, posters, and ephemera.
- We have space for meetings, readings, exhibitions and events, a space which supports and encourages research, activism and community projects.
- We are volunteer led, as we have been for all our life.
- We are intergenerational, being significant custodians of our feminist heritage, whilst looking to the future
- We are a registered charity, and completely self-funding
- We published women's writing under our previous name Women's Research and Resource Centre. Now we produce our own zines, archive self-published material and stock it in our bookshop, supporting independent producers.
- Our approach is intersectional – we provide a space for different feminisms to co-exist.

But all of this is in danger – our situation is emblematic of the climate of austerity, with many libraries and women's organisations being forced to close, and pressure on all community resources coming from rocketing property prices, especially in London. As the feminist movement of today grows, The Feminist Library can safeguard its history, and be part of its future, but we cannot do this without the support of the wider community.

How can you help?

- Donate to our emergency fund at feministlibrary.co.uk/emergencyfund and share as widely as possible. Every penny raised will be put towards securing a new home and the cost of moving our collection.
- Set up a regular donation through our website. Regular donations, even small ones, help us to make future plans.
- Ask your union branch to make a donation to our fund (we can supply a draft motion).
- Put on a fundraising or support event.
- Show support on our social media pages, and tell 5 friends how much the library means to you.
- Include a legacy for the Library in your will.
- Visit the library, use our collections for research or browsing, or arrange a student visit
- Volunteer: we have always been volunteer led, with collective organising at the core of our values. Volunteering with us gives you a chance to make an immeasurably valuable contribution, and to meet a like-minded group of people. We are particularly looking for volunteers for our fundraising and premises and events working groups, whether experienced or not – skill-sharing is central to our ethos.

If you have any questions, suggestions, or want to discuss further, please get in touch with us. Full contact details on back page.

Reviews



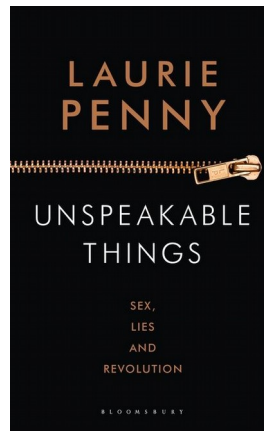
Until Our Blood Is Dry, Kit Habianic (Parthian, 2014)

Kit Habianic's first foray into the world of novel writing follows on the heels of her journalistic and short story writing careers. *Until Our Blood Is Dry*, set in a small South Wales pit village, follows the fortunes of Gwyn Pritchard, overman at Blackthorn colliery, his daughter Helen and her beloved Scrapper, a strapping young collier, during the long strike of 1984. Habianic is at her best when evoking the struggles of the miners' strike, the financial problems and strained relations. She provides us with complex webs of loyalty and gut-wrenching decisions to provoke real empathy for her characters. The South Wales landscape is beautifully rendered and she has a real talent for portraying the accents and cadences of the area.

Considering the great effort Habianic expends emphasising the strength of the women across the country that joined in the miners' strike, it's a shame that her heroine, Helen, falls a little flat. Despite the obvious empathy we feel for Helen as she struggles on the other side of the scab / striker divide, she sometimes feels too one-dimensional, a plot device with little true character of her own. Her rival Debbie suffers from the same lack of individuality - all femme-fatale via Pontypridd, no depth of personality. Other female players fare better: Helen's mother-in-law Angela and Helen's friend Sue evoke the tenacity and bravery of women supporting the strike without feeling like plot devices. Despite my quibbles with some of her main characters, Habianic manages to place women in centre stage of a struggle where their role is often overlooked.

On the one hand, the minimal space devoted to explaining the context of the strike means that even for the daughter of a miner's family like myself, the political and temporal complexities of the strike can at times be a little unclear. However, this actually serves to highlight the duplicity and deceit that surrounded the government, media and industry approach to the strike. Some of Habianic's most successful set pieces see the miners face the taunting police on the picket lines across the country. She excels in drawing us into the heated confusion of the picket line violence, the heady atmosphere startlingly oppressive at times. Ultimately Habianic's first novel is a gripping, passionate work. She conjures with great skill the specific world of Ystrad, whilst managing to draw us by association into a countrywide time of great upheaval.

Reviewed by Eleanor Shaw



Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution, Laurie Penny (Bloomsbury, 2014)

In her latest work, *Unspeakable Things*, Laurie Penny does gutsy, messy feminism. Bodily fluids abound in this book: snot, semen, vomit... because Penny is sick, sick to the stomach of bland and gutless feminism. *Unspeakable Things* is a call to arms and Penny makes no

bones about this. Who cares about getting women into the board room? Never mind the Sheryl Sandbergs or the sassy women who want it all, Penny's been in the trenches and it's a time of austerity: this is her story and that of her generation. Why are we so lost and fucked up? she asks. Appropriately, Penny begins with the foremost site of resistance: her own body. In recalling her own eating disorder Penny observes that 'of all the female sins, hunger is the least forgiveable; hunger for anything, for food, sex, power, education, even love'. For Penny, as for many younger feminists, women and girls are not the only victims of patriarchal society, as she states that 'gender is a strait jacket for the human soul'. Men also suffer as a result of sexism and should play an important role in changing attitudes to gender.

Similarly, Penny's discussion of sexual objectification, porn and prostitution, undoubtedly 'sex positive', may be considered controversial. Objectification doesn't have to be misogynistic; sex workers can have agency, she argues. Sharing a fag with porn star Stoya, Penny reflects on the stigmatisation of female sexual pleasure.

The discussion then moves on to the status of women in cyberspace, a place Penny knows well: it was online that she learnt to be a writer and to make her voice heard. All is not rosy for women online, despite its promises of liberation. Harking back to Germaine Greer's famous indictment 'Women have very little idea of how much men hate them', the internet, Penny reminds us, has shown women how much men do really hate them. Outspoken women online are constant targets of abuse, a testament to this hatred.

Ending her polemic with a discussion on love, Penny remarks that women need to stop defining themselves by love or the lack of it. The dating and mating ritual is one of the most repressive with regards to gender, just ask any woman who has been on Tinder. With her short hair and big boots Penny knows she's not going to get as many kisses: she doesn't fit the mould, and with her loud opinions, nor does she play by the rules. Capitalism has captured love: it is a commodity, a prize to be won. And we police ourselves, even at the cost of our own personhood, to become lovable.

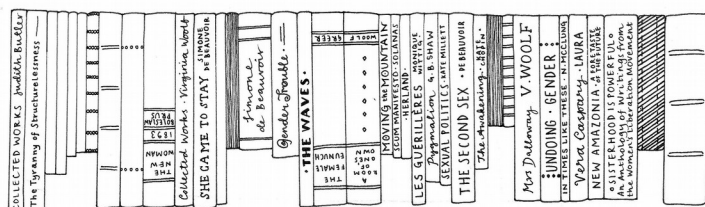
Unspeakable Things is, without a doubt, an important feminist book for our times. Penny writes about what she knows and how she lives, encapsulating the experience and feelings of many young women and men, who will

recognise and empathise with her stories. Her writing is not the most elegant and her arguments don't always flow, but the points she makes go straight to the nitty-gritty of contemporary gender repression. Penny doesn't know the answers to the problems constrictive gender roles pose, but she does know 'we've got to stop letting stale old men define our dreams'. It's time to rewrite our own stories and live the lives we truly want.

Reviewed by Cristina and lottie.

Recent Acquisitions

- Girls Are Powerful: Young Women's Writings from Spare Rib*, Susan Hemmings (eds) (Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1982)
- Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*, Jamie Heckert and Richard Cleminson (Routledge, 2011)
- Beauty Tips for Girls*, Margaret Montgomery (Cargo Publishing, 2015)
- Cooks and Campaigners Compendium*, (The Women's Library, 2002)
- Cross-eyed Coconut Head: Memoirs of a Wonky Girl*, Georgie Watts (2014)
- Bioethics*, Professor Donna Dickenson (2012, Hodder Education)
- Lesbian Ethics, Volume 3 No.2* (LE Publications, 1988)
- Rain and Thunder*, Issue 61. Winter/Spring 2015
- Play*, Dr Charlotte Cooper (2015)



THE FEMINIST LIBRARY BOOKSHOP

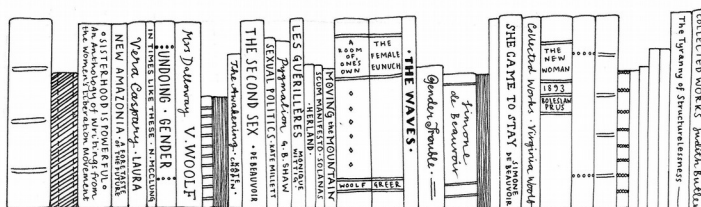
Every Saturday 12-5pm
at The Feminist Library

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The Feminist Library is 40 years old!

To commemorate this anniversary year, the Feminist Library is proud to announce a series of twelve celebratory salons. Our upcoming 40th anniversary salon programme for 2015 reflects our confidence that the Feminist Library will be around for at least another 40 years, if not more! The twelve salons are all organised around the theme of "Activating the Archive". Each salon is based on one of the categories from our unique feminist classification system - itself a substantial and important piece of radical feminist activism, which has been widely used elsewhere as the basis for other feminist classification systems. Each salon will highlight some of the amazing and unique literature that we have within the collection.

Our first salon in January, "Knowledge is our Superpower", focused on feminism and libraries. The turnout was very good and the response on social media very positive. In the afternoon we organised a comic drawing workshop which was led by the artists responsible for the feminist comic *My So Called Secret Identity*, this was followed by a discussion on the theme 'Why does feminism need its own library?' with a panel that consisted of members of the Feminist Library collections group, the Radical Librarian Collective, Will Brooker (co-author of *My So Called Secret Identity*) and Claire Hayward, Historian. The exciting programme includes salons on feminist fairytales; women's history; women and tattoos; motherhood, parenting and educating children; women's self-organisation; art and archivism; sexuality; performance art; women's mental and physical health; feminism and fashion, not to mention many other events. Please keep an eye on our website, facebook page and twitter feed for further details of these events.

Herstory at the Feminist Library

Recently a group of GCSE History students came to The Feminist Library for a workshop run by Herstory, a project supported by the Feminist Library (@herstory_uk). We spent the first half of the class learning about the changing role and status of women in the 20th century. We then recreated Judy Chicago's celebrated feminist art work 'The Dinner Party'. Every student and teacher presented a different woman from history in the first person. We learnt, through listening to each other about so many incredible women who shaped the 20th century. Hopefully some of them will make their way into the GCSE exam answers in the summer!

Save the Jagonari

The Jagonari Women's Centre has been providing high quality support to the people of Tower Hamlets for 27 years. The centre is now under threat due to an unaffordable rent hike by their landlords and is facing imminent eviction. Follow them on twitter at twitter.com/Jagonari, on facebook at facebook.com/JagonariCentre or ring the centre at 02073750520 for updates and ways to support their struggle to save this crucial community resource.

LISTINGS

1 – 31 March 2015 Women's History Month in East London

Women's groups, artists, activists, performers, writers, arts, media and community organisations are celebrating WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH in East London and International Women's Week in Tower Hamlets, with a remarkably diverse range of events and exhibitions www.alternativearts.co.uk/womens-history-month

1 – 8 March 2015, Women of the World Festival, Southbank, London.

A festival of talks, debates, performance and activism celebrating women and girls. The Feminist Library will be at the festival from Friday to Sunday so come along and visit our stall! www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Saturday 7 March 2015, Million Women Rise, London.

Women-only march against male violence in all its forms. Meet @12pm Central London in Duke St (next to Selfridges).

March sets off 1.15pm along Oxford St with rally in Trafalgar Square at 3pm. www.millionwomenrise.com

12 – 3.30pm 14 March 2015, Black British Feminism: Past, Present and Futures. Black Cultural Archives – London

In collaboration with writer Chardine Taylor-Stone and Body Narratives, this one-day conference attempts to trace Black feminist journeys and legacies into the present day. Centred on cross-generational dialogue, this interactive programme encourages reflection, celebration and a return to an activist-centred movement. View films in the Cinema of Collective Black Resistance; examine Black British feminism in the archives, and explore Black feminist activism on a tour around Brixton.

bcaheritage.org.uk/programme/conferences-and-lectures

7pm 20th March, Ain't I A Woman Collective Launch. Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, London, N1 9DX.

Spoken word and music performances by Asabi Hawah, Belinda Zhawi, Annie Rockson, Ayshamar Atkins and Siana Bangura. There will also be a raffle and drinks reception. The Ain't I A Woman Collective is a black feminist community, which aims to centre the voices of women with African ancestry in Europe and beyond.

www.housmans.com.

26 March 2015, Speaking the Activism of Black Feminism. Longfords Conference Centre, Ryebank Road, Manchester M21 9TA

Trafford Rape Crisis is proud to announce this event, to coincide with the 5th anniversary of TRC. Confirmed speakers include: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ann Phoenix, Amrit Wilson, Aderonke Apata and Shirley Tate. Fully accessible. For more information and to register visit www.traffordrapecrisis.com/Events.html.

28 – 29 March 2015, Breaking The Frame Women's Gathering. The Feminist Library, 5a Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7XW.

Women's gathering on gender and the politics of technology, focusing on reproductive technologies. For more information or to book, contact info@breakingtheframe.org.uk. breakingtheframe.org.uk

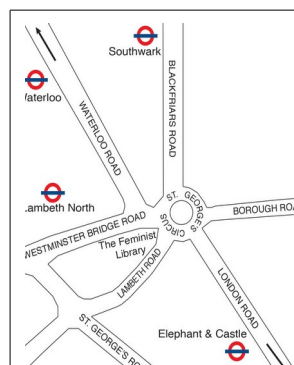
31 March 2015, Women, Peace and Transnational Activism: A Century On. Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, E14NS.

The centenary of the Women's Peace Congress, which took place at The Hague in April 1915, offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the past, present and future of women's transnational organising and to ask how far feminist perspectives have been mainstreamed into international debates about security, development and human rights over the past century. This event, a joint initiative between QMUL's Mile End Institute and History and Policy, will take the 1915 Congress and the founding of the WILPF as a point of departure to explore critical questions about the relationship between gender, activism and international politics, drawing on a range of historical and contemporary perspectives.

Free but please register online. Further details at www.womensgrid.org.uk/news/?p=4203.

3 – 5pm 18 April 18, *But I'm a Cheerleader*, Sex in the Women's Library Film Season. Glasgow Women's Library, 23 Landressy Street, Glasgow G40 1BP.

A season of films designed to put women's sexuality on the screen, curated by the Young Programmers. And supported by Film Hub Scotland, part of the BFI's Film Audience Network. The Sex in the Women's Library season is launched with a screening of this cult film: Megan is an all-American girl whose parents send her to "sexual redirection" school in this comedy about sexual disorientation. Free. womenslibrary.org.uk/events



The Feminist Library, 5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7XW.

Phone 020 7261 0879 or email admin@feministlibrary.co.uk

Visit www.feministlibrary.co.uk.

Follow us on twitter [@feministlibrary](https://twitter.com/feministlibrary)

Opening hours: The Feminist Library is open Tuesdays 11am-6pm, Wednesdays 5-9pm, Thursdays 6-9pm and Saturdays 12-5pm for the Feminist Library Bookshop. We are also open outside of these hours by appointment only. Please email admin@feministlibrary.co.uk or phone 0207 261 0879 if you would like to make an appointment. Please check www.feministlibrary.co.uk/hours for the most up-to-date information, including changes to opening hours.

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