Margaret Gillett and Ann Beer, eds. *Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical Essays by Women Associated with McGill University.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. Pp. 291.

"Having an agenda" means one has a goal and a plan to reach that goal. For many women in *Our Own Agendas: Autobiographical Essays by Women Associated with McGill University,* plans and goals were not always explicit, yet their stories reveal agendas. This collection of twenty-eight autobiographical essays not only reveals personal agendas, but illustrates differences and similarities among women otherwise linked only by affiliation with McGill University. Some contributors, such as Emily White, Violet Archer, and Erika Ritter, attended McGill as students; others, including Monique Bégin, Ratna Ghosh, and Janet G. Donald, worked as professors or administrators. Support staff are not included in this collection, although the editors say they sought a contribution from a member of this group. Authors reflect on their relationship with McGill, questions of feminism, and personal traumas, although some provide merely linear descriptions of their lives, with little or no analysis. The articles are not separated into thematic groups; each essay stands alone and speaks for itself. Although some stories are flat, others are moving and even inspiring. All are important and deserve to be told.

A sequel to *A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women* (1984), *Our Own Agendas* includes women from a wider variety of backgrounds. The contributors are from different cultures, professions, and age groups. As a result, the essays are diverse in style and in content. This diversity comes across quite strongly in the various attitudes and beliefs surrounding feminism. Essays by three of the oldest contributors are reminiscent of older-style factually detailed autobiographies. Their attitudes toward feminism, however, are clear. Laura Rowles, for example, studied physics in the 1920s and believes that equity programs and discussions of language use ("picayune fussing about the words 'chairman' and 'chair'") are not only unnecessary but lower the level at which men see women. On the other hand, Ginette Lamontagne, a senior administrator who never expected to be part of McGill, admits that she is a feminist and has benefitted from feminism, but thinks later generations will not need the label *feminist.*

Several contributors, like Laura Rowles and Ann McCall, take for granted the right to an education and to a career. Others, like Sara P. Gibbs and Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, fought for their right to pursue their chosen careers. Gibbs, in "Fighting for My Own Agenda: A Life of Science," describes her struggle to pursue research in biology despite discouragement. Kirkpatrick's "Priestesses, Goddesses, Witches, and Whores" provides insight into the path to ordination in the Anglican priesthood and the obstacles that women in organized religions continue to encounter. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, Annie Neeposh Iserhoff, and others had to fight racism to acquire their education. Nfah-Abbenyi writes,

in "Why (What) Am I (Doing) Here: A Cameroonian Woman," that every time she enters McGill, she is struck by "the reality of its whiteness." In "Excerpts from My Life," Iserhoff describes life as a child in the bush, being taken away to a residential school, and, finally, becoming a Cree teacher. In "Humour and Death," Lise Demers, also a teacher, presents a different view of growing up in a Native family. Although she draws much strength from her mother's Algonquin family, she also values the French-Canadian culture of her father's family. The combination of the two allows her to identify herself as a Native woman with "two-way" knowledge.

Traumatic events and survival play significant parts in several essays. One inspirational essay is "A Journey Within" by Jane Poulson, a medical practitioner, who describes her acceptance of the onset of blindness as a result of diabetes in her final year of medical school. In "Prelude," Mary-Margaret Jones describes and reflects upon her life before and after her mother's death, her life after being gang-raped at the beginning of her university career, and coming to terms with herself and her sexuality. A similarly painful contribution is an anonymous poem, "Life: Parts I–IV," which describes a woman's anger with her father, who claims to be supportive but demolishes her self-esteem in many little ways; with the man who raped her at age sixteen at a party; and with the men who have raped other women. But she also describes her struggle to come to terms with herself:

> I can't give up on me.
> Because I have to live with me.
> And I want to be happy
> with me.

Gillett and Beer argue that autobiography is central to a feminism of difference. Feminist pedagogy encourages, if not requires, the sharing of personal stories. Sue Middleton's *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy* argues that feminist pedagogy requires an exploration of our own and other's life histories. The relationships between individual biographies, historical events, and the broader power relations that have shaped and constrained our possibilities and perspectives as educators must be analyzed. However, doing so involves taking both personal and professional risks. Many contributors to *Our Own Agendas* do, indeed, take risks in telling their stories. Although some of the women's achievements come by chance rather than by hard work and ambition, the generous sharing of personal stories, combined with the narratives of career achievements make for, as Gretta Chambers says in the Foreword, both "a good read" and "a moving panorama of personal aspirations and experience." In any future autobiographical collection, however, the voices of traditionally silent support staff must be included.

*Our Own Agendas* is not traditional institutional history. Many essays touch only indirectly on McGill. Those that do are informative sources for researchers exploring the history of women and higher education. The essays cover a wide range of activities and achievements. The stories are as unique and diverse as the

contributors themselves. Margaret Gillett, a long-time professor at McGill, and Ann Beer, an assistant professor also at McGill, have brought together the stories of a wide variety of women. This collection is an important resource for anyone interested in the lives of contemporary women and the history of women's higher education.

*Alyson E. King*
*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education*

Carol Gold. *Educating Middle Class Daughters: Private Girls' Schools in Copenhagen, 1790–1820.* Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 1996. Pp. 243.

In 1814 Denmark became the first country in the western world to make elementary education compulsory, four years after it had been made compulsory in Copenhagen. The 1814 law stated that every child between the ages of seven and fourteen—the year of confirmation—had to be taught the three Rs and religion.

So far researchers in Danish history have limited themselves to pointing out that, depending on the economic situation of the family, schooling became part of the reality for some children earlier than for others. U.S. historian Carol Gold has chosen another perspective. In her book *Educating Middle Class Daughters,* she concludes that some children had already been to school several years before the introduction of a national education system. According to Gold, the new public education system in Copenhagen stood on the shoulders of an older private school system—and to a large extent depended on it during much of the nineteenth century.

Between 1790 and 1817 there were 261 private "school keepers" in Copenhagen, among whom were 210 women. Half of all children went to school, and of these, 70% went to a private school. The female school keepers share two things: their main reason to keep a school going was economic, and they have all been judged harshly by later generations of historians of education. Gold disputes this interpretation.

In *Educating Middle Class Daughters,* Gold depicts a world of variegated schools, where small dame schools or daycare centres existed side by side with bigger girls' schools or academies. Whereas girls in some schools were taught at a very low level, girls in others were taught at something near high school level.

Female school keepers were mainly single and relatively poor, but in opposition to the tradition that holds the women were mostly illiterate, Gold shows these women could read and write and sometimes more than that. Most had a petit bourgeois or artisan background and some came from school keepers' families.