

d'articles sa cohésion interne et sa valeur.

Lorsqu'on m'a demandé de rédiger ce compte-rendu, j'ai accepté avec plaisir mais j'étais consciente des lacunes de mes connaissances en ce qui concerne le champ de l'éducation des filles en milieu *anglophone*. Faire la critique de *Women Who Taught* était à mes yeux une excellente occasion de pallier, en partie du moins, à mes propres lacunes. Quelle ne fut pas ma surprise, en lisant l'introduction de cet ouvrage, introduction présentant une synthèse des travaux récents en histoire de l'éducation des filles, de constater qu'aucune référence n'y était faite au travail considérable effectué en français, au Québec, depuis la dernière décennie, dans ce champ d'étude! La bibliographie sélective présentée à la fin du volume ne comporte d'ailleurs qu'une seule référence à un livre écrit sur le Québec, en français.

Par ailleurs, dans l'introduction, on insiste sur le fait que l'histoire de l'éducation doit faire une place à l'enseignement longtemps dispensé par les religieuses: «These teachers need to be rescued from the hagiographic historical tradition in which they are customarily presented» (p. 23). Les auteures soulignent que ce travail est amorcé et donnent alors quelques références. Ces références ne renvoient qu'à des ouvrages écrits par des anglophones. Aucune mention n'est faite que des Québécoises ont entrepris, en français, ce travail et cela, depuis quelques années déjà.

Il est certain que *Women Who Taught* concerne avant tout «four largely English-speaking countries» (p.

15). Cependant, l'article de Danylewycz et de Prentice ne porte pas uniquement sur l'Ontario anglophone mais aussi sur le Québec (majoritairement) francophone: les données utilisées pour le Québec concernent, d'ailleurs, le plus souvent, les enseignantes francophones québécoises.

Il y a donc un problème. Il semble que la langue divise plus efficacement les historiennes de l'éducation des filles que les frontières nationales. Je ne connaissais et ne connais encore malheureusement que trop peu l'histoire de l'éducation des filles en milieu anglophone. J'ai constaté qu'une méconnaissance semblable existe, à l'inverse, chez nos collègues anglophones. Peut-être notre commune «passion de l'érudition» et des outils de communication, telle la *Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, vont-ils nous permettre de franchir cette barrière linguistique? C'est à souhaiter. Pour amorcer cette démarche, je ne saurais trop recommander aux chercheuses francophones de lire *Women Who Taught* et de se familiariser ainsi avec tout un pan de l'histoire de l'éducation au féminin.

Marie-Paule Malouin
Montréal

Keith Jenkins. *Rethinking History*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. 77. \$13.95.

Rethinking History is, in its author's own words, "an introduction

and a polemic" (p. 1). In that it is an introduction, it is simply written, thankfully slim, and spare in its argumentation. In that it is a polemic, it attempts to make a case for talking, writing, and thinking about the past in a different way than most historians actually do. There are certain advantages to a polemical introduction, but certain drawbacks as well, and Jenkins' short work exhibits both. Those who know Jenkins' work from his many articles in the British journal, *Teaching History*, will not be surprised by his post-modernist, deconstructionist philosophy.

The volume consists of three short chapters. In the first, Jenkins addresses "what history is." He begins with the helpful distinction between "history" and "the past." The former is a discourse, writing. The latter is the object of historical enquiry. Thus "the past" and "history" are categorically different. Furthermore, they are "not stitched into each other such that only one historical reading of the past is absolutely necessary" (p. 5). Historians write different histories depending upon their perspectives; yet it is common for them to profess a search for truth and objectivity. Jenkins argues that historians ascribe indefensible claims to historical knowledge upon "tight methodological rules and procedures" (p. 14) and "key historical concepts" (p. 16). All history is ideological, and so the real question is not Carr's "what is history," but "who is history for?"

Jenkins' slide toward skepticism gathers speed: professional historians occupy a social site no different in kind from the company historian, the

popular story-teller, the nationalist heritage historian. Their histories, too, are a part of the ideological fray. The only difference is the academicians' position of dominance. But, according to Jenkins, they have no justifiable claim to more authoritative knowledge of the past because "the gap between the past and history...is an ontological one...no amount of epistemological effort can bridge it...classes and groups autobiographically construct interpretations of the past literally to please themselves. There is no definitive history outside these pressures" (p. 19).

Jenkins does not want his beginning students to despair, once they understand the utter relativism of historical knowledge. He offers the unsatisfactory comment: "a relativist perspective need not lead to despair but to the beginning of a general recognition of how things seem to operate" (pp. 25-26). This is a frightfully weak offering to the genuinely inquisitive student. We all know how things "seem"; the problem is how to get beyond to how they really do operate, and Jenkins outlines a position which removes that possibility.

Chapter 2 is organized around a list of seven questions on truth, objectivity, bias, empathy, evidence, causation, and history as an art or science. Much of what is written here is based on the distinction between history and the past which was explored in Chapter 1. Some of it is polemical in the worst sense: it is argument without reason, assertion without argument. The first question is this: "If we cannot ultimately know the truths of the past, then why do we keep searching for them?" (p. 28). Given Jenkins' useful

distinction between history and the past, it is either gross sloppiness or deliberate obfuscation for him to speak of historians seeking "truths of the past." Historians do make *statements about* the past, and those statements may be true or false, and evidence may be marshalled for or against those statements. It is, on the other hand, patently meaningless to talk of the truth of the past itself. But after Jenkins disingenuously dismisses the possibility of finding the "truth of the past," he goes on to assert something quite different, that there is *no* connection between "word" and "world." Here the text consists of repetitive assertion without genuine argument, in order to create a visceral feeling for the lack of foundations in our culture: "We are partners with uncertainty; we have disturbed truth, have tracked it down and found it to be a linguistic sign, a concept" (p. 29).

Jenkins' insightful discussion of the problem of empathy is marred, in the end, by a similar sleight-of-hand. He sketches the philosophical and practical problems involved in achieving empathy with people from the past, and then outlines three reasons why, in spite of these problems, historical empathy continues to be high on the agenda in the schools' history curriculum. In part, he blames "educational notions of relevance and personal involvement" which led teachers, first in the primary years and then extending upwards, to have students "pretend to be a fox, a snowflake, an angry king" in order to make them feel engaged, "to personalise teaching and learning" (pp. 42-43). But he also blames the influence of Collingwoodian idealism

and, most significantly, the ahistorical liberal assumption of an immutable human nature. In order to use empathy to construct historical explanations, we have to make assumptions about how people thought in the past. The temptation is to fill the gaps in the record by assuming that they thought in ways which were basically similar to our own, but such assumptions are ahistorical and unwarranted.

So far, so good, but Jenkins' next step is another of his unreassuring reassurances: "I don't think this need lead to scepticism about knowing 'history' because...when we study history we are not studying the past but what historians have constructed about the past. In that sense, whether or not people in the past had the same or different natures to us is not only undecidable but also not at issue" (p. 47). But the *mentalités* of the people of the past are very much at issue: historians want to make cases about ideologies of resistance and accommodation, for example, based on evidence in the historical record. The epistemological difficulties involved in constructing knowledge about the past once again lead Jenkins to dismiss the whole project. We can agree history is not the same thing as the past. Does that mean that in doing "history" we are not *concerned with the past?* Hardly.

Many clarifying insights are scattered among these false arguments: a discussion of the central importance of historiography (p. 34), of the "bias" problem (pp. 36-39), of the distinction between "evidence" and "traces" (p. 49). The final chapter, "Doing history in the post-modern world," offers a similar mix of insight and sloppiness.

It begins with a brief, clear, and convincing historical outline of how a post-modern culture emerged as the result of the ultimate logic of liberal market capitalism. But by the end of the account, Jenkins is talking about "post-modern pastlessness" (p. 67), which means, not that popular consciousness is largely ahistorical—a plausible assertion—but quite literally, that we do not have a past. Then he confounds his useful distinction between the past and history, by talking about "reading the past." (Surely, we read history, not the past.) Finally he tangles his language incomprehensibly when he advocates that history should really be seen as "a discursive practice that enables present-minded people(s) to go to the past, there to delve around and reorganise it appropriately to their needs" (p. 68, my emphasis). Out of this stew, Jenkins wants to believe that we can extract tools for democratic emancipation. I remain unconvinced.

Jenkins is to be admired for accepting the challenge of writing a lean text which aims to introduce these much-discussed perspectives to an undergraduate audience. If there are serious flaws in the logic, they are much more exposed in such a volume than if they were hidden beneath the mountains of self-reflexive verbiage characteristic of other works advocating a similar position. I only wish that Bryan Palmer's *Descent into Discourse*—an attack on the deconstruction of history—were as accessible.

Peter Seixas
University of British Columbia

Patricia A. Vertinsky. *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Exercise and Doctors in the Late Nineteenth Century.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990. Pp. 279. \$59.95 U.S.

In recent years, the importance of the medical perception of women and its influence in both medical and non-medical areas has been the focus of many studies. Such research revealed the widening definition of the term "medical" in the past and, consequently, the increasing authority of the medical profession in our society. *The Eternally Wounded Woman* is a welcome addition to this literature in that it is a sensitive examination of the prescriptive texts on women using sources that straddle the Anglo/American world in the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such an approach emphasizes both how artificial national boundaries for such a topic can be and also their importance at the level of rhetoric. This is especially true in the use that American and British physicians made of their common acceptance that British women were healthier than American women.

A study of prescriptive literature by its very nature focuses on the way a woman should be, but in doing so Vertinsky has delineated how those perceptions relate to the entire life of the woman. This is significant, for previous studies have tended to emphasize the young woman reaching puberty or the mature woman and her experiences of childbearing, ignoring