BOOK REVIEWS

Unfinished Business: The 10 Most Important Issues Women Face Today, Dr. Julianne Malveaux and Deborah Perry, (New York: Perigee Books, 2002) 305 pp. $13.95.

It is always difficult to evaluate materials intended for educated lay audiences from an academic perspective. The problem is particularly acute in the case of *Unfinished Business: The 10 Most Important Issues Women Face Today*. Consisting of a series of "debates" on contemporary political and women‟s issues between two pundits, this book is ultimately unable to transcend the simplistic CNN *Crossfire* mindset that produced it. The book actually grew out of an encounter in 1998 between Deborah Perry, a white Republican, and economist Julianne Malveaux, a black Democrat on a typical "from-the-left/from-the-right" segment on MSNBC‟s *Morning Blend* program, moderated by Soledad O‟Brien, who now is a CNN host. The two speakers were put together because, in O‟Brien‟s words, they were "known to be at polar opposites of the political spectrum." Although they were chosen in order to create "lively debate," Perry and Malveaux‟s discussion grew so heated that the show‟s producer contemplated "killing their mikes" so that the host could get a word in edgewise (Foreward, xiii-xiv).

Unfinished Business continues their debate, bringing conservative and liberal perspectives to a range of women‟s social, political, and economic issues. Topics discussed include equal pay, work and family, education, the economy, crime and violence, race matters, reproductive rights, foreign policy and globalization, and the environment. The authors‟ positions are what you would expect: Perry, for example, is against abortion, affirmative action, the graduated income tax, gun control, and social security and welfare. She also does not believe that the wage gap between men and women exists anymore. Expectedly, she focuses on self-help as a solution for problems and emphasizes individualistic solutions. Malveaux‟s thinking, which is more nuanced and historically informed than Perry‟s, argues "the opposite position." She sees continued racial and sexual discrimination and inequality in many arenas, such as work, the family, and the government. She supports policies that level the playing field for women and people of color. At the end of each chapter on these different issues, the authors include "resources for the left" and "resources for the right," both of which provide contact addresses and website information for a host of organizations and groups, ranging from Greenpeace to the Heritage Foundation. The book also outlines the common ground for each political position, when it can be found, such as their shared concern for the environment and education for children. The book ends with a chapter that offers up suggestions for "lifting your voice" and being heard, suggestions that include voting, writing letters, or running for political office. A political glossary provides an overview of basic terms.

These topics clearly are important and of pressing interest, but the origins of the book and its conceptualization limit the terms of the debate in a manner that this

reader finds unacceptable. O"Brien"s forward to the book promises that all readers, regardless of "political leanings or your perspectives on the role of women," will see their viewpoints represented and debated (Foreward, xiv). This is simply not true. The alleged left/right organization of the work restricts the discussion to a narrow political spectrum, thus legitimizing its narrowness. The authors, who likely sensed the commercial potential of a project that catered to two normative visions of gender, present their arguments in a framework that ultimately does a disservice to the very real problems of inequality and oppression that women face today, both in the United States and globally. Discussion of gender politics ranges only from the anti-feminism of Perry to the liberal feminism of Malveaux. Missing are a host of issues and perspectives explored by feminist scholars and thinkers in the past decade, such as sexuality, Marxist/materialist feminism, or postcolonial feminist critiques. Readers are advised to look elsewhere for such discussion.

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Deep Gossip by Henry Abelove (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 128 pp., $25.95.

The author of this collection of essays was my undergraduate advisor and while I could not go so far to claim he was my mentor, I remain inspired by his approach to social history, his ability to pose difficult questions and his brilliant teaching. The impression I formed in college in Abelove"s courses on Modern Britain, Human Sexuality and semester long seminars on *Walden*, about his gifts for insight, phrasing provocative questions, and making connections, remains intact. He displays all of these abilities in this collection which contains lucid prose and clear thinking in a fashion accessible to readers with little expertise in the field. After a brief introduction parsing the volume"s title, the first essay critiques and refutes the tradition whereby psychoanalysts in the United States claim Freud"s blessing in pathologizing homosexuality. In making this argument, Abelove builds a smoothly structured narrative through a textual critique of Freud"s letters and lectures. Switching gears, the next essay examines changing demographic patterns during England"s long eighteenth-century, suggesting that the population increase was rooted in the rise of "sexual intercourse so called." He concludes, "I hypothesize that the invention of foreplay is an aspect of the history of capitalism, that the invention of industrial work-discipline is an aspect of the history of heterosexuality, and that both developments are in an important sense the same."

Reading this essay almost twenty years after hearing another version as a classroom lecture was an interesting experience, especially as it was during lectures like it that I first realized the power of social history to provide insight and provoke

thought. The lecture was structured around anecdotes illustrating the richness and variety of human sexual practice in the pre-Modern world. However, his conclusion here was only hinted at in the course. The shift suits the book with its focus on sketching the intersecting vectors of "understood" sexual identity – what is "normal," what is "queer" – and fundamental historical forces. This concern is also evident in the following essay, "From Thoreau to Queer Politics." In it he links the original objections, prompted by the publication of *Walden,* with his own experiences in a provocative queer activist group in Salt Lake City, a location that struck me as worth comment in its own right. It is a testament to Abelove"s sharp vision that he succeeds in linking Thoreau, who before being championed by Emerson was critiqued for eschewing „woman"s love," and for his eccentricity, with the author"s involvement in a group that perpetuated public "actions." Describing the practice and purpose of these actions sets up his conclusion that, "What Queer Nation really means is America." Reading this essay when same sex marriage has leapt into the national consciousness, makes me wonder if Abelove"s differentiation between these actions and more conventional political demonstrations, so important then, still holds. Are they now one and the same? If so, how much of the credit goes to groups like Queer Nation?

The last three essays join questions relating to queerness in academia and academic culture. "The Queering of Lesbian/Gay History," is a musing discussion on the way contemporary gay and lesbian students tend to reject traditional approaches to identity and the trope of marginal experience -- an inchoate post-modern understanding of their own identities -- a dynamic I have encountered among my own students but have been unable to define. This is followed by an essay on the relation between American Studies and Queer Studies through a sketch of the career of Francis Matthiessen, author of *American Renaissance*. Abelove suggests that the central unasked question of that work was, "what was the erotic meaning of nineteenth-century American democracy?" and argues that a great deal of subsequent scholarship has posed or interposed a series of questions that draw attention away from this question. Again he is clear in arguing that sexuality, particularly societally understood sexual identity outside the norm, is and should be a central concern in inquiries into the nature of society. This theme is also present, though inverted, in the closing essay on queer writers in quasi-exile in the pre-Stonewall era. His point here is more clearly stated than in earlier chapters: that a full consideration of the dynamics of this important moment of gay liberation must include a fuller understanding of events in the wider world, in this case, anti-colonialism.

As a whole I found the collection very satisfying. The essays are short and well written but they are neither pat nor smug. In each entry Abelove brings together two inquiries or themes that are not related in an obvious fashion, yet taken together they yield insights that were difficult to imagine at the beginning of the essay. I suspect that not all of these points will be revelatory for those versed in queer studies, yet Abelove"s consistent ability to bring issues together should offer fresh

insights for most readers. On the other hand, his clear writing makes the collection accessible for any interested reader and appropriate for use even in introductory courses. Overall, it is a pleasure to read.

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El viaje de Marcos by Oscar Hernández. Madrid: Odisea Editorial, 2002. 280 pp., €15.75 ($19.52).

Winner of Spain‟s IV Odisea Literature Prize in 2002, *El viaje de Marcos* (*Marcos' Journey*) is the story of Marcos, his twin brother Gus and Marcos‟ revelation of homosexual love. Told twenty-five years after Marcos‟ first meeting and subsequent relationship with Alex during August 1970, when Marcos was nineteen years old, Oscar Hernández‟s story can be considered both a romance as well as a tribute to all those individuals who, for various reasons were persecuted, ostracized and disappeared under the Spanish dictator General Francisco Franco‟s regime. It is a story about family, friendship, male bonding and secrets, both revealed and concealed.

Marcos‟ journey to Molinosviejos, a small town in the Spanish autonomy of Castilla-La Mancha was meant to be a reunion with his grandmother Palmira. Along with his twin brother Gus, Marcos intended to spend the summer re-connecting with his grandmother and relaxing before he headed back to school. It was also an opportunity to avoid the conflicts at home between his parents. However, on a chance encounter he met Alex, a twenty-something local man who befriended and romanced Marcos. Their summer romance would force both Marcos and Alex to confront people close to them as they recognized the love that they felt for each other. They then had to deal with those individuals who refused to accept their relationship which went against the ideals of the military regime in power, ideals supported openly by the conservative Spanish Catholic Church. What is interesting about the experience between these two characters is that the development of their romance occurred by chance for both. Neither man acknowledged a part of himself that they each ignited in the other. Alex and Marcos‟ relationship, however, would end in tragedy, as Gus‟ death at the hands of the Franquista youth group (due in part to a case of mistaken identity) forced Marcos, so he felt, to abandon Alex because he believed it was his fault that Alex died.

Upon his return to Molinosviejos twenty-five years later, Marcos hopes that he can continue the relationship that he left behind. After his initial departure, he went to school, studied medicine, got married and had a daughter. For the first time in twenty-five years, and after his wife‟s death, Marcos began thinking about Alex and the love they had for each other. However, upon his arrival at his grandmother‟s,

he learns from his cousin, and former rival for Alex‟s affection, that shortly after his departure, Alex had taken his own life because he could not live without Marcos. In a twenty-five year old letter left for Marcos Alex wrote:

> Amado Marcos, No sé si algún día leerás estas líneas, ya que vi en tu mirada un miedo demasiado grande como para llevarlo solo. Pero aun así, quiero hablarte, aunque no me oigas...Me he dado cuenta, en estos últimos días, de cuál es el sentido de mi vida. Y es amar. Y es amarte. Creo que esta vida no merece la pena vivirse sin amor. Sé que te has ido y que no vas a volver. Sé que me amas, pero que hora tienes demasiadas complicaciones y miedos como para estar junto a mí. No creas que te estoy culpando de nada, al contrario. Te doy las gracias. Sí, gracias por haberme amado y por dejarme amarte...Recuerda, Marcos, que nunca te culpé de nada, y que tenemos toda la eternidad para recuperar el tiempo perdido. Tuyo por siempre, Alejando (270-271).
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> (Beloved Marcos, I don‟t know if one day you will read these lines since I saw in your gaze too great a fear to carry alone. Nevertheless, I want to talk to you, although you cannot hear me...I have realized in these last few days, the meaning of my life. And it is to love. And it is to love you. I think that this life is not worth living without love. I know you are gone and that you will not be coming back. I know that you love me, but you have too many complications and fears in your life to be with here with me. Don‟t think that I am blaming you for anything, on the contrary. I am grateful to you. Yes, grateful for having loved me and for letting me love you...Remember Marcos, I never blamed you for anything, and we have all eternity to get back lost time. Yours always, Alejandro [my translation]).

Thus, Hernández‟s story tells about the birth and re-birth of Alex and Marcos‟ romance, but it also describes hate, hypocrisy, and rejection. Lastly, this story is also about the “ghosts” that characterized the last years of the Franquista regime, a period filled with taboos, prohibitions and at the same time desires for all forms of freedom.

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The Child of Exile: A Poetry Memoir by Carolina Hospital (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 2004), 85 pp., $11.95.

The Child of Exile: A Poetry Memoir was written by Carolina Hospital, a Cuban-American poet, essayist, fiction writer, and Professor of Composition and Literature at Miami Dade College. This is her first collection of poems. These poems, written by Hospital between 1983 and 2003, reflect the formative years of her life. They portray to the reader snippets of what it was and is like for her to live in America as a refuge.

Through a series of creative and lyrical poems that pull the reader into a heightened awareness of the issues people in exile face, the reader begins to understand that Hospital is writing to discover who she is and just where she fits into this new nation to which her parents have brought her. Hospital‟s parents brought her to the United States as a child to seek refuge and freedom. Through her creative way of recalling and writing to remember, she contemplates what it means to be a "hyphenated" American; that is, Cuban-American.

The book is organized into sections, beginning with Gestation and ending with Clinging, that symbolize the metaphorical progression of Hospital‟s life struggles and tribulations, celebrations and concerns, needs and desires. By sharing the experiences of her family and other refugees with drama as well as humor, she provides glimpses of what she experienced as a child, as a wife and lover, and as a mother. Gestation begins by probing the desperation of "the rafters" who venture across the treacherous seas that "swallowed their screams." In the Sorting Home section, she begins to think about growing "unfettered" in new soil. And in Monarchs in Flight, she reflects upon how, while she is "visited by memories of more cloudy days," she is "filled with color." The reader begins to see her flourish and grow. Finally, in Clinging, Hospital describes her thankfulness to "Carlos" for helping her find her "reflection restored in his eyes." Through her poetry, this insightful Latina seemingly begins to clarify in her own mind her national and personal identities and the richness of the human experience.

A number of themes perk up and are developed as one is swept up into the emotions of Hospital‟s chronicled poetry memoir. In the early readings, she questions where home is and what family means to her. Her family and she have feelings of nostalgia when they hear of their family‟s and their homeland‟s plights. Where do their loyalties lie? The reader begins to feel that Hospital‟s questions and compassion are not just those of a refuge in exile but may apply to all of humankind. The author provides opportunities for the reader to reflect upon his or her own life and situation and think about the meanings he or she holds for home and family and even life. As Hospital matures in her poems and in age, she seems to change from a lost child who feels a void in her life to an adult and parent. Through the love of her significant other and her children, complacency sets in. She becomes accustomed to and comfortable with her situation and her life in America. She begins to realize that

her identities as a wife, mother, and woman perhaps help her create viable positions for herself as they form meaning and purpose for her life. *A Child of Exile* seems to invite the reader to consider the meanings and purposes he or she places on contextual circumstances and situations and to stop and think about what might be re-conceived and re-negotiated.

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Truth & Beauty: a friendship by Ann Patchett (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 257 p.p., $23.95.

Anne Patchett‟s latest work, *Truth & Beauty,* chronicles the friendship she shared with poet and author Lucy Grealy, who died in 2002. Patchett and Geary both attended Sarah Lawrence, where, Patchett writes, "I knew her and she did not know me." The friendship between the two "officially" began when Grealy asked Patchett to find her an apartment in Iowa City where they would both be attending the Iowa‟s Writer‟s Conference. The Writer‟s Conference presence as a backdrop fades into near oblivion against the larger-than-life friendship between the two women. As Patchett writes, "Iowa City in the eighties was never going to be Paris in the twenties, but we gave it our best shot." In some respect, *Truth and Beauty* is all about best shots; the friendship between Patchett and Grealy makes one wonder if friendship is about the potential for the "never going to be‟s" becoming something else entirely. To describe Lucy Grealy as irrepressible falls short - she throws herself at life, sex, her writing. It is difficult to surmise -- and Patchett adroitly sidesteps the temptation – how Grealy "is" or was as a result of the childhood cancer (Ewing‟s Sarcoma) that left her face irrevocably disfigured despite thirty-odd surgeries (that required skin, bone, and muscle from other parts of her body) to repair and reconstruct the lower part of her face. We can‟t know, for instance, if Grealy‟s liberal sexuality is an attempt to own a sense of physical attractiveness; nor can we know if part of her power to attract and maintain an impressive coterie of friends transcended or was kept afloat by a palpable form of pity. Grealy, is after all, young, and to experiment sexually (and badly) bears no inherent pathology, but to captivate, in particular to captivate while one is less than "whole" challenges the Western notion of self. The self, then, maybe, becomes something else, or more than something definable, like the endearment "pets" used by Patchett and Grealy as a measure of their fondness for one another.

The book leaves us with a nagging sense that it all makes sense somehow: that Grealy sleeps with far too many men and none will make her whole; that she has expectations of Patchett that go beyond any reasonable semblance of friendship, and that ultimately, she meets her end as a result of addiction to heroin. Patchett

writes: "Lucy used to say she was like a piece of modern art: I"m finished when I say I"m finished."

Patchett, as even Grealy might agree, added some finishing touches of her own. Patchett raises the question of the expansiveness of truth and beauty as, like the friendship between the two women, rare, generous, and abundant. Grealy"s no-holds-barred lock on friendship and voracious pursuit of that which made her alive forces us to recognize the strength of friendship as more than sharing an intimate space. Perhaps Patchett"s greatest success here is that she suggests that friendship is no more exclusive or rarified than either truth or beauty is often perceived to be. As Patchett writes: "...we didn"t so much discuss our work as volley ideas back and forth until neither of us was sure who belonged to what. Not that it mattered. Since we didn"t share a genre, we could both find plenty of space inside the same idea." That *Truth and Beauty* generously offers up both the space and the idea of a particular friendship, the book is ultimately more than a testament to a friend, but reconfigures the idea of friendship as open and expansive.

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