

Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, eds. *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. xv, 306 pp. ISBN 0-773-51614 (hardcover)

Marcia Ostashewski

Volume 23, Number 1-2, 2003

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014526ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014526ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (print)

2291-2436 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ostashewski, M. (2003). Review of [Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, eds. *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. xv, 306 pp. ISBN 0-773-51614 (hardcover)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 23(1-2), 218–220. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014526ar>

Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, eds. *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. xv, 306 pp. ISBN 0-773-51614 (hardcover).

This interdisciplinary volume contains twenty essays dealing with women and culture in Canada. These essays contribute to the growing body of literature that addresses women's issues in folklore studies. It continues in the vein of folklore publications, like Rosan A. Jordan's *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture* and Claire R. Farrer's *Women and Folklore*, which initiated challenges to the public/private boundaries of women's culture and related issues.¹ Moreover, *Undisciplined Women* endeavors to redress the general neglect of Canadian culture in broader academic folklore spaces, and folklore in Canadian studies. The editors note in their introduction that the book's title both recognizes the "exclusion of women and feminism" in Folklore, and marks their "resistance to it" (p. x). In this way, the articles challenge ways of knowing and making knowledge within academic spaces, or "how folklore is done" (p. xvi). These essays represent work by senior folklorists and younger academics at different points in their careers; also, notably, the volume addresses and includes authors who work outside academic spaces. This is the first mark of the volume's "(un)discipline"—to include "as significant and valid collectors and (re)presenters of traditional and popular culture not only those women associated with the academy but also those who have never been near it" (p. xi).

The word play in the book's title signifies in a variety of ways. Perhaps most obviously, the women and female/feminine constructs (including "witches" and female taxi drivers) explored in the chapters often challenge socially-palatable and conforming notions of identity. This kind of challenge is encapsulated in the book's cover art, a painting created by Canadian Ukrainian artist Natalka Husar. It appears to be a scene much like those found at Ukrainian (and other) community dinners commonly held in church basements and halls in various regions of Canada. Two older women sit minding a table where they are selling tickets, very clearly in charge of the situation. Behind them a young woman is dressed in Ukrainian folk-staged dance costume—painted upside down! In this way, she "turns on their head" socially prescribed norms of behavior; she is not quite the demure or conforming young maiden her costume might suggest.

The ways in which the authors write about the communities they worked in often disrupts more conventionally accepted understandings of identity constructs found in popular culture; here, Greenhill's article that challenges heterosexist interpretations of cross-dressing ballads comes to mind. This is immensely significant not only to the discipline of folklore, but when considering that identities of related communities are tied up with conventional or "traditional" perceptions of identity constructs. This is due in large part to the fact that these identity constructs are inextricably linked to gender, as the authors both explicitly and implicitly argue in their various chapters. I can well imagine that some of the

¹Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik, eds., *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Claire R. Farrer, *Women and Folklore* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).

articles may present epistemological challenges to the ways in which communities and individuals understand themselves and their identities. Yet, as the editors point out in their introduction, some of the contributing authors "describe themselves as committed feminists; others find the terms and its connotations problematic" (p. xiii). This group of authors, then, is not easily bounded but themselves experience unsettledness and undisciplined-ness in relation to women's issues and academia.

Considering recent discussions regarding the efficacy or desirability of disciplinary boundaries and distinctions in academia, this volume's "undisciplined" title seems especially pertinent. Together, the authors break through disciplinary boundaries, writing across and through women's studies, folklore, anthropology, sociology; they find themselves at "the intersection of three all too often marginalized areas of academic inquiry—folklore, women, and Canada" (p. 3). This volume subsequently challenges the reader to consider topics, which have until recently been considered merely "folkloric," in critical examinations of culture.

Grouped along thematic lines, the essays focus on the collection and interpretation of women's folklore; images and representations of women in Canadian folklore; and how "Women Transform Their Lives and Traditions." Each thematic section is introduced by the editors, who point to major scholars in each area and central issues related to its theme. They address the collection and dissemination of folklore, and the variety of traditional and popular culture forms related to women's experiences. Finally, they celebrate the changes these women—authors, research participants and subjects—effect in folklore and Canadian studies.

The first thematic section opens as Doucette seeks to reclaim the study of women's traditions as part of Canadian studies, and "endeavor a renewing of the intellectual framework for the study of traditional culture in Canada" (p. 26). Labelle advocates for a reassessment of Catherine Jolicoeur's work, which has been marginalized within academia. Edith Fowke, a renowned Canadian folklorist, writes of her life—and its connection with folklore; her account details, both metaphorically and more plainly, the struggle of feminism ("before there was such a term") (p. 40) in Canadian folklore studies. Diane Tye examines—through and account of Jean Heffernan's work in Springhill, Nova Scotia—concepts central to folklore studies such as "innocence," "community," and "woman as ethnography/ethnographer." Re-evaluating Cameron's *Daughters of Copper Woman*, Christine St. Peter addresses problems associated with writing Native women's culture in Canada.

The second thematic section deals with representations of women. Barbara Reiti first explores Newfoundland witchcraft remedies and their connection to violence against women. Through an investigation of nationalism and gender, Anne Brydon examines the Icelandic *Fjallkona* and its shifting symbolic meaning in Canada. Barbara Le Blanc considers how social relations might be manifest in Cheticamp dance forms. As mentioned above, challenging homogenous heterosexual interpretations of the material of folklore, Greenhill presents a variety of interpretations of cross-dressing ballads; Taft describes the role of transvestism in mock weddings on the prairies. Janice Ristock's writes of "dangerously powerful women" (p. 140) as represented in Hollywood films such as *Fatal Attraction*; these

present difficulties for her own project of representing abuse in lesbian relationships. In the last article of this section, Vivian Labrie analyses stories of workplace relationships; she suggests that “indiscipline” (p. 163) can be an effective way of dealing with “structural violence.” She provides a segue from a section dealing with (re)interpretations of women’s images in folklore, to a section focusing on the women that actively transform their lives and traditions.

Here in this final section of the book, the authors attend to ways in which women work to challenge limitations placed along lines of gender, in both public and private spaces. Susan Shantz struggles to understand the place of Mateychuk quilts within wider quilting practices. Just what constitutes “public” and “private” is questioned by Jocelyne Mathieu, as she follows the production, exchange and use of clothing. Gail Paton Grant writes about processes and narratives associated with miracle healing. By interviewing three female taxi drivers, Cynthia Boyd learned of their negotiations of power within a primarily male occupation. Robin McGrath finds feminist messages in autobiographical narratives of Inuit women. Through an examination of the way in which women in Cape St. George negotiate their leisure time, Marie-Annick DesPlanques details how women who work collaboratively reinforce the personal links between them. Women also use narratives and folklore as resistance, as Pamela Klassen’s article on Mennonite woman preacher Agatha Janzen demonstrates. Kay Stone, Marvyne Jenoff and Susan Gordon reveal the efficacy of (re)interpreting narratives. It is indeed through learning of the ways in which all these women effect change, that we understand it is possible.

In conclusion, I urge consideration of the larger topic at hand with this volume—that this volume is truly a project of broader cultural studies. It inspires musicologists to look to the cultural context and signification of music and related practices, in our search for understanding the complex and fluid processes involved in the continual (re)creation of identities and histories. More specifically, its authors draw our attention to powerful instances and the richness of knowledge in the spaces where women, folklore and Canadian studies intersect. Numerous recent music-focused publications, including Beverley Diamond and Pirkko Moisala’s *Music and Gender*, Jane C. Sugarman’s *Engendering Song*, Virginia Danielson’s *The Voice of Egypt*, Sheila Whiteley’s *Women and Popular Music*—and numerous others—speak to similar issues in addressing culture.² *Undisciplined Women* focuses on topics related to cultural production—past and contemporary—in Canada, which are often at the heart of Canadian musicology. With this in mind, *Undisciplined Women* finds a place on my bookshelf, and very often open in my hands, in investigations of identity, music and related cultural production.

Marcia Ostashevski

² Beverly Diamond and Pirkko Moisala, eds. *Music and Gender* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Jane C. Sugarman, *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Uum Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge Press, 2000).