

ON GENDER AND WRITING. Edited by Michelene Wandor. London:  
Pandora Press, 1983, 166pp.

In the introduction to this collection of 22 essays on  
gender and writing the editor confesses:

I was never interested in including articles  
which would attack the idea of whether gender  
and the writing process had anything in common.  
I wasn't interested in anyone who held an  
'androgyny' view of the writing process or in  
anyone who had anti-feminist views. The people  
I asked were all people who had something  
positive to say about how they saw gender and  
the writing process coming together in their  
work. (p.9)

Consequently one finishes this book with the impression that  
almost all these writers know one another and share views on  
politics, literature and sex. The largest group of essays is  
from single mothers or gay women who write fiction, theater or  
poetry. Of the 22 writers almost all are British, all but 3 1/2  
are female (the half because he "shares" a doubled personality  
with his wife), all but a few speak of being formed by the  
turbulent 1960's. There is much discussion of motherhood, the  
feminist movement, the writer's relationship with (always) his/  
her mother, and left-wing politics. The appalling English lack  
of support for working mothers is repeatedly mentioned. There  
are perceptive and sometimes touching descriptions: an ex-  
academic growing up in the shadow of a powerful intellectual  
father; a gay man coming out; an art historian adrift in the  
storm of sexual politics; a successful novelist (Margaret  
Drabble) writing on gender; a straight man has his consciousness  
raised; an older journalist tells of a lifetime in the feminist  
movement; a straight couple merging personalities, producing  
memorable lines like: "It is sometimes difficult to remember who  
has the penis and who is being penetrated during the excitement  
of the act" (p.143). The writing is sometimes chatty and brash,  
reminding us of the 1950's underground press that must have  
nourished it. Pamela Gems asks, "Is trying to write a... retreat  
into a world that you can manipulate, that does have order? If  
that is so writing is a fascist act" (p.148). The assumption is

that order in an artistic work is psychologically regressive, but, what is probably worse, non-feminine. If the views sometimes seem about two decades old (published in 1983), yet the writers grapple with Michelene Wandor's questionnaire honestly, usually confronting what is arguably the most important cluster of social issues of this generation.

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