their cultural heritage, that leads working-class pupils to reject school culture. This, however, fails to explain the differences between the black working-class pupils of this study and those identified by Fuller (1980) and Riley (1981) who succeed through schooling.

The study is important for putting on to the agenda areas that need further serious attention, such as: the use of sexual power in the classroom by both staff and pupils; masculinity in the form of noncelebration; the links between masculinity, performance and control; the inverted relationship between commitment to schooling and the emergent sexual awareness of girls; the lack of knowledge of both girls and boys as to future prospects after school; the fact that boys only pursue feminine subjects when their masculinity is secure; the future economic familial responsibility that informs boys' perceptions. Finally, identification of the appropriation of schooling by both girls and boys for 'having a laugh' suggests a characteristic of working-class culture, black and

white, female and male, which operates right across different facets of social life.

Beverley Skeggs

References

- DEEM, R. (1980) editor *Schooling for Women's Work* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- FRAZER, E. (1988) 'Teenage Girls Talking About Class' *Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 343-58.
- FULLER, M. (1980) 'Black Girls in a London Comprehensive School' in DEEM (1980).
- McROBBIE, A. (1978) 'Working-Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity' in WOMEN'S STUDIES GROUP (1978), pp. 96-109.
- RILEY, K. (1981) 'Black Girls Speak for Themselves' *Multiracial Education* Vol. 10, No. 10, pp. 3-12.
- WALKERDINE, V. (1981) 'Sex, Power and Pedagogy' *Screen Education* No. 38, Spring, pp. 14-26.
- WEINER, G. and ARNOT, M. (1987) editors *Gender Under Scrutiny: New Inquiries in Education* London: Hutchinson.
- WOMEN'S STUDIES GROUP (1978) editors *Women Take Issue* London: Hutchinson.
- WRIGHT, C. (1987) 'Relations Between Teachers and Afro-Caribbean Pupils: observing multiracial classrooms' in WEINER and ARNOT (1987) pp. 173-87.

With Wings: An Anthology of Literature by Women With Disabilities

Edited by Marsha Saxton and Florence Howe; British edition with a preface by Merry Cross

Virago: London, 1988, £4.95 Pbk
ISBN 0 86068 166 1

Literature can empower individuals and groups. There is now clearly a women's literature which celebrates women's creativity and lives, and fights against women's oppression. In doing so, it has an enduring impact on the culture which it seeks to change.

With Wings, an anthology of American women's writings, is a celebration of the literature of disabled women. It shouts out our talents, our concerns, with some wonderful

pieces of work. In doing so, it claims both a place within the general culture and attempts to change that culture.

The anthology is divided into three sections of poems and prose. The first, 'Living in these bodies, these minds', gives voice to the physical realities of disability and illness. The introduction quotes Virginia Woolf: Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed. . . it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature'. To be disabled is not by any means necessarily to be ill, but the point is that

the invisibility of both disability and illness in our literature means an enormous part of human experience is missing. Nancy Mairs's poem 'Diminishment' makes visible this central and universal concern:

My body
is going away.

It fades
to the transparency
of rubbed amber
held against the sun.

It shrinks.
It grows quiet.

Small, quiet,
it is a cold
and heavy
smoothed stone.

Who will have it
when it lies
pale and polished
as a clean bone?

The second part, 'Seeking help and love', explores the impact of disability on our relationships with others. The pieces cover childhood relationships, adolescence and early adulthood and conclude with work on adult relationships and motherhood, including reflections on growing older and facing death. The final section is called 'Transcendence' and includes a wonderful piece of writing by Alice Walker, exploring her childhood experience of disability and disfigurement, culminating in her account of her three-year-old daughter's first realization that there is something wrong with her mother's eye:

'One day when I am putting Rebecca down for her nap, she suddenly focuses on my eye. Something inside me cringes, gets ready to try to protect myself. All children are cruel about physical differences, I know from experience, and that they don't always mean to be is another matter. I assume Rebecca will be the same.

'But no-o-o. She studies my face intently as we stand, her inside and

me outside her crib. She even holds my face maternally between her dimpled little hands. Then, looking every bit as serious and lawyerlike as her father, she says, as if it may just possibly have slipped my attention: "Mommy, there's a *world* in your eye." (As in, "don't be alarmed, or do anything crazy.") And then, gently, but with great interest: "Mommy, where did you *get* that world in your eye?"

'For the most part, the pain left then.'

There are three facets to this book. It has a political character in that the contributions bear witness to the social, economic and political oppression experienced by disabled women. Secondly, the contributions have a literary merit which can be recognized regardless of their context. And finally, it is about women's lives. When I go into my local feminist bookshop, therefore, will I find it in three places – in the biography, literature and 'disability' sections? (Just as, for example, Rosemary Manning's autobiography is in both the biography section and the writings by lesbians section?) No, the book is isolated, segregated, as we are. Kept in its proper place, at the back of the shop, on a shelf whose title, Books by and about women with disabilities, takes up more space than the books on it do. I've asked why they don't put biographies of Rosa Luxembourg, or May Sarton's *After the Stroke*, on that shelf, as well as on the biographies shelf, but the message doesn't seem to have been understood.

To be fair, this bookshop is only doing what the rest of British society does. Significantly, while the American edition of *With Wings* has five entries in the Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data, including American literature – women authors; and American literature, 20th century – the British edition has but two entries in the British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data, namely 'Physically

Handicapped women' and under the editors' names. In British society, if we are disabled then we are segregated into a special category all of our own. The other side of this coin is where the disability of a woman like Rosa Luxembourg is made invisible. Our social definitions of disability do not sit easy with the strength and historical importance of such a woman. As the editors of this book point out, how many of us realize that Charlotte Brontë, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Tubman, Dorothea Lange, Sarah Bernhardt all had some disability or chronic illness?

Where, in the huge volume of feminist writing over the course of the last twenty years, is the experience of disabled women? It isn't that we are not there, or that we do not have the capacity to do political writing, write poems, novels, short stories, biographies and autobiographies. Why has Virago, as the biggest feminist publisher, not sought out writing by disabled women in this country, rather than just taken up the opportunity of publishing this American book?

A particularly important part of our segregation is the lack of positive images. One of the purposes of this book was not just to celebrate the creative abilities of disabled women, but also to 'enhance the self-esteem of disabled women and girls by presenting positive role models of

the disabled woman as literary artist, communicator and leader of her own movement'. The association in literature – from fairy stories to P. D. James – of disability with everything that is bad, evil and ugly is such an important part of dominant ideology's insistence that to be physically imperfect is to be an outsider. Feminism in this country has challenged sexist notions of physical attractiveness but has paid no more than lip service to the extension of this challenge to the social definitions of disabled women. In *With Wings* our American disabled sisters demonstrate the way in which our literature and politics are not a 'minority' issue, but are part of the mainstream of feminist literature and politics. We need a literature that insists on the fundamental importance of our concerns as disabled women for the wider society. In finding such a voice, not only will we be empowered as a group, but feminism in particular, and our culture in general, will be the richer.

Jenny Morris

Note

Jenny Morris has edited a book called *Able Lives – Women's Experience of Paralysis* London: Women's Press, 1989. She thanks Lois Keith for her comments on this review.