

# WOMEN at the CENTER

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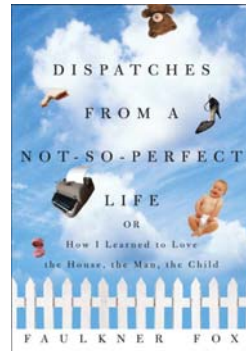
Issue 6, Summer 2004



Faulkner Fox, author of *Dispatches from a Not-So-Perfect Life*, teaches creative writing in Duke's Department of English. Read more about the book and its author at [faulknerfox.com](http://faulknerfox.com).

## Dispatches From a Not-So-Perfect Life

Faulkner Fox is a teacher, a poet, a wife, and a mother. These various and often conflicting selves battle it out in her lively new book, *Dispatches from a Not-So-Perfect Life, Or, How I Learned to Love the House, the Man, the Child*, published by Harmony Books. This frank and often hilarious memoir of her years as a pregnant wife and the mother of young children has sparked strong reactions in readers. Although a few reviewers have been critical of what they've termed Fox's "feminist rhetoric" or "whiny" tone, popular response has been overwhelmingly positive. Fox is now in the midst of a hectic book promotion schedule, but between cross-country trips, she has been treating local audiences to lively readings and discussions.



In January, Duke faculty, staff, and students packed a room in Perkins Library to hear Fox read and discuss her work. The event was co-sponsored by the Duke University Libraries, the Bingham Center, the Gothic Bookshop, and Parents@Duke, a network of parents who share information and concerns through an active e-mail list. The anecdotes and issues

Fox depicts clearly resonated with the men and women in the standing-room-only crowd.

Fox noted that some critics feel the need to individualize her observations—assuming, for example, that her husband must be insensitive, or that she doesn't love her children, or that she isn't appreciative of her privileged status. On the contrary, Fox is at pains to point out that hers is a happy marriage with a giving man, that she adores her children, and that she enjoys a comfortable middle-class life. It's these very contradictions that has the author flummoxed, and her readers nodding their heads in recognition. In *Dispatches* Fox explores with great candor her anxiety, her unhappiness,

and her guilt about feeling dissatisfied, in the process striking a familiar chord with many parents. Her incisive wit and willingness to admit her own taboo emotions make for a refreshing and empowering read for parents struggling to maintain a sense of self in the face of sleep deprivation and the needs of their young children.

*Sara Seten Berghausen, Librarian for Literature and Theatre Studies, Perkins Library*

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## Mary Lily Research Grants Awarded for 2004-2005

The Bingham Center is pleased to announce the recipients of this year's Mary Lily Research Grants, which support the work of students, scholars, and independent researchers traveling to Durham to make use of the Bingham Center's holdings. From an exceptional group of applicants, this year's grants have been awarded to the following:

**Mary Anne Beecher**, Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Oregon, for work on a book about the material culture of domestic storage from 1820 to

1920, and women's roles in influencing its character and use.

**Jamie Bufalino**, Department of History, University of California at Riverside, for work on her dissertation which examines the impact of advertising on women's roles and stereotypes from 1925 to 1935.

**Ellen Cain**, Independent Scholar, for work on a book which examines Amber Arthun Warburton's views on nationhood, ethnicity,

*(cont'd on page 3)*

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## Peninsula of Lies: a Transgender Mystery



Photo: Elizabeth Ball

Edward Ball is also the author of *Slaves In the Family*, a National Book Award winner, and *The Sweet Hell Inside: A Family History*.

Choosing a table in the most remote corner of our reading room, Edward Ball poured over box after box of letters, photographs and printed items: artifacts from the life of the mysterious Dawn Langley Simmons. This reserved scholar seemed an unlikely match for his research subject. Simmons, who died in 2000, was a flamboyant, enigmatic figure in Charleston, South Carolina, society. Born in England as Gordon Langley Hall, he engaged in a series of striking transformations, first through moving to the United States, befriending wealthy elite women, and sharing a variety of imaginative versions of his personal history. In 1967, Hall was one of the first individuals in the United States to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Her subsequent marriage to an African American man, alleged pregnancy, and motherhood mystified and alienated the Charleston society she had sought to impress.

In search of the truth behind this chameleon, Edward Ball made a pilgrimage to Duke's Special Collections Library to examine the Simmons papers. Visiting Charleston, New York, Philadelphia, and England, Ball interviewed everyone who could offer insight into his subject and explored the medical history of transexualism. He recounts this journey in the engagingly written *Peninsula of Lies: A True Story of a Mysterious Birth and Taboo Love*, published in March 2004 by Simon and Shuster. On March 17th the Bingham Center co-sponsored a reading and book signing by Mr. Ball. Other co-sponsors included Duke University Libraries, the Women's Center, the Women's Studies Program, and the Duke University Center for LGBT Life.

*Elizabeth Dunn, Research Services Librarian,  
Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library*

## Aunt Betty's Around-the-World Adventures



An illustration from McMahan's memoir *Heart and Nerve and Sinew* shows her dizzying ascent of Ayers Rock in Australia.

Shortly after Duke Magazine published an article on the Bingham Center's collection of girls' literature, we received a phone call from alumna Elizabeth 'Betty' McMahan asking if we might be interested in adding her self-published children's books to our holdings. The stories, she informed us, were loosely based on her own childhood growing up in the 1920s and 30s on her family's cane farm in Davie County, North Carolina. She had written and illustrated the books as a gift for her nieces and nephews when they were small. These books sounded like a perfect fit for our collections. After meeting and talking with McMahan in person, it became clear that she had much more in store for us!

Ms. McMahan came to Duke in 1943 to work with Professor J.B. Rhine at the Parapsychology Lab. The Rhines became close family friends, even helping out on the McMahan farm during the war years when labor was scarce. When Betty learned that the records of the Parapsychology Lab had also found a home at Duke's Special Collections Library, she offered us her own collection of papers related to the Rhines.

McMahan went on to get her Ph.D. in zoology

from the University of Hawaii and has studied termite colonies in Puerto Rico, Australia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, India, Panama, and Egypt. Upon her retirement from the Biology faculty at UNC Chapel Hill in 1987, McMahan volunteered with the Peace Corps in Jamaica, teaching zoology to first-year students at the College of Agriculture in Port Antonio. She now lives at Carolina Meadows, a retirement community just south of Chapel Hill, where she is as active as ever. All these adventures, and countless others, are detailed in McMahan's self-published memoir *Heart and Nerve and Sinew, or Aunt Betty's Around-the-World Adventures*, a title she took from a beloved poem by Rudyard Kipling.

The memoir, along with several of McMahan's children's books, compilations of her cartoons from "The Meadowlark" newsletter, illustrations she made of her travels aboard Pacific-traveling cargo ships, as well as a variety of news clippings, photographs, diaries and scrapbooks documenting this extraordinary and inspiring woman, now form the Elizabeth McMahan Papers, one of the Bingham Center's most intriguing recent acquisitions.

# Engaging Sources: The Grove Press Action

Through a series of workshops and lectures sponsored by the Department of History, this year's Women's History Month activities at Duke offered a forum for students and faculty to consider how far we've come in exploring gender as an analytical category and to discuss new directions for women's history and gender analysis.

As part of this series, on March 24th Laura Micham and Amy Leigh Hagardorn presented a workshop titled "Engaging Sources from the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture." This session examined documentary sources available at the Bingham Center with an emphasis on "reading for gender" both in sources that have consciously gendered content and in those that appear more gender-neutral. Undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty participated in this discussion about becoming more gender-aware readers of primary sources.

Using a document analysis worksheet adapted from one devised by the Library of Congress, workshop participants examined two documents that reported on separate demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. The May 23, 1966, issue of the newsletter *Bring the Troops Home Now* covered a women's march in New York City, and the seminal women's liberation movement journal *Notes From the First Year* covered the 1968 march of the "Jeanette Rankin Brigade." In each case, readers were prompted to ask specific questions about the documents, such as "What evidence in

the document helps you to know why it was written?" and "What question is left unanswered by the document?" These questions and others help orient researchers to the issues involved in research using primary sources.

The workshop then explored documentation surrounding the 1970 takeover by feminist activists of Grove Press, arguably the most influential alternative press of its day. While Grove was lauded for breaking down the barriers of sexual morality, many in the women's liberation movement were aware of the hypocrisy of this view. Having just been forced out of her job as an editor for Grove due to her union sympathies, Women's Liberation Movement leader Robin Morgan organized a sit-in to protest the exploitation of women on Grove's staff as well as women within the pages of Grove publications. The protesters penned a manifesto demanding everything from pay equity and health benefits for female staff to a fund for women sex workers generated by the profits from Grove's many "adult" imprints.

A slideshow of images from issues of *Evergreen Review* (see illustration at right) as well as the manifesto and other items from Morgan's papers brought this historical moment to life for workshop attendees. All of the activities included in the workshop were aimed at honing the participants' critical analysis skills and making them more savvy researchers.



*Evergreen Review* No. 78, May, 1970

## Recent Acquisitions:

- An addition to the records of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South (RCWMS)
- Additions to the papers of Phyllis Chesler, Kate Millet, and Alix Kates Shulman
- A large addition to the records of the Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI)
- The records of Common Woman Chorus, a feminist musical ensemble who have performed in Durham for over twenty years.
- A very rare 1845 edition of *The Ladies' Almanac and Calculator*
- An almost complete run of the New Jersey women's liberation newspaper *New Directions for Women*
- *After Class*, a lesbian pulp novel penned by Rick Raymond for All Star Books in 1964

## Mary Lily Research Grants Awarded (cont'd from page 1)

social class, and gender, and how these views shaped her efforts on behalf of migrant laborers in mid-20th century America.

**Jennifer Eisenhauer**, Assistant Professor, Department of Art Education, Ohio State University, for work on an article which looks at girls' zines as a window on the relationship between young women's subjectivity/agency and popular visual culture.

**Katherine Lehman**, Department of American Studies, University of New Mexico, for work on her dissertation which examines popular representations of single women from the 1960s to the present in relation to changing sexual mores.

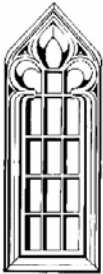
**Margaret McFadden**, Professor, Interdiscipli-

nary Studies, Appalachian State University, for work on a book about international women activists from 1918 to 1939.

**Ulrike Mueller**, Independent Scholar, for work on an exhibit on "the text, identity, and performance that was Kathy Acker" scheduled for November 2004 at the ZKM (Center for Art and Media) in Karlsruhe, Germany.

**Jennifer Putzi**, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Women's Studies, The College of William and Mary, for work on a book about the gendered politics of Confederate mourning and commemoration.

Congratulations to all our grant recipients!



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## Middlesworth Award Showcases Bingham Center Collection



The abundance of self-published women's and girls' zines in the Bingham Center's collections provide fertile ground for research in a variety of disciplines, including psychology, history, and English.

Duke's Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library has a tradition of welcoming and fostering undergraduate use of the rare and unique materials in its rich collections. Each year the Chester P. Middlesworth Awards are presented to undergraduate and graduate writers of the best papers based on research in the library's collections. This past year, one of the Middlesworth awards went to sophomore Daniel Avissar for a paper that focused on feminist zines and prescriptive literature for women in the Bingham Center's collections. Written for Professor Caroline Light's spring 2003 course "Feminism in Historical Context," Avissar's paper is titled "CACA Magazine: A Survey of Feminist Zines." For more information about the Middlesworth Awards, contact a member of the research services staff in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at (919) 660-5822.