

Review: Arms and the Woman

Author(s): Elizabeth Bobrick

Review by: Elizabeth Bobrick

Source: *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 17, No. 9 (Jun., 2000), pp. 8-9

Published by: [Old City Publishing, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4023453>

Accessed: 31-01-2016 19:04 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Old City Publishing, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Women's Review of Books*

<http://www.jstor.org>

"Wonderfully wise,  
achingly honest..."\*

*A Good  
Enough  
Daughter*  
A Memoir

ALIX KATES SHULMAN

"Refreshingly upbeat,  
infused with insight,  
affection and respect."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"A stunning memoir.

Alix Kates Shulman is a  
brilliant and completely  
captivating writer."

—Harriet Lerner,  
author of *The Dance of Anger*

"Poignant...fresh and  
compelling."

—*Entertainment Weekly*, A-rating



"Honest and well-written..."

[this] memoir is, in the  
end, one of redemption,  
reconciliation and affection."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Thoughtful and honest."

—*Boston Globe*

"Fascinating..."

Shulman's reflective  
memoir proves well worth  
pondering as we confront  
the role reversal we  
ourselves will face—if we  
don't already."

—*Newsday*

\*Rebecca Goldstein,  
author of *Mazel*

NOW IN PAPERBACK

Wherever books are sold

 Schocken

www.randomhouse.com

## Arms and the woman

by Elizabeth Bobrick

**In Glory's Shadow: Shannon Faulkner, The Citadel, and a  
Changing America** by Catherine S. Manegold.

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000,

330 pp., \$26.95 hardcover.

**Breaking Out: VMI and the Coming of Women**

by Laura Fairchild Brodie. New York:

Pantheon Books, 2000, 384 pp.,

\$26.00 hardcover.



By the mid-nineties, all federal and most state military academies in America had opened their heretofore men-only programs to women. Two holdouts remained: The Citadel, in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Virginia Military Institute, in Lexington, Virginia. The Supreme Court eventually forced both schools to admit women, to the great dismay of their vocal alumni, students, administrators and townspeople.

The background and aftermath of these rulings are the subject of these two books; in style and substance they present very different accounts of what initially appear to be highly similar circumstances.

Catherine Manegold's book centers on the 1993 lawsuit *Faulkner vs. Jones et al.* The case pitted a teenage girl who denied that she was a feminist ("I'm an individualist") against The Citadel, a publicly funded military school in her home state which had refused to admit her solely because of her gender. Willy-nilly, she was turned into a hero by those who supported women's rights, and obscenely vilified and physically threatened by many who wanted to see The Citadel remain unchanged. In 1995 the Supreme Court ruled that Faulkner be admitted. When she withdrew from the academy less than a week after enrolling, Rush Limbaugh gloated and Faulkner's supporters were embarrassed.

This story is a journalist's dream, but surprisingly, Manegold, an experienced reporter now on staff at the *New York Times*, has written a rambling, often confusing book. While she shows skill in conveying atmosphere—tension, jubilation, fear, pride—she is a clumsy storyteller, trying too often to strap the facts onto a Procrustean bed of underscrutinized theory about the South's resistance to assimilation and cultural change.

Her most jarring assertion serves as a good example of her tendency to oversimplify in order to provide historical and cultural context. She contends in a chapter called "A Game of Slave and Master" that a pattern established in slavery—one person having absolute control over the physical state of another—was the foundation of The Citadel's still-active system of hazing: the school had been founded after a near-uprising, when slaves were most harshly subjugated. But young males have been subjected to some form of initiatory or indoctrinary hazing throughout history and cross-culturally. Anthropologists and psychologists find many other reasons than imitations of slavery to account for them. Manegold does not seem to be

aware of these explanations, or chooses to ignore them.

Once the possibility of physically dominating blacks became more remote, Manegold continues, the feelings of superiority white men once reserved for blacks were transferred to uppity white women. In the 1970s, she says, the forced acceptance of black cadets on campus forced "a new dialectic of contempt towards women.... For the first time, a transparent hostility toward women showed." She does not consider that this could be due to the fact that, for the first time, women were a threat to the all-male bastion of military academies: they had begun to enroll at West Point and the Air Force Academy, both far more prestigious than The Citadel.

Manegold tries to explain too many complex situations at a dismayingly high-school level, and with a good deal of repetition. (About the national mood in 1959: "We peered into the looking glass and questioned what we had built." As she has it, "we" did that every time things changed, whether "we" stood to lose or gain from social upheaval.) Among her subjects are the ties that bound colonial masters and African slaves; the foundations of the Old South's sense of entitlement and freedom from federalism; the tides of social change that have swept the country for the last two hundred and fifty years, including a thumbnail sketch of every war (and the Cold War); and the emotional moods of several presidencies (including the semiotics of Carter's cardigans and Reagan's cowboy boots). She goes into tedious detail about non-essential matters (the rise, fall and clientele of Faulkner's grandparents' diner,

the expertise of The Citadel's lead lawyer's grandfather in black magic) in an effort to provide reportorial color. The combination of generalization and minutiae crushes the narrative.

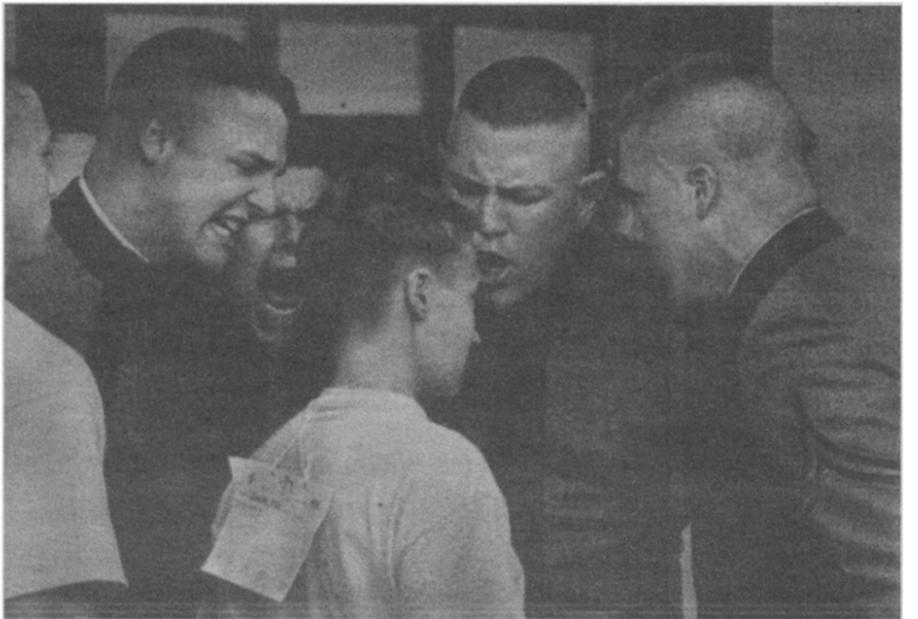
The final chapters are the book's best. Here Manegold observes The Citadel during Faulkner's first days, watching from the permitted female perches of the infirmary and the administration building. In the former she has a chance to talk with nurses treating students brought in for dehydration, muscle spasms, panic-induced hyperventilation, heat exhaustion, sleep deprivation and forced overdoses of alcohol or caffeine. While some of these conditions can be attributed to boot-camp-style training in a near-tropical climate, many were the work of the upperclass cadets in charge of the first-year students' training.

In the administration building Manegold talks with two students as they wait to meet with their academic advisor. One describes his disappointment with the amount of lying the cadets do to their approving adult superiors, despite the school's revered honor code; the other tells of an anonymous (and hence all the more frightening) threat of anal rape he received from an upperclassman. These incidents, along with e-mail messages Manegold received later from an anonymous student sympathetic to her attempted exposé, give the only glimpse over the wall of secrecy that The Citadel built for its own preservation. They present a credible, searing picture of what can only be called systematic torture.

When Faulkner voluntarily left The Citadel, the public lesson seemed to be that if a woman insisted on the privilege of admittance to every quarter of male-devised society, but once there did not choose to stay, she mocked her own attempt and failed all women who chafed at a male-dominated society. In her last press conference, a weeping Shannon Faulkner had nothing much to say to the massed TV cameras beyond, "I'm sorry." But Manegold depicts The Citadel as something more than a tough school that an overweight, emotionally unprepared girl (and many, many boys) couldn't handle. By her account, it was a combination of *Lord of the Flies* and a concentration camp, complete with Nazi regalia and goose-stepping.

The great worth of Manegold's book is that it shows that Shannon Faulkner, however unprepared she was for what faced her, had no reason to apologize to the nation. Disappointingly, we hear nothing further from Faulkner herself about her experience once she is no longer news.

Cadre members "flame" VMI cadet Megan Smith. From *Breaking Out*.





Cadet Yulia Beltikova practices her salute. From *Breaking Out*.

Like The Citadel, the Virginia Military Institute vigorously resisted the Supreme Court and the Department of Justice on the issue of admitting women. But when it was clear that the fight was lost, the school decided to waste no further time in ensuring a glorious defeat (thereby showing that its leaders, unlike those of The Citadel, had learned something from the Civil War). VMI's Superintendent, Major General Josh Bunting III, was adamant that extensive preparation was the only way to make coeducation work at VMI.

Bunting established the Executive Committee for the Assimilation of Women in 1996, a year before the first female cadets arrived on campus. He invited Laura Fairchild Brodie, the wife of a VMI faculty member, a Ph.D. in English, part-time professor and self-described feminist, to be a member of that committee and to record the transition. Her book is the story of the exhaustive preparations for female "Brother Rats," as cadets are known in the campus lingo.

Most of the book deals with the provisions made for dealing with the perceived difficulties of putting women in an environment so indifferent to women's existence that there wasn't even a changing room in the gym for female faculty members and faculty spouses. As such, *Breaking Out* can be read as an institution's attempt to deal earnestly and sensitively with female difference. A somewhat less sanguine reading will view it as a case study of male anxieties about women's bodies. To give only one example, a senior officer and veteran of Desert Storm insists that female cadets would need longer showers and more privacy in the showers than male cadets, on the grounds that if they couldn't douche they'd get urinary tract infections.

Brodie keeps a straight face through all this, although she, along with General Bunting, expresses some amazement at the amount of discussion devoted to how the new cadets would deal with the attendant problems of menstruation, saying that there was "a fine line...between frankness and fetishism." The talk "seemed to leave Bunting balanced between philosophical amusement and mild disgust—that VMI officials were now discussing menstruation as casually as if they were pondering military protocol."

Other fears, more legitimate than these, are voiced and wrestled with in what appears to be an atmosphere of remarkably open-minded consensus. For example, can male upperclassmen physically harass the female cadets the way they do the men and not get punished for sexual harassment? Will the women get privileges because they're weaker than men—notably, by not having to do as much exercise—while men have to

earn their privileges by being strong? Will women have to lose their hair to a buzz cut like that given to the men, and not be allowed to wear jewelry or make-up? What happens when the inevitable physical attractions between male and female students occur?

Interestingly, once they arrived, the women talked less about fear of pushups and more about losing their sense of a feminine self. An account of VMI's attempt to form a cheerleading squad including female cadets—in boyish Brother Rat haircuts and flirty little skirts—perfectly illustrates the dual anxieties surrounding women's appearance: women perceived as being confused in their sexuality (butch hair, girly skirt) upset the social order (they were booed off the court). Yet had the women been allowed to remain as pretty as "real" cheerleaders, they would have been seen as harmful distractions to the soldierly duties of the men. Brodie apparently saw nothing odd about packing female cadets off to cheerleader camp so that they could shake their booties in "the Brother Rat Rumble" for the men they might someday be commanding. One wishes that an intelligent, self-described feminist had spent more time on considering the implications of this incident.

It is usually difficult to tell where Brodie stands on any given issue. This makes her a trustworthy reporter, although the end result is a tad bland. Her status as an insider is both a help and a hindrance. While she shows no sympathy for the alumni who so much wanted to keep the school all-male, nor for those who attacked Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg as an interfering Yankee feminist, the Institute itself, personified by General Bunting (whom she unabashedly reveres), always comes out smelling like a rose. If things don't always work out for the women—as in intramural athletics, where they either didn't play at all or stood alone on the field with no one ever passing them the ball—well, she assures us, "no one seemed to mind." Perhaps they didn't, or perhaps there was nothing to be gained in minding, and even less in saying so.

The time limits that both Manegold and Brodie put on their investigations ultimately limit the usefulness of their books. Because both show women just at the beginning of their careers in their respective institutions, the reader is given no chance to weigh whether a majority of women admitted to the most physically and psychologically demanding military academics can indeed succeed in doing things the way the men have always done them (or failed to do them). It would be nice to know, too, if the women who endured four years of this arduous life thought they had made a difference, or if it was worth it in the end.

# Home is where the dirt is

by Martha Nichols

## Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House

by Cheryl Mendelson. New York: Scribner, 1999,

884 pp., \$35.00 hardcover.

## Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management

by Isabella Beeton, edited by Nicola Humble.

New York: Oxford University Press,

2000, 672 pp., \$13.95 paper.

## Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash

by Susan Strasser. New York: Metropolitan,

1999, 355 pp., \$27.50 hardcover.



In 1861, Mrs. Beeton knew just what a lady's maid could do for me. Every morning she'd dress my hair with pomade, clean my hair brushes and lay out my clothes. She'd prepare my bonnet, which "should be dusted with a light feather plume, in order to remove every particle of dust." After breakfast, she'd sweep the carpets in my dressing room, "having previously strewed the room with moist tea leaves."

In the year 2000, Cheryl Mendelson doesn't talk much about tea leaves or bonnet dusting. She tells me to embrace housework myself rather than handing

it off to someone else. Yet her new manual has a familiar ring, and not the kind left around a collar. *Home Comforts* covers everything from place settings to "Resilient Floors" to liability laws. Partly aimed at housekeeping novices, its 800-plus pages are user-friendly and encyclopedic. Mendelson admits she used to keep her "passion for domesticity" a secret. But after years of working on this book, she's come clean—so to speak—and believes the rest of us should, too.

The trouble is, lots of us hate housework. Who has time to do the weekly

## A Remarkable Survey of Human Sexual Behavior Around the World

# THE PENGUIN ATLAS OF Human Sexual Behavior

JUDITH MACKAY, M.D.

"This atlas needed to be written...Will undoubtedly prove useful for teachers at every academic level."

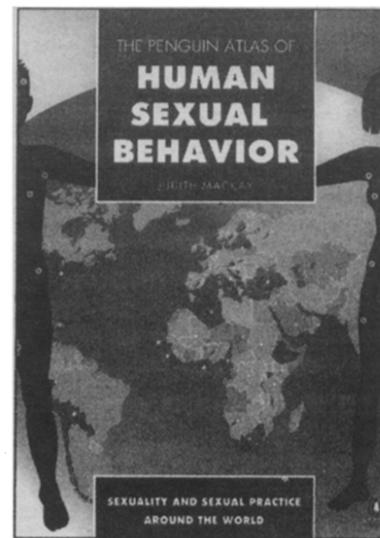
—Robert Koch Institute

"Highlights many features of this important health dimension in an educational and creative fashion."

—World Health Organization

Full-color maps and graphics illustrate in a clear, accessible format the differences and similarities in sexuality and sexual practice from country to country and between different cultures. They also reveal how far sexual behavior and social attitudes towards sex are determined by nationality, ethnicity, and religion as well as by age and gender.

Penguin 128 pp. 0-14-051479-1 \$18.95



### TOPICS INCLUDE:

- the sex drive
- marriage, adultery, divorce
- fertility & infertility
- puberty
- homosexuality, heterosexuality, transsexualism
- cloning
- sexual problems & counseling
- pornography & censorship
- dating & relationships
- cybersex

### ALSO AVAILABLE:

#### State of Women in the World Atlas • Third Edition

JONI SEAGER "A marvelous book, a rich source of information creatively selected and displayed."—*Women's Review of Books*.

Penguin Reference 144 pp. 0-14-051374-4 \$16.95



PENGUIN PUTNAM INC.

ACADEMIC MARKETING DEPT. • 375 HUDSON ST. • NY, NY 10014-3657 • www.penguinputnam.com