Review

## *In Stitches: A Patchwork of Feminist Humor and Satire*

edited by Gloria Kaufman, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. 180 pp.

REVIEWED BY ANN CHARLES

This volume of feminist humor covers a wide range of topics in a variety of formats. It begins with several sections whose headings clearly delineate their subject matter such as: "Doting, Dating, Mating," "Siblings & Sublings (Parents)," and "Older and Bolder." These sections are followed, however, by such odd-sounding titles as "Snooking & Snaffling Snools" and "Zap!"

What do we find here? Well, to start with, there is a most helpful list of definitions. (Unless, of course, you already know a snool from a snaffle or what snooking is.) In these sections, we also find commentaries on public restroom facilities for women, on the medical profession, on religion, and on the women's movement. Here, too, is a look at women artists and their work, how such work often goes unrecognized, and the power it can have in changing the status quo when it is seen. This collection of humor includes prose, poetry, and song. It includes photos, art and cartoons. The quotations in the margins are bursting with wit. The reader gains the sense that a lot is going on here. Something is always calling for the reader's attention. The feminist humor in this volume has much to offer, which

is good because humor is a very personal thing. Some pieces will make you laugh out loud; others may not. The collection which Kaufman has put together, though, is worth checking out. It covers such a broad spectrum of feminist humor that you are bound to discover whatever it is that tickles your funny bone.

Kaufman's introduction is itself a very interesting piece. As she examines the relationship between humor and power, we see that humor has quite a serious side to it. Humor can be, at times, the key to survival. Kaufman discusses what feminist humor is and how it differs from mainstream humor, particularly mainstream women's humor. Feminist humor, she says, is hopeful and inspires change. Mainstream women's humor, on the other hand, is bitter and resigned to the status quo. Also, mainstream humor in general hurts those who are weak in order to maintain the current power structure. Feminist humor seeks to educate both the weak and those in power in an effort to stimulate change. Kaufman's discussion on feminist preferences for wit rather than jokes is fascinating. What could be objectionable about jokes? It is more, we discover, than just their use of stereotypes.

As feminist humor is continually growing and changing and thus cannot be completely defined, Kaufman says that "the only sense...in which I am willing to define my vision of feminist humor is to assert that the entire volume of *In Stitches* is an instance of definition by example." She invites readers to analyze and even to disagree with her selections.

Readers should ask themselves, "Does this piece inspire change? Does it build someone up or does it

tear someone down? Are those in power just being ridiculed or is there some way for them to be educated through this work?" Kaufman acknowledges that some feminist humor is angry and bitter, but she believes that it is better to emphasize the positive in feminist humor. So give these issues involving humor thought, but don't forget to laugh. Let the humor here uplift your spirits and renew your energy to face the world.