

I Could Be Mute: The Life and Work of Gladys Schmitt. Edited by ANITA BROSTOFF. (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1978. Pp. 176. Preface, introduction, chronology, illustrations. \$10.95, cloth; \$4.95, paper.)

A collection of ten essays — some critical, some biographical — plus one illustrative short story ("Consider the Giraffe"), this book offers a fascinating introduction to the life and art of Pittsburgh writer and teacher Gladys Schmitt (1909-1972). The book, however, is more than simply a portrait of the artist. It is also an attempt to communicate a sense of "the commonality of female experience" with regard to "the conflicts and confusions talented women face" (p. 16) in our society. To this end, editor Brostoff provides a sampling of articles — all written by women who knew Schmitt either as relative, friend, teacher, or colleague — ranging in interest from intimate personal reminiscences on the one hand (such as Elizabeth Schmitt Culley's "Lasting Impressions" or Dorothy Rosenberg's memories of Schmitt's needlework in "The Pattern in the Tapestry") to detached scholarly assessments on the other (such as Jan Cohn's essay on "The Historical Novel," which places Schmitt's work in a generic context, or Anita Brostoff's own perceptive textual study, "Five Heroines: A Persistent Image"). The essays, with their shifting perspectives yet common thread, weave a stunning tapestry of feeling and thought, as graphic inquiry into the reasons behind Schmitt's faltering reputation as a writer and her fundamental lack of fulfillment as a woman. The picture we get is often painful and seldom pretty.

In a sense, Gladys Schmitt almost failed to survive her birth. She was an RH-factor child, and the symbolism of her tenuous, newborn hold on life stayed with her until death. Numerous unresolved fears and conflicts plagued her throughout adult life. The essays project the image of a woman who was quite talented and intelligent — even "glamorous, irreverent, opinionated and verbal" (p. 24) — but who never felt quite secure in her success; who was, at the heart of it all, essentially tied in knots by a neurotic family system and a destructively symbiotic marriage relationship.

The title, *I Could Be Mute*, is extracted from Schmitt's *Sonnets for an Analyst* (Number 30), published posthumously in 1973 but written a decade earlier during her gradual recovery from an emotional breakdown. Partly because they are her most autobiographical (and, many think, best) work, partly because they offer direct, if speculative, insight into the female socialization process, Schmitt's

sonnets seem to be the authority to which the authors ultimately turn. Such an orientation serves the stated purpose of the book — to understand Schmitt as writer and woman — but it also leads to conclusions that some readers may find equivocal, since all the analysts are themselves women. The conviction that “Schmitt had been fighting a battle all women writers fight” and that “women’s writing is self-definition [and] cannot be edited by husbands, lovers, department chairmen, publishers, or critics, to conform to patriarchal notions of proper womanhood and still be authentic” (p. 81) may well be true, but one wonders if the essays, collectively, do not come down a bit hard, for example, on husband Simon Goldfield, who emerges as something of a millstone around Schmitt’s neck. Curiously, there are no male viewpoints in this book to substantiate or refute the feminist argument.

In the end, the attributes of the work outweigh the limitations. What we have, finally, is a sympathetic and compassionate portrait of the author of *David the King*, *Rembrandt*, and *The Godforgotten* (not to mention six other novels and sundry short stories) that is both timely and impressive, and a fitting tribute to Carnegie-Mellon University’s first Thomas S. Baker Professor of English. *I Could Be Mute* is not, strictly speaking, a biography, nor does it purport to be. The editor’s stated intention is rather to “prompt further study of Gladys Schmitt” (p. 7). Brostoff took the first step in this direction in a short piece published in 1973: “Only Human Values: An Essay on Gladys Schmitt’s *Sonnets for an Analyst*.” Now she has taken a second, more significant step. Hopefully, her efforts will inspire a comprehensive and definitive biographical study somewhere down the road.

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Gritty Cities: A Second Look at Allentown, Bethlehem, Bridgeport, Hoboken, Lancaster, Norwich, Paterson, Reading, Trenton, Troy, Waterbury, Wilmington. By MARY PROCTER and BILL MATUSZESKI. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978. Pp. ix, 276. Preface, introduction, illustrations, sources, maps. \$17.50, cloth; \$9.95, paper.)

Gritty Cities is a teasing tale of twelve cities in the northeastern corridor of the United States. It is teasing in its ability to inspire in the reader a desire for more information about any or all of the small