



Great Dames

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Great Dames is a collection of biographical sketches, memoirs, and essays about twentieth-century Canadian women from all walks of life. While attempting to capture the meaning of the ordinary lives of extraordinary women, it also explores the possibility of challenging, even subverting, the traditional view of life writing as an endeavour to summarize and fix in time, the public careers of public men. The fifteen essays represent a variety of alternative approaches to feminist biography, including chronological narrative, thematic exploration, multiple biography, conversations between biographer and subject, interviews, diaries, and even fictional accounts.

In selecting their subjects, from Mennonite refugee women to an Ojibwa ethnologist, the contributors were asked to consider women who would be unlikely candidates for longer biographies; in the course of their research, however, it became clear that the lives of at least two of the chosen subjects warranted book-length examination. The selection also attempts to address perceived gaps in regional, class, racial, and disciplinary representation in life writing.

Together, the essays reveal that the content, form, and perspective of biography are now bound only by the creativity, research energy, and taste of the biographer.

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