

Book review

ROLL ON THE REVOLUTION ... BUT NOT TILL AFTER XMAS! SELECTED FEMINIST WRITING

Margot Roth Edited and selected by Hilary Lapsley, Pat Rosier, Mary Mowbray, Claire-Louise McCurdy, Linda Hill, Prue Hyman, Jenny Rankine and Anne Else

**Auckland: Women's Studies Association (NZ) Pae Akoranga Wahine, 2016,
204pp**

ISBN 978 0 4733 5174 8

In *Roll on the revolution*, the Margot Collective has produced an anthology of some of the most important and incisive feminist writings of Margot Roth covering a 70-year period. The collective is to be congratulated on their editorial effort and for making visible the work of an intellectual who has made sustained critiques of the structural inequalities faced by women in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Roll on the revolution takes the reader on a journey through the evolution and development of a feminist thinker whose public writing preceded the rise of second-wave feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As Sandra Coney notes in her preface to the collection, Margot Roth's early writings described the effects of suburban neurosis before Betty Friedan used 'the problem that has no name' in her 1963 book *The feminine mystique* to describe the psychological and emotional effects of domestic drudgery and isolation.

Organised into four thematic sections, *Roll on the revolution* showcases Margot Roth's autobiographical writing and a selection of her early feminist writing covering the years 1946 to 1959. The final section alerts the reader to some of Margot's academic scholarship, but the majority of the anthology is dedicated to Roth's involvement with *Broadsheet*, to which she contributed a column, the 'Gripes of Roth', as well as her significant contributions to the *Women's Studies Newsletter*.

Roll on the revolution begins with two autobiographical pieces published in the 1980s and 1990s. The first touches on social mobility and class politics in shaping a sense of place and identity, and the second surveys her childhood in a family that valued education, as well as her working experiences before marriage. During World War II, the mobilisation of men overseas opened up new employment opportunities for women, including Margot Roth, who took up a position as a cadet reporter with the *New Zealand Herald*. No doubt her knowledge of the inner workings of the trade informed her later critiques of the media's discriminatory practices, both in its representation of women and in the limits placed on women's opportunities as reporters and newsreaders.

In the second section, three pieces of early feminist writing offer a perceptive and wry assessment of domesticity and gender relations in the 1940s and 1950s. The first is from 1946 and sets out a critique of domesticity. Marriage and her role as wife, wrote Roth, was 'destroying

her own individuality' (p. 30). 'No married woman should be expected to develop into nothing more than a comparatively useful amoeba on call about the house all hours of the day and night with no individuality of its own': the notion of the home as woman's place needed to be abolished (p. 32). She called for imaginative ways to enable women's access to education and state-funded childcare facilities, to end gender discrimination in employment, and to achieve equal pay. Bookending this section is 'Housewives or human beings?', a radio talk that was reproduced in the *New Zealand Listener* in 1959. It offers a powerful critique of domestic routine, calling for 'relief from social isolation and the physical and mental exhaustion caused by a 24-hour day' (p. 40).

In her columns for *Broadsheet* and the *Women's Studies Newsletter* between 1982 and 2015, Margot Roth challenged the gender discrimination inherent in media representation, especially around the reporting of violence against women and children. This is an issue that remains highly relevant, particularly in a market saturated by social media platforms that are failing to tackle online bullying and harassment of women. Women's work and unpaid labour was another recurring theme. In a 1988 column, she noted women's work in the care sector 'props up the welfare system' (p. 69), a situation that has changed little today, with the contemporary care economy dominated by women who are recipients of low rates of pay. We also witness in these columns a determination to bring to light the unsavoury and discriminatory attitudes of New Zealand's rugby culture, one that condones the mistreatment of women and has largely failed, until recently, to enable women to take leadership roles in governance and administration.

Having started out as a newspaper journalist and columnist in the 1940s, Roth's journalistic experiences shape her writing style, which is a delight to read: incisive, sharp, deftly constructed, and pithy. Initially under the care of Pat Rosier, the collective have judiciously selected a diverse set of genres that showcases Margot Roth's talent.

It is heartening to see one of Aotearoa/New Zealand's ground-breaking feminist thinkers being celebrated in this way. Her columns spoke to issues of great weight and meaning in women's lives at the time and brought to light the structural and ideological basis of gender discrimination in Aotearoa/New Zealand society. I hope *Roll on the revolution* inspires similar efforts that attend to writing histories of second-wave feminism, collating writings of inspiring women, and recording and assessing feminist efforts to change lives on matters that remain as relevant and urgent today as they were in the past.

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