

CHERYL FROST

BEE, PUBLISHED BY "WOMEN'S WORK"

Sturt Street, Townsville, Queensland,
1975; soft covers, 52 pages, price \$3.50.

This is another, but more light-hearted, recent production of the feminist movement in Australia, in this case being funded by the National Advisory Committee for I.W.Y.. All the contributors and editors are women. The book has aesthetic and emotional appeal, and it will be a great pity if prejudice against women or against feminism deprives it of its fair share of critical attention and sales.

There is a successful blending of visual art and poetry, so that reading on two levels is possible - coffee-table-book perusal or in-depth study of the poems.

The works of the three artists, Anneke Silver, Gay Woodworth and Anne Willis, maintain their characteristic styles, and at the same time achieve reasonable integration through the use of a uniform format. Woman is the dominating theme of the sketches, in moods ranging from heroism and brightness, through submission and somnolence to despair.

Kosmic Worm's *Kartoon Kapers*, the profound political purport of which came to me only after prolonged pondering, adds to the visual interest. I hope that Anne Marie will have learned to spell before the Worm and Pingpong go on to *Epic 2*.

The quality of the poems varies greatly. There are two pieces of real excellence: Stefanie Bennett's *Interims*, which introduces the collection, is a call, at once witty and emotional, for enduring, intelligent sisterhood; Judith Wright's contribution is longer, a two-part poem, *About Building*, which combines denseness of imagery and thought with this poet's usual careful attention to words and form,

All buildings type the skeleton,
vertical structures braced and strong
with pelvic floor and shoulder-bone;
the rooms within like organs strung
on muscle rib and artery
and corridors of nerve and vein
threatened by time and gravity.
Buildings depict the shapes of work.

There are some further well-crafted poems, including Stefanie Bennett's *Crow & Feedback* and *Intensive Care*, and, among the works of poets not yet established, Cathy Drinkwater's *The Day the Wheels Stopped Turning*, and Nancy Phillips' *At the Edge of the Rainforest*, *Condiment*, and *School/Caretaker*. Most of the other poems are worth reading for their emotional or intellectual appeal, but, like many works by comparatively inexperienced poets, they often lack the formal tightness which is to be achieved only by inspiration or by labour. I do not know how many poems the editors rejected. In any case, they have accepted no more than a couple which are positively bad.

As the titles already listed show, not all the poems deal with women or feminism, but aspects of these occur fairly frequently. There are few directly political poems; many explore a love-relationship, often homosexual. Although predictable, it is noteworthy that the androgynous element should thus be as apparent in the initial creative works of women as of men.

At first sight, *Bee* seems to be well produced, but a careful look reveals errors which more careful proof-reading and planning would have eliminated. The cartoonist is not the only contributor who makes spelling mistakes; and a few pages are disorganized or shapeless, with printing and art work obscuring each other.

In sum, however, the book is worth reading, although slightly over-priced. Future publications by the same group of women could well benefit from the experience gained here and by even more rigorous application of standards prevailing beyond the region.