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You're a Brick, Angela!

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Not on Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

No brickbats here for Girls Gone By Publishers for republishing Cadogan's and Craig's commentary on girls' stories. The 1986 edition contained an addendum bringing the book up to 1985 from the mid-1970s where the first edition stopped. This reissue of the 1986 text contains an additional short preface and, best of all, many more illustrations. These have been selected with a sure, and sometimes sly, touch adding enormously to the reader's enjoyment. The only pity is that they don't all appear on the same page as the incidents which they depict, such as the pinning of a notice advertising a kiss for three pence on the rear of a grim-faced and astringent teacher. It is necessary to turn the page before seeing Miss Trumpinshaw warding off one over-enthusiastic customer. The sweep is wide, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century with Charlotte M Yonge, Mrs Gatty, Mrs Ewing and others of that period. The works of American authors are discussed including Martha Farquharson Finley, L M Alcott, Susan Coolidge and later Kate Douglas Wiggin, L M Montgomery, Gene Stratton Porter and Eleanor H Porter whose **Pollyanna** is given short shrift. Interesting comparisons are drawn between the societies out of which British and American authors were writing. Pioneering days had bequeathed American women a legacy of self-reliance and principles of equality; yet the 1849 Tennessee Legislature denied women both the right to own property and that they had souls - a telling pairing. In 1849 also **The Lily** appeared. Despite its name, it was a magazine that spoke up strongly for a more assertive and equal role for women. Treatment of popular magazines and their influences is one of the meatiest sections of the book and a useful listing of their publication dates is given in an appendix. Cadogan and Craig are strong on social commentary and their lightly sketched historical background to the books and periodicals discussed is entertaining and informative. They interrogate the way in which books and magazines either supported society's expectations of how young women should comport themselves at certain periods or else nudged them forward into a more liberated way of living. Their style is brisk and incisive and they show no hesitation in debunking some of the affectations of certain authors. The end chapters come as rather an anti-climax and one feels that the authors' interest lies more in the pre-1960s period. The slight amount of attention paid to Antonia Forest in comparison with that given to Malcolm Saville is unexpected and there are other discrepancies. These, however, are minor cavils when put in the context of the whole book. The marvellous thing about it is the enthusiasm shown by Cadogan and Craig, making it indispensable reading for anyone interested in the topic, and even those who are not initially attracted to the girls' story will revel in **You're a Brick, Angela!**.

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