Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science. By *Londa Schiebinger.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions. By *Lisa Bloom.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

A Question of Identity: Women, Science and Literature. Edited by *Marina Benjamin.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Anne Fausto-Sterling Brown University

RECENTLY I HAD ONE of those decadal birthdays that one marks with special parties which draw together friends from different eras of one's life. Attending my fête were some women I have known since the early 1970s when we worked together in local Rhode Island feminist organizations. Although we come from very different walks of life, we share a commitment to social change and especially to the betterment of women's lives. One woman, of whom I am very fond, asked about my work, wondering aloud whether she would understand the book I am now writing. I responded that if she could not, then I had not done a good enough job.

The older I get and the more I write, the fonder I become of simple narrative. This happens to me at a moment when the most politically interesting and important work done by academic feminists, queer theorists, and the like seems, ironically, to come dressed in obscure, distancing writing. Telling a clear story is out. Disrupting the linear narrative is in. I do see the point of it all and yet my political commitments (the same ones that originally led to the development of feminist scholarship) keep dragging me back to the straight and narrative. If my nonacademic but perfectly intelligent activist friend cannot follow what I have to say, even though I burn with the importance of my message, then something is wrong.

These thoughts came to me as I read the three books I review here. For each I found myself asking whether the author had a story worth telling, whether she succeeded in telling it, and for whom the telling might be of use. In the end, a successful book needs the story, the storyteller, and an audience. The choice of audience is a political act. Certainly, there are times when one chooses to write solely for a small group, an academic ear. Even then, one hopes that one's students and perhaps the occasional scholar in a neighboring field can follow along. To the extent that feminists still conceptualize their writing and academic work as a resource for political change, however, it behooves us to disperse our message as widely as possible. When the numbers able to drink from our fountain of knowledge become vanishingly small, we cease to do our political and intellectual jobs. I remain convinced, however, that it is possible to write fine scholarly works that are nevertheless accessible to a broader audience.

When I apply my above-stated criteria to Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body* the book comes through with flying colors. It is both scholarly and so readable that I plan to require it for my freshman biology students. Each of the six main chapters highlights a case study of seventeenth-century science in the making. Using original source material, Schiebinger shows how contemporary social struggles and anxieties about race and gender contributed to the manufacture of scientific knowledge. Even today some of that knowledge, for example, the application of the name *mammal* to warm-blooded, four-limbed, hairy critters that suckle their young, remains with us as an "objective" truth. Schiebinger, however, demonstrates that when the naming originally took place it reflected both animal biology and seventeenth-century gender politics. Linnaeus, the father of modern animal classification, used the word for breasts—*mammae*—to signify the unity of all so-called higher animals. Thus a distinctly female organ linked humans to the animal world. In contrast, he called humans *Homo sapiens,* wise man, to separate us from other members of the genus *Homo.*

Ostensibly about gender, *Nature's Body* is thoroughly and explicitly about race as well. The development of seventeenth-century European biology is inextricably linked to the explorations and exploitations of

Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The chapters on Western encounters with the great apes, on the anatomy of difference, on seventeenth-century theories of race and gender, and on who should do science weave the themes of race, gender, colonial exploitation, and the manufacture of scientific knowledge into an intricate tapestry. In telling her stories of early modern science, Schiebinger contributes to the feminist scholarship on the nature of scientific understandings. Is Newton's law of gravity true, regardless of who understands it or applies it? Perhaps, but even though "scientific knowledge is . . . grounded in sensory input from the natural world . . . there are also important ways in which it . . . does matter who does science" (211). Schiebinger is a bit unsophisticated in addressing the "who" question, however. Today at least, there are two ways to approach the question of changing science. Getting more women and people of color into an unchanged structure will not, in my opinion, help all that much. But perhaps what Schiebinger intends is that the structure must change in order to accommodate an increasingly diverse workforce.

Like *Nature's Body*, Lisa Bloom's *Gender on Ice* combines my favorite topics—race, gender, and science. Bloom has a wonderful story to tell—that of the race to "discover" the North Pole. In this study we find out how race (in the persons of Admiral Peary's Inuit helpers, without whom the expedition would have perished), gender (in the form of symbolic masculinity, articles about nonwhite peoples in the *National Geographic*, and Peary's wife and his Inuit mistress), and nationalism (in the form of U.S.-British competition to get there first) combine to construct scientific truths even in the twentieth century. The material is rich, evocative, and well documented. Alas, Bloom does not narrate the story successfully. The presentation is jargon laden (one example, the conversion of the noun *trope* to a passive verb), and while I could tell that the threads were really worth following, I kept losing them. The book, in short, needed the hand of a talented editor to highlight the story and render it accessible. I would, nevertheless, recommend that readers interested in race, gender, and science, especially those attempting to develop alternative geography and anthropology courses, use *Gender on Ice* in lecture preparation and as back-up reading for advanced or sophisticated students who can move beyond the book's initial inaccessibility.

Narrative threads are harder to weave when organizing a multiauthored volume. Nevertheless, Marina Benjamin's *A Question of Identity* succeeds for an academic audience primarily schooled in literary analysis. Benjamin wants to understand more about the concept of woman as subject. To do so she has assembled authors to examine literary renderings of women in interaction with science. Why science? Because it is among the premier contributors to objectifying women, removing their

subjective reality and their ability to function as independent actors. Benjamin offers essays on four types of identities: enlightenment (with pieces by Sylvana Tomaselli and John Mullan), reproductive (with pieces by Marie Mulvey Roberts, Tess Cosslett, and Susan Squier), evolutionary (with essays by Londa Schiebinger and Katherine Hayles), and cognitive (with contributions by Jenni Calder and Sally Shuttleworth). Most of the authors apply standard literary criticism to particular literary texts. Science fiction is an obvious and favorite choice because the workings of science and their rendering in the context of gender relationships are among the central features of this genre. Schiebinger's piece (which also appears in *Nature's Body*) offers a more historical approach, while Mullan discusses the fascinating medium of popular science, particularly that offered to a female audience. Benjamin argues that female agency is positional, not essential, and she has collected essays that analyze the agency of females in different times, places, and genres. Most are clearly written, but with presentation styles that restrict their audience to academics familiar with literary criticism. (I cannot, e.g., imagine that the book would hold the attention of many of my science colleagues.)

The Benjamin volume differs from those of Bloom and Schiebinger: while the latter two focus on the influences of race and gender on the formation of scientific knowledge, most of Benjamin's authors are interested in literary uses of scientific knowledge to construct gender. (Except for Schiebinger's piece, race is not very much in evidence in *A Question of Identity*.) The different approaches feel to me like very different projects. Yet they are certainly part of a dynamic nexus of gender, science, and knowledge formation. That Benjamin's approach seems so different from Bloom's and Schiebinger's means that we still need to know a lot more about the gendered and racial production of scientific knowledge and the scientific production of race and gender. As these three books attest, the literature is growing. I welcome them as worthy contributions while waiting with great anticipation for more.