

woman of ideas

"Women who rely on women are usually a lot better off than women who rely on men. I have a friend who's having a baby. She doesn't want to have it but she couldn't go through the abortion. I'm her friend and it's like she has chicken pox or she broke a leg. Were she to rely on the man I'm sure he'd stick around 6 months and take off. I'm going to be there a lot longer than that. There are groups of women in all sorts of areas who are setting up communal facilities to raise their children.

"I got divorced. I had three jobs. One was calming my husband down from his one job. It's very different from looking after oneself to resourcing another.

"A woman in the States now is married an average of eight years. Forty-five percent of marriages fail and the average length a woman works is 22 years. So which are you going to prepare yourself for?"

Spender's main concern is women's history.

"Women do have a history as varied and diverse as men but women have been suppressed and censored. . . It's not they don't have the history, it's that the record of that

to equip women to go off when men say women haven't done anything, and put the book down in front of them.

"It's a different political argument to put seven volumes of women's literature down and say why aren't any of these in the courses."

Spender received her Ph.D. on the philosophy of language from the University of London. She is the founding editor of the Women's Studies International Forum and the consulting editor for Pergamon Press's Athene Series.

Spender realizes her position is a lucky one.

"I'm fortunate in a sense because of my independence. I can come in here and insult Gary Kelly (a professor in the U of A English department) and everyone else. That doesn't stop me from getting a job or publishing my next book. . . There is a limit to how much you can protest and keep your job."

Spender freely admits that she is a product of the sixties feminist movement. But she would prefer to see herself as part of the 300 years of women's movement.

"Whenever there has been women pro-

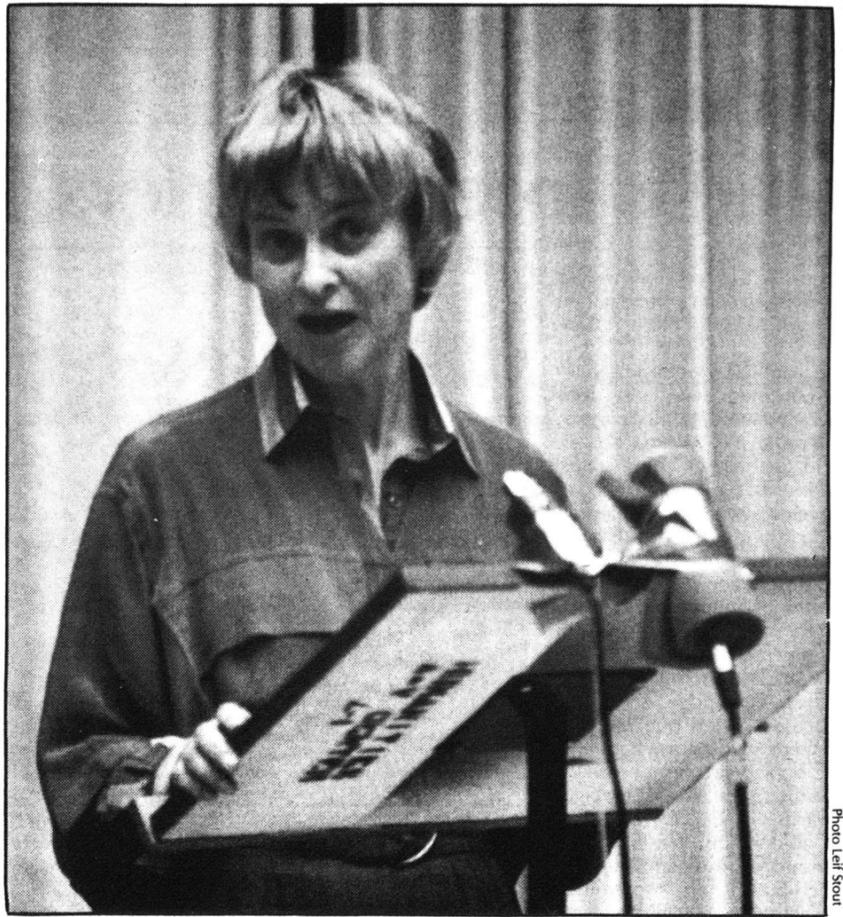


Photo Left Stout

"I would never ask a man to please do anything"

"Men are unused to being criticised. Men are absolutely used to being acknowledged as superior beings."

history is not accessible to them. It doesn't enrich and empower or make you feel good. "Men got in first, made up the rules, decided what they were going to do. If you can't fulfill the requirements they want

testing, which is three hundred years that I know of, there have been people saying it's passe. They did that to [Mary] Wollstonecraft and that was in 1790. You know it's a way of discrediting women and not taking them seriously. They said in the sixties that it was such a twentieth thing like when the flapper got the vote.

"Historically this is how it always goes. Every 50 years women re-invent the wheel. Every 50 years there is an explosion of insights, of understanding, like the sixties where women think this is appalling. And then they have a huge fight on for about ten years and then you get a second generation who say, 'oh God, mom's at it again.'

"You get a gradual decline where those who fought are still fighting like me, and then you get the second generation who take for granted what we fought for and who become a bit, 'oh what do you mean? We're

alright, we're doing fine' and their daughters will protest again.

"It's about their reality, isn't it? If they think they're doing fine, then who are you or I to tell them that they're not. Women change and maybe what they think is fine now or even in three weeks time, will not be good later."

Spender is not depressed about the declining numbers of women who are fighting.

"If you're looking for converts then I suppose you could say your task is disappointing but if your task is about providing knowledge for people who want to know, and I don't think you can teach anybody anything unless they want to know, then I don't find any failure at all.

"The books are here, there is access to them. I don't go around to people saying feminism is right. I say feminism is one way of

explaining the world. It's been enormously helpful to me.

"I think of some little person fifty years from now coming across these books that I've written and saying 'My God, did you see this!' I don't think that is depressing. One way of looking at it is that women keep disappearing. Another way of looking at it is that no matter what men keep doing to us, we keep coming back.

Do I look depressed about this? I mean wherever I go I have lots of women come up to me after I speak, laughing, saying they feel better already, thinking about it. I can hardly go away saying 'Oh my god, it's a tragedy!'

"I have a life that is incredibly free and this is actually liberation. And I'm the embittered feminist! That's hardly true."

explosion of insights, of understanding — re-invent the wheel."

they're not going to admit you. So it just gets perpetuated. To allow more women authors and women's history to be taught, it would lower the standards. That's the argument given.

"What I'm trying to do is to give women evidence, tools, data they can use. I'm trying

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