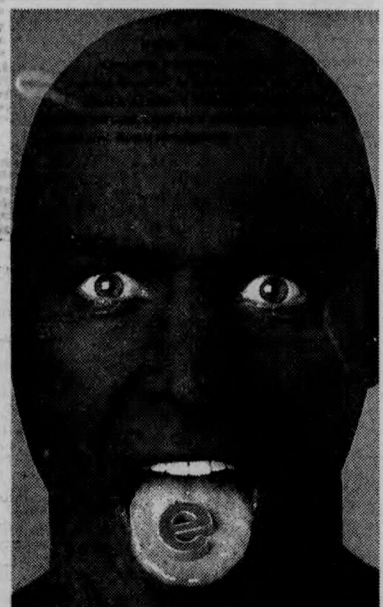


BOOKS

The sun is horizontal, so the flesh of the near-naked girl bouncing ball is nettled in its light, an orange mesh waving
 ber and the shadowed wall. She kisses the hand beside her mouth. In a hand, it hardly matters, it
 the also makes the kiss. Now the sun is flashing, the blunt grey rocks
 the yearningly but ward, it is upon the stunted spruce and the low-lying larches and their delicate
 the floor of the room. The tough rock cranberries. The feet show both ways. Granny was
 in a room, in a room, in a room. Those to many, gritty (as I must cor- the carcass; the
 of which artificially dressed with make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

The rest is silence
 - W. Shakespeare



Ecstasy
 by Irvine Welsh
 Random House

Trainspotting author's fourth work collection of three fast-moving tales of "chemical romance"

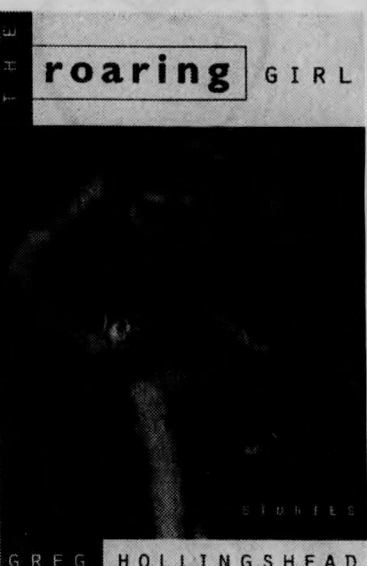
NEIL DUXBURY
 THE BRUNSWICKAN

Irvine Welsh. Drugs. With the blaze of publicity surrounding *Trainspotting* the two have become almost synonymous. Welsh's fourth publication, *Ecstasy: Three Tales of Chemical Romance*, does nothing to change this situation. The first of the tales, "Lorraine Goes To Livingston," revolves around a romance author whose stroke initiates a major change in her life. Her hospitalisation brings her in contact with an unhappy nurse who is able to help her when she discovers her husband's systematic betrayal. Sounds tame? Add in a necrophiliac tv celebrity and supporting cast of hospital trustees finding somewhere else to look, not to mention the dance clubs and associated pills, and the period romance novel that gets subverted into a period porno and you start to wonder what's coming next. And then you encounter "Fortune's Always Hiding," a blood soaked story of the relationship between Dave and Samantha. Dave gets his kicks from violence, not to mention his cash, once the stuff he's nicked gets sold. Samantha, however, is the real hardcase. Her violent acts

are calculated revenge on the prescription drug manufacturers who left her without arms. Ecstasy, the drug, mellows Dave out enough to actually respect a woman. But after that it's back to the violence as Samantha gets Dave to help her complete her revenge. It leaves you wondering how much further over the top Welsh can go. Which is why the third tale, "The Undeclared," comes as such a surprising change of pace. Again two people. The guy is again a waster, but at least has a clue that he is; his life revolving around chemicals and odd-jobs. The other is a woman stuck in a silent marriage. When she finally breaks free of her husband she meets the waster. And things kinda go from there. There's still drugs-a-go-go but this seems to be a much straighter story than the other two, more about coincidence, assumptions and the hassles of dating and drugs. To sum up. First romance - black satire, lots of fun. Second romance - way over the top for my liking. Third romance - just about worth buying the book for. Welsh is a very stark writer. His stories move along quickly. Very quickly. His excesses grab your attention, when his humour hasn't left you rolling on the floor. Take the title of the first:

"Lorraine goes to Livingston." That's some romantic title that. It's pretty much the Scottish equivalent of "Emma goes to Edmunston." And that's where you may begin to find problems with Ecstasy. Welsh has his own language, Scottish pop culture, which makes reading his words like listening to a foul mouthed Scots man speak. Fast. With no concessions to your lack of comprehension. Welsh has his own punctuation too, eschewing quotation marks in favour of a dash when a character begins to speak. Once you've mastered the dialogue you'll find you've uncovered enough pill popping, gob smacking, bodice ripping and cursive conversing to cause a nation's worth of V-chips to explode, burning the hair of the moralists craning for a closer look at another disgusting tome contributing to society's decline. But if these moralists weren't looking so closely for all of the interesting bits, they might notice that the violence and drugs aren't glorified. Accepted, sure - but everyone gets their kicks in different ways. They might even notice that these romances aren't really about discovering someone else, but about discovering yourself.

Governor General's Award for Fiction winner reviewed; short stories by professor at U. of Alberta



The Roaring Girl
 by Greg Hollingshead
 Somerville House Publishing

TRINA KILPATRICK
 THE BRUNSWICKAN

The *Roaring Girl* is collection of 12 short stories, running from risqué to up front seriousness. This was a very readable book, though sometimes the stories were, to me, a little too deep. Much of the writing was such that one has to search for the meanings behind the words. However, hidden meanings or not, I believe that this book was very well written, and literary, without being boring.

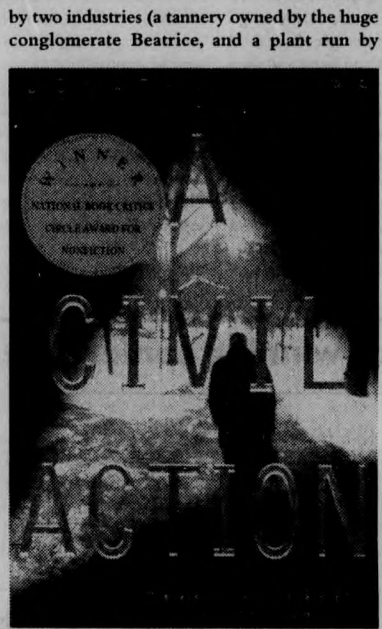
The characters were realistic and presented in a believable manner. Their descriptions and dialect easily conjure up pictures of what they look like and who they are; people who we all might know. In fact, most of the protagonists were fighting battles that many of us have fought at one time or another. From searches into ones self to fighting for ones property, the characters face great odds, not always ending up winning. This point I really like. The stories were more like real life than most writing is, given in to happy endings and riding off into the sunset. In addition to the fact that Mr. Hollingshead presents such believable and easily seen characters, most of the short stories were written in the first person, so we are actually inside the main character's head. In my opinion, the best story in this book was *The Death of Brule*. About a very young boy, it tells the story of him growing up in a family who uses jokes to hide the hate and hostility within. This is the kind of no holds barred story that is rarely seen, telling how the boy gets the start of his sexual education at the age of five from the girl next door who is two years older. But this does not end here as would be politically correct. It actually tells of their youthful sexual exploration where the little boy marvels in the girl, yet wonders how his mother could not possibly know what is going on. It goes on to elicit memories of losing people to circumstance, only to find them later, yet they are not the same person at all. The story I liked least in this collection is called *The Naked Man*. The main reason I didn't particularly like this is due to the fact that I just didn't understand it. Maybe this was just an example of intentional obtrusiveness on the part of the author, trying to make the reader look between the lines, but I found it very confusing, thus making it uninteresting to me. It was filled with hints and off the wall things happening, but I just did not have the time or the faith in the story to go looking for meaning. All in all, I really enjoyed reading this book and would recommend it to anyone who would like to get away for a little bit into someone else's world.

Account of case puts idealism to the test in tale of true human drama

A Civil Action
 by Jonathan Harr
 Vintage Books

DAMIAN PENNY
 THE BRUNSWICKAN

The blurb on the back cover calls *A Civil Action* a novel "in which greed and power fight an unending struggle against justice," but also "the story of how one man can ultimately make a difference." This is half right. Throughout this harrowing book, we see an important wrongful death lawsuit thwarted at every turn by a court system that distorts the facts beyond recognition, aided by the large corporate defendants. At the end we don't think that the plaintiff's lawyer, for all his hard work and sacrifice, has been able to make much of a difference at all. This attorney is Jan Schlichtmann, at the start a cocky young lawyer in Boston who represents a number of families in the industrial town of Woburn, Massachusetts. These families have all lost children to leukaemia, and they allege it was caused by contamination of the water supply



chemical giant W.R. Grace). When Schlichtmann and his associates first take them to court, they are quite confident of victory - so confident that, at one point, they speak of nine-figure verdicts that will punish the companies for their neglect. Yet by the end of the trial, Beatrice has somehow been absolved of liability, and the families have been forced into a much smaller settlement with Grace that hardly makes a dent in its coffers. The families never even get an apology they wanted, and Schlichtmann's goal of making a real difference lies in ruins. If this was fiction, it would be compelling enough - certainly more so than any of John Grisham's hackwork - but this is all true, and that makes it even more affecting. Schlichtmann emerges as a real tragic hero, a man who insists on meeting the huge defendants on their own turf, regardless of the cost. By the end, he has lost almost everything, his firm and associates (who dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the Woburn case) are crippled by debt, and Schlichtmann lies perilously close to insanity. The message is a depressing one - try to change the system, and have the system crush you. A lesser book would have concentrated entirely on Schlichtmann, but *A Civil Action* is

filled with compelling characters - even the lawyers who initially represent the defendants are portrayed with real detail and respect. Indeed, the book goes into astonishing detail, yet never becomes tedious or boring; even when complex scientific evidence is put forth in court, Harr presents it in a way we can actually understand. The reader feels like they have gone through the whole exhaustive process with Schlichtmann and company. I can recommend this book without hesitation to anyone interested in the practice of law; although the case is American and therefore turns on some principles different from those in the Canadian legal system. There are enough similarities to make the book a real educational experience. But the appeal of *A Civil Action* goes beyond that. Not only does it tell a great human drama, but it tells a story that does not end happily or hopefully. Harr could have found some way to present this in the best possible light, but he never does, and the book is made even more powerful. I note that *A Civil Action* movie will be released in 1998, with John Travolta (!) as Schlichtmann. Why do I suspect it won't be as good as the book?

Book investigates complicated stereotypes of masculine and feminine

Lip Service
 by Kate Fillion
 HarperCollins

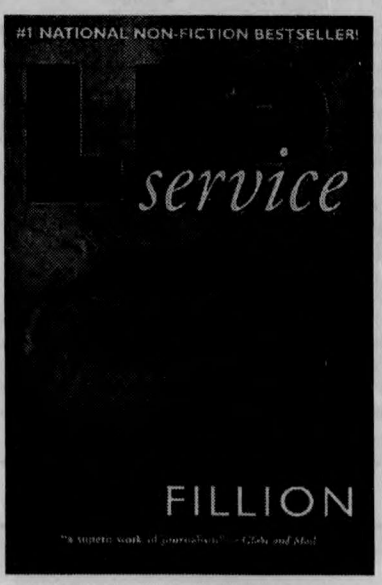
MARY ROGAL-BLACK
 THE BRUNSWICKAN

"Women drivers!" "That's a man's job!" Gender-related beliefs and myths: you'll hear or think at least one every day. For some time, though, I've suspected that dichotomies like "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" weren't quite getting to the truth of the matter. Sometimes, when I'm alone at night with the lights turned out, I wonder if men and women are really that different. Feminism, a movement aimed at equality for women, at times simply manages to exacerbate the itchy problem of gender differences. I consider myself a feminist, but I also think that at times, feminism means vilifying men and casting women in the role of victim, and this makes for a difficult model for most people to live within. The real story, of course, is much more complicated. All of this is why I was really relieved to discover Kate Fillion's book, *Lip Service*, a cautionary tale for the young runaway feminist and ammunition for those who want to believe that the world isn't divided so neatly into categories of Men versus Women. A journalist from *Saturday Night* and *The Globe and Mail*, Fillion presents a mixture of academic research and interviews with real people in a very readable, lively book that will be interesting to anyone involved in the gender struggle. Fillion doesn't reject feminism, but she does attempt to look at it without blinders, a much-needed approach for anyone who, like I did, becomes blinded by anger when they first discover how gender politics affect their lives. *Lip Service*, "the truth about women's darker side in love, sex, and friendship," challenges

current social thinking on topics ranging from sisterhood to date rape. "Most of us are so accustomed to thinking of men and women as psychological opposites that we don't even notice that our actual experiences contradict our beliefs," writes Fillion in her introduction. "In real life, men and women step out of their assigned roles all the time, and behave, think, and feel in ways that are supposedly characteristic of the 'opposite' sex. Yet, even though we're not following them, many of us continue to pay lip service to oppositional gender roles." Fillion starts by disputing "the myth of female superiority," arguing that the end result of choosing to believe that females are innately morally superior is to deny women power. She begins with the perception that women have a unique and pure ability to bond over shared experience and super-sensitive intimacy skills, then breaks down such beliefs by depicting - as thoroughly as Margaret Atwood does in her fiction - the subtle cruelties that can exist between women. Still more illuminating, though, is her depiction of the 'kindnesses' women do for each other: white lies, too-easy forgiveness and habitual self-deprecation. The dynamics of friendships between women, Fillion argues, can be crippling simply because women feel bound by the stereotypes of feminine nurturing, sharing and sensitivity. By providing a different perspective on this and other topics, Fillion encourages her reader to be critical of the ways in which their beliefs have been formed. For example, the belief that boys are more aggressive than girls is offset by the suggestion that girls develop and employ sophisticated methods of "psychological warfare." Still more surprising, though, are the ways that current thinking have led us astray: What has developed, as Fillion demonstrates, is a crack between traditional stereotypes and dictates for behaviour, and more advanced, equality-based thinking; men and women fall through the cracks when they blindly abandon stereotypical gender

roles without recognising what they have chosen in its place. Perhaps the most compelling example in support of this view is her discussion of date rape, in which she points out that women as well as men can be guilty of date rape as it has been commonly defined. Men accused of date rape because they continued to try to persuade a woman after she said 'no' and were ultimately successful prompts Fillion to question how much responsibility women are willing to accept in the sexual arena. "There is a difference between blaming the victim and questioning what, exactly, constitutes victimization," Fillion points out. "This is the real danger: women are being coached to misperceive their own sexual 'nature' and experiences, which has implications for virtually every aspect of their lives." It's not a politically correct approach to the issue of date rape, but the point Fillion is making is that when we chose to interpret sexual encounters in this way (giving into persuasion, a skilled "mental attack"), it not only undermines more serious experiences of rape, but also absolves women of responsibility for the choices they make. Reading the situation through Fillion's eyes, I saw for the first time that people who are crying foul about the current sexual climate just might have a point. It's an important message about the familiar No Means No system that is now so ingrained in our thinking. The author questions whether a No that means 'convince me' is equivalent to a No that means 'absolutely not', and argues that a woman does bear some responsibility for making her actions consistent with her words. Finally, Fillion's interviews with men are particularly revealing. More of this information about the effects of gender stereotypes on men is needed in any fair-minded debate about gender issues (I've always thought that the assumption that only women are oppressed by traditional expectations is egocentric and too easy). The effect of societal pressure on men to be masculine, particularly in the bedroom, is

probably more complex than many women would imagine. There are some ideas in *Lip Service* that will challenge and even threaten the way we see the world, but it is so carefully and thoroughly argued that it must be taken as a whole rather than as the sum of its threatening parts. As a whole, it is educational and important for anyone who wants to better understand gender relations. After finishing *Lip Service*, I gave it to my mother. "I wish I'd had this book twenty years ago," she said. Fillion is admirably resolute, making no apologies for being the bearer of the message that the *Empress* is naked, convinced that the knowledge will be good medicine for all of us. At the most, it is liberation for all; at the least, it is a little more relaxing than feeling totally oppressed.



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