

It Happens As We Speak: A Feminist Poetics

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CALYX: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women
Volume 24 Number 2

Feminist poets, writing in the *ars poetica* tradition, have to establish and assert new space when they engage. Pat Falk does that in *It Happens As We Speak: A Feminist Poetics*.

It Happens As We Speak is a pastiche of journal entries, essays, discursive prose and verse. The timeframe extends over forty years of Falk's life as a poet and a student of poetry. The book provides an intimate portrait of the emergence of a feminist poet and scholar of feminist poetry during a significant era in feminist poetry and scholarship. Falk uses this juxtaposition to great effect through the book. She puts her personal experiences in dialogue with feminist poetic moments. For instance, Falk's experiences as a graduate student during the 1970s are punctuated by her reading of the new texts by Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Shulamith Firestone, and Susan Griffin; Falk embodies the theories of each in her own life.

Each of the twelve chapters explores a feminist issue thematically. In "The Madwoman in the Attic," whose title is taken from Gilbert and Gubar's significant work, Falk ruminates on Bertha. Falk considers not only her own personal discovery that she carries her middle name, Jane, from her mother's reading of *Jane Eyre* but also the unfolding, contemporary scholarship on the book and how it affects her sense of identity and her writing. Falk's long term perspective on significant literary works over her life as an artist is riveting, especially as it is revealed through intimate journal entries.

From childhood to abortion to divorce and more, this book is a treasure trove of personal experience put in dialogue with feminist literary theory and feminist poetics. *It Happens As We Speak* is a very accessible book to read. It is grounded but never mired in feminist and literary theory, making it interesting to a broad and mainstream audience. The book's only weakness results from its assembly. The style is fragmented and arguments are inconclusive at times. I wonder what Falk might have produced had she taken the contents of this book as raw material and written a sustained series of essays. I believe it would be an extraordinary contribution to feminist *ars poetica*.

Until that is written, however, *It Happens As We Speak* is an important documentary gathering of the emergence of a feminist poet, and it is a vital contribution to feminist *ars poetica*.