

PAPERBACK OF THE WEEK

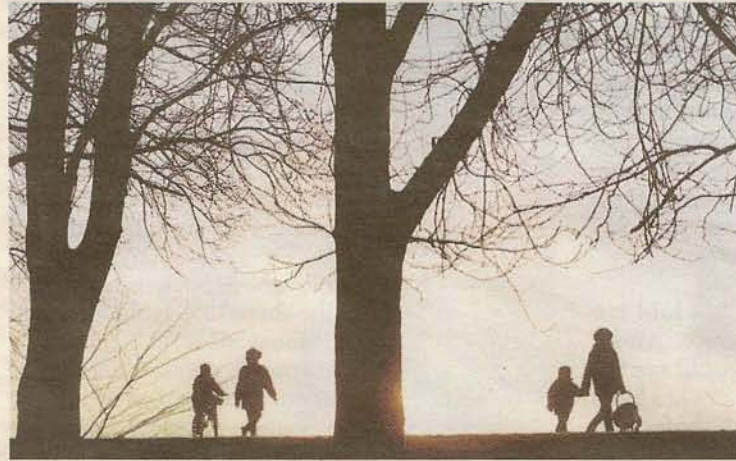
Fresh examinations of the female space

CLEAVE: NEW WRITING BY WOMEN IN SCOTLAND

Ed. Sharon Blackie
Two Ravens Press £8.99

Anthologies of new writing are not always among the most mouth-watering of prospects. Nevertheless, Sharon Blackie has compiled a book that stands out from the pack. "The one thing I asked of all contributors was that what they offered up for Cleave should in some way reflect the experience of being a woman in contemporary Scotland," she writes, and that simple instruction has led to an excellent anthology with a sense of direction and common purpose.

If Scotland is a major theme, so are motherhood and family. But writing itself is one of the strongest threads. It begins with a transcribed conversation between Kirsty Gunn and Meaghan Delahunt making connections between writing, travel,



Themes covered in the collection include motherhood and family

landscape and motherhood, and sets a definite and appropriate tone for the rest of the book.

"She was embarrassed by poetic effusions, however private, and confounded by the power of the word to falsify as it is written," writes Sylvia Hays in *Night Walk*. It's a sentence that leaps off the page, even if it's hard to say exactly why at first. But as we read through Cleave the sense arises of writing itself as a meta-

phor for all kinds of things that involve breaking strict gender roles, and that the authors can connect it quite readily to other aspects of their lives.

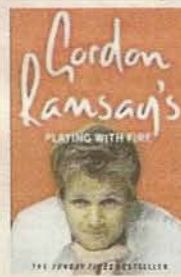
The "experience of being a woman in contemporary Scotland" can encompass what it's like to be female on a train after a football match, the feeling of a having a 20-mile stretch of Scottish mountains looming over your house or of moving into a small village to find the neighbours distrustful of the incomer. But it can also mean finding a space in your life to sit down with a notebook or a laptop and share it with others.

Positioned midway through, Joy Hendry's autobiographical essay serves as another reminder that literary women have rarely been recognised or valued in Scotland. As she points out, male and female authors are not necessarily trying to do the same thing, with the same priorities. But taken on any terms this is an impressive collection of accomplished and thoughtful work. ■

PAPERBACKS

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Gordon Ramsay HarperCollins £7.99



Britain's most volatile TV chef is vain and competitive, something he owns up to right at the start of this summary of his adventures in the restaurant

trade. From his earliest attempts to run his own restaurant to the empire he presides over today, Ramsay's pursuit of perfection has been relentless. But even the best would be nowhere without good business sense, or an expert partner. You won't learn how to run a restaurant from this book, any more than it'll teach you how to cook a fabulous meal; but *Playing With Fire* does bring into focus the challenges and opportunities of the trade as Ramsay recounts his resounding successes, the occasional ill-fated venture like Glasgow's Amaryllyis and confrontations with the Inland Revenue. When he's not on screen, bellowing at some hapless victim, it's easier to take in the points Ramsay makes, and he writes intelligently (if often profanely) about not only making restaurants work but turning them into multi-million-pound concerns.

A BOY OF GOOD BREEDING

Miriam Toews Faber £7.99



Hosea Funk, the Mayor of Algren, has always believed that he's the biological son of Canadian Prime Minister John Baert. When he's informed that Algren is in

the running for the title of Canada's smallest town, an honour to be awarded by the Prime Minister himself, he comes up with a scheme to keep the town's population down so he can be reunited with his father. It sounds like a challenging task, and turns out to be even harder than Hosea imagined, with even one new resident (like his girlfriend, for instance) threatening to tip the balance. This book has actually

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INSIDE ARTS, BOOKS & CINEMA NEXT WEEK: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ROBERT MUGABWE

Guess who?

The youngest of an aristocratic family,



Are you able to recognise the literary character on the left? If so, you could win