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| 1. Record Nr.           | UNINA9910456364203321  |
| Autore                  | Brock Peter  |
| Titolo                  | Great dames / / edited by Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin  |
| Pubbl/distr/stampa      | Toronto, [Ontario] ; ; Buffalo, [New York] ; ; London, [England] : , :<br>University of Toronto Press, , 1997<br>©1997   |
| ISBN                    | 1-4426-2721-2<br>1-282-04541-5<br>9786612045417<br>1-4426-7550-0   |
| Descrizione fisica      | 1 online resource (351 p.)   |
| Collana                 | Heritage   |
| Disciplina              | 920.720971   |
| Soggetti                | Women - Canada<br>Electronic books.<br>Canada Biography  |
| Lingua di pubblicazione | Inglese  |
| Formato                 | Materiale a stampa   |
| Livello bibliografico   | Monografia   |
| Note generali           | Includes index.  |
| Nota di contenuto       | Frontmatter -- Contents -- Introduction -- Just the Facts? -- 'Write Down Everything Just as You Know It': A Portrait of Ibolya Szalai Grossman -- Victims of the Times, Heroes of Their Lives: Five Mennonite Refugee Women -- Driving towards Death -- Creating Facts -- Dear Ruth: This Is the Story of Maggie Wilson, Ojibwa Ethnologist -- Casting Light on Women in the Shadow of the Law: Toronto at the Turn of the Century -- Struggle to Create -- From Bovarysme to Automatisme (and Beyond): Thérèse Renaud and the Refus global Women -- The Wrong Time and the Wrong Place: Gwethalyn Graham, 1913-1965 -- 'Traditional' Lives -- Settling the Score with Myths of Settlement: Two Women Who Roughed It and Wrote It -- Anna of Intola: A Finnish-Canadian Woman with Sisu -- Soaring to New Heights: Changes in the Life Course of Mabel McIntosh -- Breaking into 'Men's Professions' -- Marion Milliard: 'Raring to Go All the Time' -- 'By Title and by Virtue': Lady Frederick and Dr Henrietta Ball Banting -- Elizabeth Allin: Physicist -- Giving Voice -- 'Out of a Cardboard Box beside Our Bed like a Baby': The Founders of Sister Vision Press -- Evelyn Garbary: |

Sommario/riassunto

Great Dames is a collection of biographical sketches, memoirs, and essays about twentieth-century Canadian women from all walks of life. While attempting to capture the meaning of the ordinary lives of extraordinary women, it also explores the possibility of challenging, even subverting, the traditional view of life writing as an endeavour to summarize and fix in time, the public careers of public men. The fifteen essays represent a variety of alternative approaches to feminist biography, including chronological narrative, thematic exploration, multiple biography, conversations between biographer and subject, interviews, diaries, and even fictional accounts. In selecting their subjects, from Mennonite refugee women to an Ojibwa ethnologist, the contributors were asked to consider women who would be unlikely candidates for longer biographies; in the course of their research, however, it became clear that the lives of at least two of the chosen subjects warranted book-length examination. The selection also attempts to address perceived gaps in regional, class, racial, and disciplinary representation in life writing. Together, the essays reveal that the content, form, and perspective of biography are now bound only by the creativity, research energy, and taste of the biographer.

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