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Main content

Article Preview :

OBSESSIVE GENIUS: THE INNER WORLD OF MARIE CURIE. By Barbara Goldsmith. Norton. 320 pp. \$23.95

Marie Curie's family donated her workbooks, diaries, journals, and other papers to the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris at the end of the 20th century. In what may have been a cataloging first, the library initially had to sort the collection into three groups based on level of radioactivity.

Barbara Goldsmith's new biography uses these literally and figuratively hot resources (and others) to take a fresh look at the past century's most famous woman scientist. Goldsmith, the author of *Little Gloria ... Happy At Last* (1980) and other books, portrays Marie Curie (1867-1034) as a blend of brilliance, resolve, passion (for work and at least three men), recurring depression, obsession (this is not the first biography of Curie to include that trait in its title), achievement,...

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Barbara Goldsmith tells how Marie Curie was thwarted at every turn by the establishment in *Obsessive Genius*. No wonder she was a depressive obsessive, says Robin McKie. I can only say it made me wary, though in the end, I was won over by *Obsessive Genius* which is carefully conceived and commendably brief. It is only really marred by the odd outburst that reveals how uncomfortable the author is with technological terminology, a serious flaw for a scientific biographer. She confuses 'astrological' with 'astronomical'; describes early models of the atomic nucleus in various nutty ways (electron plum puddings); and includes the suggestion that 'invisible rays could be detected by the light they caused in a tube'. 256 pages : 23 cm. "The myth of Marie Curie - the penniless Polish immigrant who through genius and obsessive persistence endured years of toil and deprivation to produce radium, a luminous panacea for all the

world's ills, including cancer - has obscured the remarkable truth behind her discoveries. Marie Curie's shrewd though controversial insight was that radioactivity was an atomic property that could be used to discover new elements. While her work won her two Noble Prizes and transformed our world, it did not liberate her from the prejudices of either the male-dominated sci