

would expect such a prestigious publisher as Oxford to provide more efficient proof-reading, especially in a book which is otherwise very handsomely designed).

One good reason for limiting the selection of early writing is the need to provide space for the numerous women writers who have succeeded the Victorian lady poets. Sullivan's anthology, of course, includes the women whose work has found a secure place in the Canadian poetic canon, but it also presents the work of less well known writers who are usually excluded from anthologies of Canadian poetry. Sullivan makes a case for the inclusion of Louise Morey Bowman in the history of modernism in Canadian poetry. She presents poems by writers such as Lucy Maud Montgomery, Martha Ostenso and Adele Wiseman, who are better known for their prose fiction. The anthology includes a generous selection of contemporary work and acknowledges the cultural diversity of Canada by including poetry by, for instance, three writers of Caribbean origin and one Native Salishan poet.

The inclusiveness of *Poetry by Canadian Women* is its greatest strength. The anthology traces not only, as Sullivan suggests, "the evolution in the concerns of women poets," but also the formal evolution of Canadian poetry from the Victorian romanticism of an Isabella Valancy Crawford to the high modernism of a P.K. Page to the feminist postmodernism of a Daphne Marlatt. Another aspect of the collection's inclusiveness is its treatment of poets who are well established in the Canadian canon. Often such writers are represented in anthologies by a few well-known "classics," usually not recent works. Sullivan includes such canonized poems — Margaret Avison's "Snow," for instance, and Margaret Atwood's "Death of a Young Son by Drowning" — but she also includes selections of the writers' more recent poetry. This is most striking in her selection of poems by Anne Marriott, who is best known for her documentation of the dust-bowl condition of the prairies during the Great Depression. The much-anthologized "Prairie Graveyard" (1940) is here, but it is augmented by several poems dating from the 1970s and 1980s.

No anthology is ever entirely satisfactory. I have suggested that this collection's historical purpose might be better served

by the inclusion of more nineteenth century women poets, and Sullivan acknowledges that her selection of newer poets has been limited by constraints of space. By and large, however, *Poetry by Canadian Women* achieves the editor's aim "to demonstrate the full range of writing by Canadian women."

CELEBRATING CANADIAN WOMEN: Prose and Poetry By and About Women

Greta Hoffmann Nemiroff, ed. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989

MARGARET ATWOOD: Visions and Forms

Kathryn Van Spanckeren and Jan Garden Castro, eds. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988

Clara Thomas

In Anne Cameron's "The World is Full of Magic" the final work of fiction in *Celebrating Canadian Women*, Klopium, the story teller, tells the listening girl: "Tell you what...I'll give the stories to you. You want it done, you do it." Greta Nemiroff's collection is a part of her answer to what she felt was a similar challenge [the other part of her answer was *Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender* (Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1987)]. The planning of this massive project began in 1984. Nemiroff describes her original design — to represent a cross-section of Canadian woman writers from every geographical, social and economic sector of Canada. That she could not, she says, is because of "restraints of length and consequent cost." Even without these restraints, I suspect, submissions by or dealing with the poor, native persons, francophones or recent immigrants were extremely scarce on the ground.

Her final decision, "to organize the book thematically around women's experiences" has many strengths. The thematic divisions — Growing Up Female, Body/Mind, Romantic Love, Mothers, Families, Work, Women and Men, Women and Women, Women Alone/Women Aging, and Power and Transcen-



dence — constitute a ready-made pedagogical outline that will be extremely easy to use in course planning within the general rubric of Women's Studies, though the price (\$35.00) certainly gives one pause. And though the thematic structure threatens at times to become overpoweringly inward-turning and narcissistic, the overall skill displayed in the writing of these pieces triumphs — this collection is much, much more than a celebration simply of the *Sturm und Drang* of womanhood.

One of the tempting exercises this anthology suggests is a comparative reading of the works of the well-known writers with those of the lesser-known. The results are flattering to the latter group, whose techniques of writing are of very high quality. Where the difference lies, perhaps, and I say this with hesitation, as one reader's tentative opinion only, is in the quality of imaginative finish that the work of our much-published writers displays. Some, by no means all, but some of the other works, both of poetry and prose, strike me as experience unmediated, or only partially mediated, by the imaginative process. Raw experience sounds crude, but that is what I mean.

Reservations aside, however, the positive values of this collection far outweigh its negatives. Much of the poetry seems to me to be exquisitely written, the prose wholly effective to its chosen themes and the showcasing of the lesser known among the better known writers complimentary to both. Greta Nemiroff is to be acknowl-

edged as a fine anthologist – and anthologizing is a creative craft that scarcely ever gets the recognition it deserves. I hope that neither Fitzhenry and Whiteside's price nor their decision to classify it as text rather than trade inhibit its wide dispersal and use in classrooms and for personal enjoyment.

Margaret Atwood: Visions and Forms is distinguished by several unique inclusions: an autobiographical Foreword by Margaret Atwood; a Margaret Atwood chronology; a final "Works Cited" section that provides a good working Atwood bibliography; a lengthy interview, done in 1983, by Jan Garden Castro at Washington University, St. Louis; "Conversation," an exchange between Atwood and students at the University of Tampa in 1987; and, most intriguing of all, an eight page series of full-colour reproductions of Atwood's own water-colours with accompanying commentary by Sharon Wilson. These features, together with an unusually superior design format, featuring, for instance, a striking title page complete with a beguiling, sculpturesque portrait of the author, make this an especially desirable book.

To collectors and feminists, the brief initial note by Sandra M. Gilbert, "*Ad Feminam: Women and Literature*," will be a feature of added attraction, situating this book, as it does, within a feminist series.

Reason tells us, after all, that if, transcending prejudice and special pleading, we speak to, and focus on, the woman as well as the man – if we think ad feminam as well as ad hominem – we will have a better chance of understanding what constitutes the human.

Kathryn Van Spanckeren's editorial introduction is a valuable overview of the entire volume, stressing particularly Atwood's feminism and the political and didactic strains in both her writings and her in-person commentaries. Perhaps the role of teacher and mentor is expected of her when she meets student audiences in the States: at any rate to this Canadian reader her strictures on political and personal responsibility are right on target, though I should think they'd be far less appreciated here than they obviously are there.

The essays themselves cover Atwood's

novels from *The Edible Woman* to *The Handmaid's Tale*: though one might think that enough had long since been said about the early works, particularly about *Surfacing*, there is nothing tired about their treatments, and I know that it is unreasonable to mourn the necessary time-lag that means the omission of work on *Cat's Eye*. For me, the three on the poetry, by David Buchbinder, Judith McCombs and Kathleen Vogt, are especially valuable, providing insights into work that, compared to the novels, has suffered relative neglect. Personal preferences aside, the essays *in toto* establish a very high standard of critical commentary. If at this time I were advising students about purchasing Atwood criticism, this would certainly be the book I'd suggest. It is, I believe, by a long way, the best we've had so far.

CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S FICTION: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory

Paulina Palmer. Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1989

Marlene Kadar

Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory is primarily an investigation of the relation between contemporary women's fiction (Anglo-American novels) and feminist theory, political and literary. Apart from a theoretical Introduction and a Conclusion, the book is divided into seven political themes which the author, Paulina Palmer, identifies within her selections of fiction. Palmer uses British, American and Canadian literature to reveal what she considers the major precepts of the women's movement, and she is particularly considerate of the radical feminist position, which she defines – along with other feminist positions – in a useful Select Glossary at the back of the book.

Palmer herself is a British feminist who teaches in the Department of English at the University of Warwick, but, as she points out, she is not just an academic; she is active in the radical feminist movement. Palmer is also an avid reader. Thus *Contemporary Women's Fiction* is chock

full of references to novels, short stories, and movement documents, with a smattering of feminist literary theory, some of which is translated from the French (Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva). Palmer makes it quite clear that her book rests on an attempt to correlate "works of fiction with feminist literary theory," and she hopes that her study draws "attention to the variety of women's fiction today." In accomplishing the former, Palmer is most animated when she does one of two things: she locates fiction which reveals a radical feminist political theme, such as woman-identification, the norms of a feminist community, lesbian relations, and mother-daughter relations; or, she illustrates that (once again) it is an academic feminist lurking behind that socialist feminist or psychoanalytic [feminist] approach to a motif in the fiction.

On the one hand Palmer denigrates the omission of radical feminist approaches in literary criticism, yet also finds that many of the themes explored by women in the last two decades "are, as we have seen, radical feminist in tenor." Palmer looks askance at what she calls "anti-realist" fiction because she has determined that pre-oedipal and semiotic themes are generally the habit of writers concerned with the concept of "the fractured self." One exception to this trend is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a book which succeeds, Palmer says, in combining the psychoanalytic with the political.

