

genres. The *grand dame*, the woman scholar, the nun, the religious or political activist, the *cortigiana onesta* and the patrician all appear. A wide range of secular works is included. Examples of religious writing cover the spectrum from the radical reformation to mainstream Protestantism and the counter-reformation. The genres represented are quite diverse — sonnet, chanson, epigram, ode, ballad, religious lyric, epithalamium, letter, chronicle, memoir, polemic history, polemic poetry, novella, novel, translation, mysticism, prose and poetic dialogue both secular and spiritual, homily and political oration. The selections clearly meet the editor's criteria that they show individual aesthetic merit and form an abundant representative florilegium.

The familiarity of some authors chosen (Marguerite of Navarre, Theresa of Jesus and the Countess of Pembroke) should not obscure the importance of presenting many more authors who have not been easily accessible in English, among them Gaspara Stampa, Veronica Gambara, Catherine of Bologna, Pernette Du Guillet, Marie Dentièrre, Caritas Pirckheimer, and still others scarcely known even by name — Anna Owena Hoyers, Helene Kottanner, Anna Bijns and Lea Ráskai. The contributions are substantial, ranging from 20-30 pages of combined essay and text. The introductions to individual authors are scholarly and almost all are quite helpful, while the well-ground axes of critical theory are refreshingly absent. Wilson's excellent 30 page general introduction and her editorial hand have achieved an overall consistency of tone which gives a strong coherence to the volume.

The collection is large (638 pp.), well edited, attractive and reasonably priced at \$40.00 (US) for the cloth edition, \$19.95 for paper. Well written and organized, it is easy to read and use. A chronological table of literary and historical figures and major events helps to place the authors, while the bibliographies are invaluable for those wishing further information.

The book provides an excellent introduction to the women writers and women's literary issues of the period: it is a browser's delight and an important reference tool, although as an anthology it may not be satisfactory teaching material.

The very merits of this welcome volume, however, sharpen questions about the status and role of early women writers, many of which are related to issues of education and even of bare literacy. To take but three: How literate were women? What do we know of the audience for whom women wrote? What further study needs to be done on the conditions under which women wrote?

Women authors are clearly exceptional, but the current state of historical research on literacy simply cannot tell us much that we want to know about the degree of literacy among women or even about the correlation between reading and writing. All studies show women to have been less literate than men; David Cressy's impressive 1980 study documents the massive illiteracy among English women from 1580-1730. However, although acknowledging that upper-class and urban women are considerably more literate than their sisters, Cressy does not attempt much analysis of the literate 10 per cent. Further, Margaret Spofford and Mary Jo Manes, among others, point to interesting indications that routes to popular literacy were perhaps more widely varied than Cressy's methods might capture. These studies open the possibility that women, who may themselves have been unable to write, were nevertheless important teachers of reading, and point to ways in which girls could acquire fairly fluent reading skills without access to more formal schooling. Such considerations are closely related to the distinction between composition and writing. For at least two of the women in Wilson's collection, Catherine of Genoa and Helene Kottanner, questions about scribal practice overlap questions about textual fidelity and the nature of authorship.

A better understanding of literacy is also needed to understand women authors' intended audience. There are interesting questions about reading in a culture of mixed literacy and illiteracy; author-reader relations may be quite different for those who read to and for themselves and those who are conduits of literacy or those who are read to. In turn, these relations may vary according to the type of literature considered. Again, unselfconscious address to a mixed audience of men and women is comparatively rare in these writings, though many writings assume an audience exclusively male or female.

Finally, problems of access to education and to different kinds of writing, together with special problems of authority and inclination to write, still require further study. In this context, Cressy's conclusion that literacy and practical utility are closely related may also need to be refined in the case of women writers. Wilson addresses the "mirror phenomenon," problems of canonization and the issue of women's silence; she notes the conspicuous absence of learned translation. The volume thus shows the circumscription of early women writers; it is no accident that they are treated primarily as writers. The forms of written expression urged on women of the renaissance and reformation period — imaginative literature in the vernacular, vernacular translations and devotional literature — are those most susceptible of literary analysis. Only seven of the twenty-four contributors come from outside the field of literature; their essays are among the shortest (only one over 20 pp.) and least successfully integrated.

Wilson takes the position that in spite of everything, women's voices do offer an important counterpoint to male acts of creation, believing that all participation in shaping language is a form of social power. This valuable collection illustrates her thesis and challenges us to advance the supporting research necessary to understand more fully the situation of women writers.

THE LANGUAGE OF EXCLUSION: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti

Sharon Leder with Andrea Abbott.
Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987.

Janice Lavery

Traditional literary criticism has often used stereotypical images of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to explain their work and lives, in what the authors call the "spinster/recluse model." The "abnormal" Dickinson trapped by her self-imposed isolation, and Rossetti by her mystical spirituality, have provided the major focus for many examinations of their poetry. Leder and Abbott, claiming that the poets have been wrongly de-

tached from the political issues and reform movements of their day, have aimed their study "beyond the current criticism by releasing the poets from the prison of their private selves and by demonstrating their poetic responses to public events in their age."

These responses, according to the authors, place the poets firmly within the historical development of the women's movement, particularly in the sense that

women's writing — which embodied their voice — and their public actions were gathering critical power. Leder and Abbott explore the poets' lives and work to establish them as participants, through their work, in the events and great issues of their day. Dickinson, for example, was affected by the American Civil War, and Rossetti was active in social reform work during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

The poets' status as single women, in an age when "unmarried women of all classes were society's largest group of outsiders," is presented by the authors as among the most important keys to the poets' sense of exclusion and their resulting roles as clear-sighted observers of the society which had little room for them.

Rossetti's poetry was informed by the English women reformers and radicals who were focusing on marriage reform and women's exclusion from education,

professional and economic opportunity. Dickinson commented critically on the American Civil War, religion and marriage.

It has taken nearly one hundred years for Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to be assessed in terms of their work and their experiences, rather than the degree of their conformity to or divergence from traditionally acceptable feminine behaviour.

While their writing style could be smoother, Leder and Abbott have assembled a convincing case, utilizing biographical data, critical evaluation of the language and writing of Dickinson and Rossetti, and a survey of existing literary criticism and feminist theory of language. Extensive notes, indexes and a selected bibliography all add to the usefulness of the study.

People in the literacy field may be interested in approaching this book as a

model for analyzing women's writing within a societal and historical context. Much of the strength of current literacy practice comes from its respect for and encouragement of the learner, her life and her experience. It is interesting to see this acceptance and respect applied to women in another context, and the historical perspective is a constructive addition to the learner-centered approach.

The examination of the lives of these women, who were educated and middle class (both stunning examples of literate power), may seem at first to be of limited relevance to the literacy movement. It is, however, a useful reminder of the long struggle women have waged to find their own authentic voices and to have them heard. The move toward literacy is an important part of women's struggle to free themselves from involuntary exclusion and to enable all our voices to be heard.

PARADISE ON HOLD

Laura Bulger. Toronto: Bramble House, 1987.

Marie-France Silver

This arresting collection of short stories by Toronto author Laura Bulger created a considerable sensation within the Canadian Portuguese community when it first appeared in its original language. Now

that it has been translated, it should attract a good deal of attention from English Canada.

These are tales of loneliness, inadaptation, and alienation. Bulger's characters are misfits — people caught between conflicting views of life, torn between the illusory world of their imagination and the drab reality of daily life, disenchanted by the present while tormented by nostalgic memories of their long-gone youth. Many of them have immigrated to Canada from Portugal or Italy. Torn between the

old world and the new, they are as estranged — psychologically and spiritually — from the former as from the latter. They remain outsiders, forever pulled in opposing directions. "What a helluva life!" exclaims the narrator of "Vaivém," the last story in the collection. "Always coming and going, from here to there, there to here, um vaivém ..."

In a classically sober style, Laura Bulger succeeds in dramatizing the peculiar ambivalence of all those who have left one country to settle in another.

CIVIL TO STRANGERS AND OTHER WRITINGS

Barbara Pym. Edited by Hazel Holt. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988.

Anne Pilgrim

Not long before her death in 1980, Barbara Pym gave some thought to the proper disposition of her remains — her literary remains, that is, which were then occupying a large cardboard box in her bedroom. Eventually she gave all of her manuscripts, notebooks and papers to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, a most suitable (her favorite adjective) choice given

the importance of Oxford in her life and her fiction. It is from that treasure trove of manuscripts that the present collection of some of her earliest work is drawn.

The appearance of *Civil to Strangers* brings to thirteen the total number of Pym novels, in a thirty-eight-year publishing history which falls into three sharply defined phases. First came the six gently satirical comedies, peopled with "excellent women" much put upon by vicars or anthropologists (or both). This sort of novel went out of style in the early 1960s, leaving Pym in an enforced silence that ended only in 1977 when both Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin singled her out in a *TLS* survey as an "under-rated" author; at the end of the decade she was able to place three more novels with Macmillan

in rapid succession, including the much-praised *Quartet in Autumn*. Since her death her sister Hilary, her literary executor Hazel Holt and other friends such as Larkin have been active in editing the manuscript material, a project which has yielded the invaluable 1984 autobiography, *A Very Private Eye*, and four posthumous novels: *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *Crampton Hodnet*, *An Academic Question*, and now *Civil to Strangers*. To make up what she describes as "a last sheaf" of Pym's unpublished writings, Hazel Holt has added to the full text of *Civil to Strangers* sizeable extracts from three other novels, four short stories, and the script of a talk Pym gave on BBC Radio in 1978 after her rediscovery by the press and public.