analysis of the relegation of women to Otherness in man’s world is an unprece-
dented accomplishment, the solution she proposes, in the achievement of tran-
scendent subjectivity, remains a mascu-
line solution. Such a reading will again be
familiar to many readers; but Nye’s inter-
weaving of Marxist and radical feminist
themes with de Beauvoir’s texts, and her
discussion of the impact of The
Second Sex on such American feminists as Millett,
Atkinson, and Daly, are novel and inter-
esting. Neither a reconceptualized femi-
nine subjectivity, nor the separatist sub-
jectivity of radical feminism, offers onto-
derstanding of the impact of The
Ring consciousness of
nine subjectivity, nor
themes with de Beauvoir’s texts,
Sex
esting. Neither a
psychoanalytic interpretation that consti-
tute the innovative aspect of the chapter.
From Millett’s and Friedan’s rejections of
Freud’s emphasis on sexuality, through
Mitchell’s reading of Freud as a “kind of
corrective to Marxism,” to Kristeva’s and
Irigaray’s readings of Lacanian theory,
Nye’s discussion is sensitive and illumi-
nating. The place of Horney and Deutsch
as Freudian apologists is usefully detailed,
and there is a good discussion of Flax’s
and Chodorow’s ambivalent indebtedness
to Freud in their contributions to object
relations theory. Most insightful, I think,
are her concluding references to Marie
Balmay’s Psychoanalyzing psychoanaly-
sis, a work which broaches the topic of
Freud’s unconscious motivations in the
development of his theories. Such read-
ings, in Nye’s view, again point to the
masculine specificity of the solutions pro-
posed in purportedly global theories.

Saussure and Lacan are the traditional
theorists of language with whom French
feminist theorists most frequently engage
in their efforts to understand the effects of
language in constructing gender-identity.
Derrida is the anarchoist figure of hope.
Nye offers a witty analysis of attempts,
particularly on the part of Irigaray and
Cixous, to develop a woman’s language
that would emulate Derridean deconstruc-
tive practice, unbalancing and subverting
the Lacanian order of the signifier, cele-
brating a “feminine ‘style’,” advocating
jouissance over logocentrism. For all of

the inventive, lucid promise she sees in
these proposals – and in Kristeva’s more
direct engagement with male questions –
Nye ends, again, on a note of caution. She
argues: “Although a deconstruction of the
text of patriarchy may be needed to clear
the way for these new ideas, a feminine
counter-text can only offer a mirror image
of masculinist thought.”

Nye’s conclusions are by no means
wholly pessimistic, nor do they suggest
that her engagement with the “philoso-
phies of man” has been a useless exercise.
Yes, one must conclude, a practising
feminist does need theory, but the “phi-
losophies of man” do not serve her well.
Feminist reworkings of men’s theories
reveal that they are indeed men’s, derived
out of men’s gender-specific and histori-
cally-specific practices in order to offer
solutions to their problems. Yet to un-
derstand the “conflictual and alienated
sources of the philosophy of man” is to
understand its contingency, and hence to
refuse its totalizing effects. That refusal
creates a space for the development of
strongly affirmative feminist practices,
out of which new theoretical positions can
be constructed.

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POETRY BY CANADIAN
WOMEN

Rosemary Sullivan, ed. Toronto:
Oxford University Press, 1989

Linda Lamont-Stewart

Rosemary Sullivan’s Poetry by Canadian
Women differs from other recent antholo-
gies of Canadian women’s poetry, such as
Mary di Michele’s Anything Is Possible
(1984) and Judith Fitzgerald’s SPIELLES
(1986), in that it is designed to provide an
historical record of the development of
Canadian women’s poetry from the early
nineteenth to the late twentieth century.
Sullivan begins her Introduction to the
anthology with a quotation from Virginia
Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own on the
importance of early women writers in
establishing a foundation of women’s
writing upon which later writers could
build. Sullivan’s anthology, then, is to be
read “as a cumulative work, a single long
poem created over one and a half centu-
ries by women poets writing in Canada.

Behind the eclectic generation of contem-
porary women writers is a cumulative
tradition of poets who might be thought of
as facilitators, clearing a space for future
voices.” Poetry by Canadian Women thus
seeks to establish a canon of Canadian
women’s poetry.

The first question that arises with re-
gard to any collection of women’s writing
is whether segregating women’s literary
work from the national canon as a whole
contributes to its marginalization. Cana-
dian women poets have been surprisingly
well represented in anthologies since E.H.
Dewart published his pioneering Selec-
tions From Canadian Poets in 1864. It is
true, however, that with the notable ex-
ception of Isabella Valancy Crawford, the
nineteenth century poets whose work has
remained in the canon are predominantly
male. There is, therefore, good reason to
re-examine the work of our early women
poets, as Sullivan argues: “To those who,
fearing ghettoization, resist the idea of
collecting women’s writing under a single
cover, one can only respond with Virginia
Woolf’s insistence: we need the homage
of memory, the catalytic power of the
retrospective glance.”

In glancing retrospectively at early
Canadian women poets, Sullivan has not
attempted merely to be historically repre-
sentative. Rather, she has sought out
“poems that could sustain a modern
reader’s attention,” and she has discov-
ered some gems, particularly the firstpoem
in the collection, “Sir Walter Raleigh’s
Advice to His Son on the Subject of
Matrimony” by Margaret Blennerhasset
(alia A Lady). Blennerhasset’s witty and
cynical condemnation of male attitudes
toward women, published in 1824, has
obvious appeal for today’s feminist reader.
In restricting her selections to poetry she
feels should be of interest to the modern
reader, however, Sullivan excludes the
work of a number of women who were
well known as poets in their own day. She
lists the names of some of the writers she
chose not to include, but does not explain
why she considers their poetry of little
interest. If only to illustrate the extent to
which women’s interests and attitudes
have changed over the past century, it
would have been useful to include represen-
tative poems by such writers as Mrs.
Leprohon or Agnes Maule Macfar-
(Machar’s name is misspelled in Sullivan’s
Introduction, and there are a number of
other typographical errors in the text. One

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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 Salish 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 dustbowl 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


Clara Thomas

In Anne Cameron's "The World is Full of Magic" the final work of fiction in Celebrating Canadian Women, Klopinum, 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 Transcendence — 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 acknowledg-