

sessed by the colonial system, the English language is an instrument of oppression: "I lived in Oxbow, Maine," writes Mavis Goeres, a Tobique woman,

for seventeen years and then in Brockton, Massachusetts. You know, the man I married was white and he wouldn't let me speak my Native language or teach my children the Native language, so when I go away from him didn't I ever talk Maliseet. (laughs) My youngest daughter, Susan is the only one that can really speak Maliseet. The others know just little words, bits and pieces, but Susan can speak it when she wants to. It's a shame, though, she doesn't because the other kids don't speak it; we're losing our language.

Another Tobique woman, Juanita Perley, writes with anger:

When people went shopping, they never got money to buy the groceries; the Indian agent would write up a purchase order at his own store — McPhail's store. I can remember how they ridiculed the Indian people who came in there and even as a little kid I resented it. But you had to go in there with this little piece of paper that said you could have, say, \$10 worth of food, or whatever struck his fancy at the time. They'd be making fun of the Indian people that came in — they called us 'gimmies' — like 'gimme this,' 'gimme that.'

The way we talk, you never say, 'Please,' in our language because nobody was ever made to beg. So when

Indian people said something in English they translate it literally from the way we speak and it sounded like a demand. I always resented the way the white people treated us and even today I resent it — I don't like them one bit, and I don't care if that is printed in the book, either!

Teaching languages, teaching children the languages of the world, is perhaps one of the most estranged and unacknowledged aspects of women's work. For Native women, Native languages can not be separated from the preservation of a Native cultural identity. Women are producing their own spheres of exchange, their own terms of mediations and negotiations between men and women within their communities, between the Canadian State (the force of legal denominations) and the many forms of Native self-determination (the force of legal counterdenominations). In the past, Native women who married non-Natives were forced to assimilate to a non-Native culture. Divorced and cut off from their own culture, they bear the scars of dispossession; they could not acknowledge their cultural heritage and they remained unacknowledged persons, with a non-Native culture. In struggling to achieve a Native women self-determination, Native women are ensuring that any collective effort to achieve Native self-government will only succeed when the equality of Native women has also been acknowledged.

I have tried to show what is valuable about the way this book has been produced and what I have learned from it

about the need to preserve Native language. The production of this book, however, raises an economic and political problem. Produced by a mainstream women's press, with the help of a non-Native, under the liberal mandate of cultural diversity, the process of decision making that controls who or what gets published ultimately lies with non-Native women. As non-Native women, we must remind ourselves of those Native presses such as Theytus Books, P.O. Box 218, Penticton, B.C. and Write-on Press, Box 86606, North Vancouver, B.C., which are struggling and succeeding in publishing work by, for and about Native people. While it is important for Native women's voices to be heard in mainstream presses, it is just as important, if not more, to support, to buy, to read books published by Native presses in order that they may continue to publish Native writings.

Glenna Perley anticipated that the readership of *Enough is Enough* would be doubly directed towards both Natives and non-Natives. And she envisioned that the experience of those readers might also be different. I can only speak as a non-Native woman, who has learned a great deal from this book and from writing this commentary. For the non-Native reader, unfamiliar with the struggle of Native women in this country, this book is a place to begin listening to Native women or for the already initiated reader, familiar with Native women's writings, poetry, novels, essays and criticism, another book that will engage you in the struggle. To Native women readers, I look forward to listening to your commentary.

WOMEN WRITERS OF THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

Edited by Katharina M. Wilson. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

Joan Gibson

Katharina Wilson is prolific in bringing the works of women writers from the early periods of European history to a wider audience. The author of two books on Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, a tenth-cen-

tury Saxon canoness and dramatist, Wilson has previously edited *Medieval Women Writers* (Georgia, 1984) and plans to continue with a volume on seventeenth-century women writers. Even more ambitious is the massive forthcoming two volume reference work, *Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* (Garland Publishing, 1989). The edited volumes follow a format of introductory essays of biography and critical assessment, with bibliographies of primary and secondary works and lists of English translations. The period collections also include selections from the works of the women discussed.

The renaissance and reformation vol-

ume concentrates on women of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with a few examples of renaissance style and sensibility from the early seventeenth century. Organized geographically, the book includes twenty-five authors, five each from Italy, England and the German-speaking countries. France has seven representatives and Hungary, Spain and the Low countries one each. The volume is inclusive in other ways as well; a wide variety of social background is represented which Wilson fits into six broad categories of social/functional identity. She relates these to the women's audience, their choice of Latin or vernacular languages, subject matter and chosen

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