

who is slowly losing her sight, or of the 39-year-old sales clerk who has worked on shop floors for most of her "long life" (151) and who scrimps and saves so that she might buy for herself the ingredients to mix a single gleaming topaz cocktail each week, a balm that allows her to rest, to forget the drudgery that is her life:

No customers to worry you, ask questions, be discontented, complain of you, perhaps. No shopwalker to pass you over with his eyes for something younger, more attractive, no girls to spy your grey hairs out, note your lines and wrinkles — nudge one another — pass remarks. None of that. Nothing but peace — quietness — serenity. (152)

Individually, the stories are but pieces of this fascinating palimpsestic text that gains its resonance through addition upon addition of tales of experience.

Sister Woman is at once realist and sentimental and politically engaged — truly an unlikely triad of fictional possibilities — and, given Sime's virtual invisibility to the canon of Canadian literature, one that provokes questions about generic purity and the ascription of value to women's writing. Aside from a few typographical inconsistencies — two lines from the bottom of a page of explanatory notes stray onto the otherwise blank page which follows, at first glance appearing to stand as an epigraph or inscription framing the tales which follow — this facsimile edition is a sound one. The introduction by Sandra Campbell provides a useful contextualization of Sime's work within its historical moment and social milieu, which concentrates specifically on the economic and moral realities of the early twentieth century in Canada — a time when Sime's explorations of women's tentative independence and her articulation of the richness and hardship of licit and illicit

sexual unions was striking, particularly against the nationalist and imperialist discourses of maternal feminism and moral purity that characterized this period. *Sister Woman* is a profoundly political text, for it stages a pause, a moment of speaking and listening in which the complex negotiations of women to adapt and embrace new personal, social and economic roles can be heard.

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Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology. Sara Castro-Klarén, Sylvia Molloy, and Beatriz Sarlo (eds.). *Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, Pp. 362 hardcover.*

This is that rarest of volumes: one which lives up to the compliments the publisher has gathered to sprinkle about the bookjacket. For instance, Gregory Rabassa, translator of Cortázar and García-Marquez, is quoted on the jacket as saying, "This anthology will give English-speaking readers a whole new trove of top-drawer writers and their fine work." That is certainly true. More than three dozen voices of women are represented in this volume, some of them like Gabriela Mistral, well known north of the Rio Grande. Other voices, some of them peasant women, are not widely known.

Mary Louise Pratt of Stanford University is quoted as saying, among other things, that this anthology is "a powerful and original contribution to the field of Latin American writing in translation." So it is: powerful because of the texts selected, and original because the editors have employed a provocative method of text selection. Moreover, in some cases, they have provided fresh or first-time translations of texts. Even Nobel Prize winner Gabriela Mistral is looked at freshly.

This leaves a reviewer, even one certified as a grouch, only one task: to mention the chief merits of this collection. The chief of the chief merits is that this is an anthology of women's writing in a very broad sense. The editors have not been content to foist on us the usual combination of fiction and poetry, although fine examples of both are included. The range of texts included is extensive. Texts by writers as sophisticated, in the best sense of that word, as Clarice Lispector mingle with texts of women as unsophisticated, in the best sense of that word, of Rigoberta Menchú. Lispector, a Brazilian with a law degree who never practiced law and spent many years in Europe and the United States, was an innovative writer influenced by existential themes and philosophy. Menchú, a Quiche aboriginal from Guatemala who recently received the Nobel Peace Prize, was interviewed in 1982 by a Latin American anthropologist. Both Menchú's father and mother were *campesinos* killed because of their solidarity with the Quiche struggle for social justice.

Lispector's rich legacy is represented by three short selections. One of her aphorisms included in this volume should be recalled with humility by academics: "an error made by intelligent people is a very serious matter because they have the arguments to prove it correct." Menchú's excerpt is a touching example of the continuing merits of the Bible as a revolutionary document in some situations. She outlines how she and her fellow villagers used the stories of Judith, Moses and David to reach a new understanding of their desperate need for social action. Her eloquence, while of a different kind, is the equal of Lispector's. As Menchú says simply, "We recognize that the system has wanted to impose on us: to divide us and keep the poor dormant. So we take some things and not others." One of the things Menchú and her

comrades did not take was the traditional Catholic concept of sin.

An interesting blend of the Lispector and Menchú approaches appears in an excerpt by the Mexican writer, Elena Poniatowska. Poniatowska is a novelist of unusual power. One of her pieces included in this volume is from *Massacres in Mexico*, her account of how the Mexican army brutally responded to political demonstrations in 1968. Poniatowska craftily mixes her own reportage, the discourse in fragmentary form of people who participated, her own reactions and clips from newspaper accounts.

The awe produced by the multitude of fine voices represented in this volume leaves one feeling guilty about dwelling on three, particularly when the range of voices extends from internationally recognized poets to excerpts from the diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus. She lived in a Brazilian *favela* earning her family's keep with bits of housework and picking over garbage heaps. Carolina Maria de Jesus battled her oppression with courage, pride, compassion, a sense of justice and humour. All show in her diaries. What a fine woman. What a fine voice. One quote cannot be resisted: "Today is Mother's Day. The sky is blue and white. It seems that even nature wants to pay homage to the mothers who feel unhappy because they can't realize the desires of their children."

A second chief merit of this splendid volume is the provocative organizational method used to select the voices. Each editor is responsible for a section. Part 1, edited by Sara Castro-Klarén, is entitled "Women, Self, and Writing." Here Castro-Klarén alerts us to some of the major problems facing women writers crafting distinctive voices in Latin America. Among these issues are the mother

tongue. For instance, Mistral believed that the case of Victoria Ocampo, who learned French before Spanish, was tragic. Another issue is that of *marianismo*, the idealization of motherhood, and *malinchismo*, the woman accomplice of patriarchal domination.

Part 2, edited by Sylvia Mollow, is entitled "Female Textual Identities: The Strategies of Self-Figuration." Here Molloy addresses the question of "what do female texts do when they say 'I'?" Molloy's probings of this question are too complicated to be condensed in a short review but are well worth reading. Some of this section exposes the reader to some marvellous poetry. The merits, demerits, problems and frustrations of translating poetry are well known. However, since many of the readers of this volume will be English-speakers whose Spanish is non-existent or poor, perhaps the most appropriate test is that of W.H. Auden who argued that a translation must succeed as an English poem. By that standard some of these translations are quite wonderful.

Part 3, edited by Beatriz Sarlo, is entitled "Women, History and Ideology." In this section we find the pieces by Rigoberta Menchú, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Elena Poniatowski already noted. However we also hear from Eva Perón on the merits as she saw them of Juan Perón and from Magda Portal, a Peruvian Communist, who came to see very early on that a devotion to Marxist-Leninism does not automatically cure a male of *machismo*.

In conclusion, I predict this anthology will create much frustration. Readers will head to libraries and bookstores looking for translations of complete works by these fine voices. They will find that the translation into English of Latin American women writers lags far behind what is merited. One can only hope this

is a situation that publishers will rectify in the next decade.

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Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (eds.). *Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, Pp. 276 paperback.*

At a very recent, otherwise quite wonderful, postcolonial conference, the only panel that specifically addressed questions of gender swiftly degenerated into a largely untheorized free-for-all, breaking down into camps divided as to whether gender was or was not a significant axis of oppression for the purposes of postcolonial studies. Comments ranged along the well-worn paths of the "there is no sexism" and "racism is worse than sexism" schools of thought. Deeply distressing as this discourse was to many of us at the conference, the sad truth is that feminist and postcolonial theories and theorists still do not always succeed in communicating effectively with one another.

Given this state of affairs, I welcome the appearance of *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, which looks at "western" women and their relationship to the (mainly British) imperial drive. (I scare-quote the homogenizing term "western" throughout this review to signify that it, like the commonplace term "first-world," implies a critically unsustainable radical disjuncture between arbitrarily designated sections of the world.) *Western Women and Imperialism* sets out to rectify a critical "neglect of the role of Western women in the colonies" (3). It provides a "context-specific" (192) examination