

The first thing that strikes this reader is the selection criteria. While some authors are well recognized for their output in the short story genre (Silvina Ocampo, Clarice Lispector and Ines Arredondo), others are primarily known for their long fiction writing (Elena Poniatowska, Marta Lynch), others, still, for their poetry (Alyandra Pizarnik), or for their play (Elena Garro). One wonders, therefore, whether it would not have been more appropriate to make a selection of short fiction by Latin American Women much more representative by either eliminating the authors who are not "strictu sensu" short story writers, or else, by simply labelling the anthology as "Prose fiction by Latin American Women."

The subtitle of the book, *Short Fiction by Latin American Women* poses another problem, for it could be perceived as sexual discrimination in reverse. Had the collection contained only writings by male authors, I am certain that this fact would not have appeared in the title. By definition, an anthology is a "florilege," a collection of the most representative writings in a given genre or period, chosen for their literary excellence, without any specific reference to gender.

The above could be overlooked, however, if the anthology met certain standards in supplying information within a critical framework. The average length of the biographical notes given on each author is five lines; in one case, it reaches eight lines (Lydia Fagundes Telles), and in another, only three lines (Ines Arredondo). This, coupled with rather short, often anecdotal introductions to each of the selections, lends to the anthology an aura of imprecision which cannot be counteracted even if Isabel Allende, one of the most prominent writers in Latin American today, endorses the book.

We ask at this point what is the purpose of this anthology. The statement that "many of the best untranslated books from Latin American countries have been written by women" (Introduction, p.3) leads the reader to form certain expectations of what is to follow. Expectation turns into disappointment when very little is said regarding the reasons for such a statement. Again, this shortcoming would not be serious if the book were intended for a readership familiar—if not with the works themselves—at least with the cultural parameters from which they stem; it becomes quite serious, however, when the readers most likely to read this book are lacking the necessary information to contextualize the material within its authentic cultural framework.

In spite of its shortcomings, *Other Fires* has some positive aspects. Certainly the quality of the translations is impressive in that each selection faithfully reflects the original language. Another positive aspect is the felicitous choice of the title which becomes a double reference to the "fires the Spanish explorers had seen burning on the Coast of Patagonia and on what was to be known as Tierra del Fuego (Land of Fire), and also, to Roger Callois' enthusiasm on discovering the Great Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, "a fire burning on the other side of the Atlantic," (both quotations from the "Introduction," p. 7).

The book, with its full colour detail of George Tooker's painting, "The Gypsy," on its cover and its clear, easy-to-read print presents well. Let us hope that it will serve as an introduction to other Latin American writings regardless of gender.

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**Goodbye Harold, Good Luck.** Audrey Thomas. *New York, NY: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986. Pp.222.*

I originally picked up *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* in an airport bookstore hoping that it would demand just the right amount of concentration—accessible enough to disengage my usual fear of being airborne, challenging enough to engage my academic feminist tastes in women's literary productions. I was not disappointed—this is vintage Audrey Thomas, with her characteristic blend of humour and poetry, completely in command of the short story. The humour and the poetry, female in vision and voice, are encapsulated in the dedication and the epigraph, the former to a friend "who doesn't laugh (too hard) when I look for the iron in the fridge"—shades of fire and ice!—and the latter from an unorthodox Greek:

Adopt the character of the twisting octopus, which takes on the appearance of the nearby rock. Now follow in this direction, now turn a different hue.

The octopus shows up in many different understated guises in this collection, most notably and obviously in the waking adventures and nocturnal dreams of a prepubescent boy on a vacation in Greece. In Thomas' introduction to the volume, a seemingly casual meditation on correspondences, memories and images which fascinate the writer, the metaphorical octopus emerges as a "real" but "unsent" post-card conflating a bright red amaryllis

with a gramophone horn. Throughout the book, we are confronted with a synaesthetic multi-vision of the mythic jumbled with the ordinary, of refrigerators and walruses, of hummingbirds and Americans, sleazy motel bath-room mirrors and popular song lyrics redolent with unintentional, "extra" luminosity. This "funny" layering effect is reproduced in Thomas' experiments with narrative structure—whether circular, parabolic, mythic or merely framed, form often appears deceptively simple upon first reading. An escape artist as well as an expert at disguise, the retiring octopus never dominates Thomas' well-seasoned seascapes and sensual escapades. I don't really like labels, but here is magic realism at its best.

The stories in this collection, however dispersed, tend to cluster in pairs or triads. "Elevation," "The Man With Clam Eyes" and "Breaking the Ice" are all set on the B.C. coast, and all present the heroine in the throes of launching or terminating an affair. "Elevation" offers a gentle, benign parody of academic back-to-the-landers and the American boy-man. Dangerously innocent, married and divorced one time too many, this specimen nonetheless retains his sexual appeal. Situated at the start of the volume, "Elevation" defines one of Thomas' basic fictional equations: "She begins to realize that if he is studying hummingbirds, she is studying him," leading the heroine to steal a few lines from his naively pretentious diaries, "such as this remark by William Bateson: 'The brain can receive only news of difference.'" Also set in summer, "The Man With Clam Eyes" is one of my personal favourites—the grieving heroine ("her heart is broken/I wish her well"), discovers a manuscript secreted in the isolated cottage she has rented in a bid for recovery, and is soothed rather than disturbed by the typographical error in its title. Set in winter, "Breaking the Ice" is for all that the most engagingly positive of these three stories—stoically surviving Christmas away from her young children (they are visiting their recently divorced father) the mother in this story finds hope as well as comfort from a new love, who arrives for the New Year at the same time as one of her daughters, and accompanied by his own child. The sense of quiet domesticity, joy and anticipation is conveyed by the magic of the winter seashore during a power failure, suggesting the rebirth which the pastoral lyric has traditionally associated with "time out" far from the city and the rushed routine of normal life. Here, snow-angels compete with sea-lions in the heroine's bitter-sweet balancing of romantic and Darwinian insights into bonding. A realist at heart, Audrey Thomas seems temperamentally inclined to quiet, not quite epiphanies in these stories.

"Local Customs" and "The Dance" are both set in Aegean rather than Pacific islands; the former is particularly intriguing in that the narrator manages to inhabit the subjectivity of a lonely twelve-year old boy with complete naturalness. A world is peopled in a brief space here, complete with Greek hostellers, German expatriates, aging lovers and youthful hitchhikers, all doubtfully searching for happiness which, when it does not elude, elicits a price. Unlike some of the older and less sensitive summer inhabitants of paradise, the prepubescent boy still has a lifetime of discovery ahead of him, and yet his looming initiation seems tinged with tragedy. "The Dance" is less ambitious, less successful, and less haunting. Here, a single parent and her daughter experience the disappointments of kitschy bungalows, tawdry tourists and bad imitation-British food for some days before finally condescending to visit the local "Disco Poman-tico" [sic].

The heroine is torn between wanting to dance (her "shelf-life" is nearing the "best before" date) and enjoying her duenna-like role in her daughter's emerging womanhood. Somehow the story's concluding thrust to unity and relative authenticity, with their discovery of and joining in the ancient Greek folk dances that eventually displace the hit parade in the early morning hours, strikes me as a bit forced. Like "Elevation," "Dancing" succeeds as a slighter, if amusing satiric portrait of inner and outer landscapes, but lacks the restrained emotional power of "Breaking the Ice" and "Local Customs."

"Miss Foote," "Compulsory Figures" and "One Size Fits All" form a triad not by virtue of their pedestrian qualities but by their transgression of magic realism, leading us a considerable distance into the surrealist mode. The short-short Kafkaesque tragic stories of the Christlike shoe salesman with a foot fetish and of the trapped wife who mistakenly tries to escape to Kingston are not nearly as effective as the longer history of Miss Foote, the wandering spinster schoolmarm who meets the grim reaper in a Cornwall village in the form of a young punk reading a sensational Sunday morning paper. Here, Thomas' evident fascination with the bizarre world of dreams takes over for real, as Miss Foote repeatedly dreams her death from a loss of heart (literal and metaphoric). Almost as unforgettable as the young boy in "Local Customs" (as, singing, she plods along bravely to meet her destiny), she is also intriguing by virtue of her introduction in a form reminiscent of P.K. Page's famous metaphysical poem about Dutch cleanser bottles receding to infinity, or Borges' fabulous nightmares. The feminist fairy-tale "The Princess and the Zucchini" also functions as pure

fable, but stands out from this group of tales as very different in tone. Here, the modern liberated Princess Zona interacts with her enchanted zucchini in a subversive manner far removed from that of her ancestress in the story of the frog-prince. And the fable (gothic to the male reader, comic to the female) is not so far removed from reality after all — the king and queen completely misread their teenage daughter's culinary experiments as expressing compliance with patriarchal roles and values.

"Degrees" and "Relics" are two of the most effective stories in this collection, characterized by their narrator and heroine's moral ambivalence, by their use of a transient foreign setting, and by the sense one gets that they could become or might have been potential novels. "Degrees" is the tragic story of Ruth Garwood, an East Indian academic wife in colonial Africa who struggles to be more British than her alcoholic British husband, adopted child (blond and blue eyed) and fellow housewives at coffee mornings and kiddies' birthday parties. Here, the interrelation of class, race and gender produce an unforgettable portrait of a woman who is colonized and despised, a far from loveable victim of the "ideals" of post-war domestic identity and post-Raj remnants of assimilation into empire. The story's centre of consciousness is appalled by Ruth's maltreatment of her African servants, cheap cotton housedresses, and extravagant silver tea service. Yet unlike the other wives, Ruth reveals no prejudice towards the Lebanese merchants who shops they all patronize.

The narrator avoids Ruth out of a sense of embarrassment as much as guilt, while feeling empathy and even anger when faced with Ruth's experience of callous indifference at the hands of virtually all the other women. The genuine concern of Mary Lamb, one rare saintly young wife, is refreshing but not reassuring given the general context of middle-class women's existence, selfless and secondary in Africa as in Canada:

It amused me how these women were always 'rushing up' something or 'dashing off' a letter or 'dashing to' town or 'popping in'. I suppose it gave their lives an illusion of urgency and importance they might otherwise have lacked.

Clearly the degrees of colonization, complicated by anti-feminism, are mirrored by the degrees of complicity within the narrator herself and, by extension, within the reader.

"Relics," also characterized by a first-person narrative voice and making additional use of temporal effects, is as convincing and almost as moving as "Degrees" — here the narrator-heroine revisits her old boarding house in a Scottish university town many years after the fact. Meditating on youthful paths not taken (abandoned lovers and other unknowns) Rose reconsiders her then superficial dealings with Morag, decides to visit the harried young single mother who had been her landlady, discovers that Morag has died, and mourns the lost potential for friendship. The story offers a woman's variant on the old theme of innocence and experience, with particular emphasis on youthful blindness, middle-aged vulnerability, and the difficulty of communication and so of love. I might add, at this point, that "Relics" is only one of many Thomas stories marked by intertextuality, in which bonding/bondage with other women writers such as Wilson, Gallant, Munro and Laurence adds to the emotional impact of the reading experience. This sense of community extends to all women, writers and mothers: in "Mothering Sunday," the narrator explores and explodes commercial clichés to realize, in the end, that "I have no right to laugh at Edna Jacques."

I am tempted to launch into an extended commentary on the last, title story, with its sudden unexpected twist opening vistas onto unacceptable, unforgettable scenery, to cite Alice Munro, but will leave you to enjoy it on your own. All I can say is that this is a short-story collection that I would not hesitate to teach it in any literature course as required state-of-the-art, but also that I would enthusiastically recommend to a non-literary female friend as a darn good read.

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**In Our Own Words (Northern Saskatchewan Metis Women Speak Out).** Dolores T. Poelzer, and Irene A. Poelzer, Saskatoon: Lindenblatt and Harmonic Publishing Inc, 1986. Pp. 161. Sole Distributor: One Sky, 134 Avenue F South, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7M 1S8.

*In Our Own Words* is a window looking in on the Metis women of northern Saskatchewan. The reader cannot help but see and hear these women as, directly and simply, they speak the shape of their experience. The book began with them in the course of ninety-six interviews, undertaken by Irene Poelzer as she travelled from community to community in her second-hand half-ton truck, accompanied by her large Lab/Setter, Big Foot. The book ends with them and their suggested solutions to the problems they