

A more detailed introduction might also help. How, for instance, were the excerpts chosen? Does the author have an organising principle, or was the collection dictated by the availability of sources? How do the excerpts reflect changing developments in Australia's history? The introduction consists mainly of excerpts from the excerpts, with limited exegesis of their import or provenance. A further quibble: page numbers for each excerpt would greatly aid those interested in reading the original sources, especially for those entries where ellipses indicate the author has compiled the excerpt from multiple places in the original text.

*Venus in Transit* is a valuable introductory source for those interested in travel, women's place in early Australian history, and the country's material culture. Sellick's subjects speak to themes in imperial and colonial history, provide nourishment for students of comparative frontier history, and shed further light on the history of relations between whites and Aborigines. Sellick's work is instructive above all in what it does not do. He is not an intrusive editor, restricting himself to minimal factual addendums in the text itself. His subjects are not thrown up as "case studies" illuminating a specific theoretical position, nor are they treated as archetypes or exemplars. While further introductory exegesis would strengthen the work, the documents are ultimately left to speak for themselves. This mark is the standard of any good anthology, amongst whose ranks *Venus in Transit* must now be included.

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#### Works Cited

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***Tradition and the Poetics of Self in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry*, edited by Barbara Garlick. Costerus New Series 140. New York, Rodopi. 2002. xi + 199. ISBN 90-420-1300-1 (paper).**

It has been almost twenty years since Dorothy Mermin's significant grouping of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti.<sup>1</sup> Mermin's

<sup>1</sup> "The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet," *Critical Inquiry*. 13.1 (1986): 64-80.

justification for bringing the three women together is their refusal to be silenced by the patriarchal "Traditional conceptions of the poet's role [. . .]" (65). Mermin accurately ties the women together, linking them through their recognition of the new role of the woman poet that they forged. It is a logical triad to form, especially since each of the three women has had a great impact on the women poets who have followed them. With this in mind, Barbara Garlick has brought the poets together again in a new collection of essays. Her thesis suggests that the essays are going to explore "the question of tradition" in the poetry of these women, as she quotes Virginia Blain's comment that "tradition is established by writers who recognise each other's work and respond to it [. . .]"(viii).

When I saw the title of this collection of essays, I expected the book to cover a range of women writers and to identify a tradition of women's writing in the nineteenth century, yet the following essays barely touch on Blain's concept of tradition. Garlick has chosen essays that are thought-provoking and well-written, but they are loosely connected. A quick look at the table of contents reveals a rather lopsided group: one essay about Caroline Bowles and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, two essays about Barrett Browning alone, two essays about Emily Dickinson and five about Christina Rossetti. Immediately one can see that the collection is not about "tradition and poetics of self in nineteenth century *women's* poetry" [my emphasis] but is actually about these three women in particular (Caroline Bowles is featured in just the one essay). Making this point might seem pedantic, but given current trends in the scholarship of women's poetry and the recovering of women poets from the nineteenth century in particular, one expects this collection to cover broader ground than the three poets who have long been seen as "literary mothers."

Any discussions of nineteenth century women's poetry are necessarily going to note male influences on women; whether the men are contemporary poets, male relatives or even Christ, they often exist as a means of rebellion or inspiration. Virginia Blain shows that some of Barrett Browning and Caroline Bowles' works were influenced by a father and father-figure respectively; she suggests that similar autobiographical elements are present in poems by Dickinson and Rossetti, hence creating what can now be seen as a tradition, recognised retrospectively by late 20th century readers. Meg Tasker sees male influence in Barrett Browning's work from fellow poets such as Homer, Wordsworth and Tennyson. Tasker takes the often-accepted position that *Aurora Leigh* is a novel; she substantiates this through Bakhtin's definition of what a "novel" is. Using Bakhtin to support her argument is valid, but it would aid Tasker's discussion to juxtapose Bakhtin with contemporary notions of the novel familiar to Barrett Browning. E. Warwick Slinn's short feminist reading of two Barrett Browning protagonists is a useful means of reading "poetic selves" in EBB's poetry. He makes the convincing argument that women protagonists can act as their own "agents" while also acting on behalf of their male counterparts; this agency may not always end favourably for the woman, but it does

give her a voice and a means of acting on her own behalf at her own behest and not because of any rules determined by the patriarchal society in which she lives.

Debra Fried and Lori Lebow take vastly different approaches to the work of Emily Dickinson. Fried argues convincingly that Dickinson's misspellings or "phonetic associations" are "a legitimate means of poetic invention" (58), which follows a similar argument made by Elizabeth Phillips's 1988 study, in *Emily Dickinson: Personae and Performance*. Fried attempts to delineate Dickinsonian usage of personification in a large number of poems; her argument is too bogged down in inappropriate metaphors and quotations taken out of context and left unexplained that her conclusion falls flat. Lebow, on the other hand, presents a logical, focused exploration of Dickinson's "epistolary poetics," in which she contributes to an on-going discussion in Dickinson studies that seeks to identify poetic elements in the poet's letters. Lebow's sound contention that Dickinson's use of poetic devices within her letters "not only allows Dickinson to compress her ideas, but to communicate on more than one level" (94) articulates a position scholars are coming to accept.

The last five essays in the volume cover various aspects of Christina Rossetti's poetry. As whole, the essays, including one by Barbara Garlick, carefully show how Rossetti is part of a developing tradition of women poets: Susan Conley traces Romantic influences in Rossetti's work, particularly relating to the Gothic in the sonnet sequence of *Monna Innominata*; Sharon Bickle lays out a logical woman-centric reading of the sonnet sequence and shows Rossetti's connection to Barrett Browning; C.C. Barfoot reasonably connects her more to eighteenth century than nineteenth century poets; Garlick shows that Rossetti was clearly aware of "her own truths about the self" (158) in her final prose work; Tomoko Takiguchi ends the volume appropriately with a discussion of secrecy in Rossetti's work. Tomoko shows a perfect parallel between the poet and "the reality of the life of a middle-class Victorian woman" (192).

This volume is an excellent collection of essays about three individual poets whose contributions to the formation of the canon of women's poetry in English cannot be overstated. As excellent as the essays are generally, as a whole they do not expound upon "tradition" in women's poetry as the introduction defines it; thus, a collection that could signal significant new research in women's poetry of the nineteenth century falls short of being extraordinary.

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