

THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF LITERATURE BY WOMEN: THE TRADITION IN ENGLISH. Edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 1985, 2457pp.

To be anthologized is undoubtedly a mark, if not always of excellence, at least of recognition and distinction. For reasons which cannot be investigated here, women writers have more often than not failed to receive due attention in anthologies which do not consider gender as a critical criterion. But, finally, teachers of literature by women in undergraduate and graduate English programs can now rely on an authoritative and comprehensive collection of texts. Edited and abundantly annotated by Sandra M. Gilbert (Princeton University) and Susan Gubar (Indiana University), this recent addition to the acknowledged series of Norton anthologies successfully charts and delineates a distinctively female literary tradition.

The anthology follows the basic Norton format, with two innovations as to principles of selection and organization. One is that, following feminist critical practices, the historical background provided emphasizes social and cultural aspects and focuses specifically on woman's history and on the feminine experience. The intention, according to the editors, has been to represent "the exuberant variety yet strong continuity of the literature that English-speaking women have produced between the fourteenth century and the present" (p.xxii). The second innovation is that Gilbert and Gubar break with conventional literary periodization and organize authors by birthdate into six major eras: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, The Nineteenth Century, Turn-of-the-Century Literature, Modernist, and Contemporary Literature. Each part is introduced by a survey of the cultural and social history of the period, with special attention to the predominant ideology as to gender relations.

The selections cover 148 authors from England, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, India, Africa, and Australia. They include innumerable short selections of all genres (including political tracts and personal essays), plus three complete novels: Jane Eyre, The Awakening, and The Bluest Eye. By inte-

grating texts across both national and generic boundaries, Gilbert and Gubar fulfill one of their primary intentions: to show that a common ground of "female culture" exists.

Answering to criticism as to their application of feminist criteria rather than literary ones, the editors explain in an interview to Laura Shapiro (Ms. Magazine, Jan. 1986, p.62) that they have chosen to represent both what they call "the sanctified feminist canon" and what is also a tradition of great work. Among other criteria they have also considered the teachability of the selections and a fair representation from various perspectives: lesbian writers, black women writers, working-class and immigrant women writers.

For anyone working along the lines of feminist literary scholarship The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women provides a superb and comprehensive text. For critics and teachers who do not yet understand or subscribe to the principles underlying gender criticism, time will have to tell.

Elvio Antonio Funck (UFRGS)

