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Sylvia Ann Grider, Lou Halsell Rodenberger, eds. *Texas Women Writers: A Tradition of Their Own.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997. xvi + 461 pp. $17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89096-765-2; $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-752-2.

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Academic acceptance of what is and is not a viable field of study has changed greatly over the past generation. One of the most impressive areas of growth has been in the field of women's studies. The intersections between this new mode of analysis and more tradition-bound fields like state and local history are even more recent. By the summer of 1998, the scholarship about Texas women can no longer be considered in its infancy. In recent years, numerous books have been published about Texas women. No doubt these volumes will go far toward reconceptualizing the way in which Texas history is taught by raising new problems for analysis and revisiting old issues for a different vantage point.

One of the more important new books about Texas and Texas women is *Texas Women Writers: A Tradition of Their Own.* This volume, edited by Sylvia Ann Grider and Lou Halsell Rodenberger, is a perfect example of a work that reconfigures our knowledge of an old topic–the literature of the Texas experience–from the perspective of gender. Instead of recognizing the canon of Texas writers–J. Frank Dobie and his cohort–Grider and Rodenberger invite attention to the equally important body of work by and about Texas women. *Texas Women Writers* is an edited collection that will excite scholars from disparate fields. Women's historians, Southern and Western historians, Texas historians, literary scholars, and social and cultural historians will all find material to stimulate their interests. Careful study of the many different chapters in this book reveals that the Texas literary tradition has much more to offer than the typical cowboys and Indians chronicled so masterfully in the works of the leading male literati of the state. Perhaps Judyth Rigler best summarized the findings of the volume in her entry about the future of women's writing in Texas: "what I find most promising among Texas women writers is their ability to get to the real heart of relationships, to give the reader that truly joyful experience of seeing something in print that he or she had known somewhere deep within, of having a basic human emotion shared and thus made more real, more valid somehow" (p. 345).

Indeed, Grider, Rodenberger, and their many contributors are not providing women's history in the form of a "me too" book; rather the essays in the volume suggest reasons for an inception and development of a much different tradition of writing by Texas women. The most important conclusion within these pages is that women, who have tended to write about feelings and emotions, have also tended to be more honest about the various realities–positive and negative–that characterize life in Texas. Perhaps Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind*, which tells of the bleak conditions in late nineteenth-century West Texas, is the best example of a long line of books that critique instead of celebrate all that is Texas.

Divided into five sections, the book provides for readers numerous short entries that analyze the life and the work of the major Texas women writers along with other entries that evaluate larger trends or schools such as the radicalism of Tejana writers, Texas women poets, and children's book writers. The editors have crafted an introduction that traces and briefly contextualizes three periods of Texas women's literary creativity: the pioneers, 1830-1920; the innovators, 1920-1960; and the professionals, 1960-1995. This essay, then, is more helpful as a guide to the first part of the book, which treats each of these periods in turn, than to the last four parts of the book, which examine alternately Tejana and African-American writers, poets, dramatists, and a symposium on the larger topic of Texas women writers. Separate short introductions at the beginning of each of these parts acclimate readers to the respective essays.

The editors are bold in establishing their argument. They use the introduction to explain the dichotomy that exists between male and female Texas writers, with the former being creators and celebrators of the "Texas Mystique" and the latter being credited for "prod[ing] the Texas Mystique until they expose its less glittery underside" (p. 45). J. Frank Dobie and Larry McMurtry come in

for much of the criticism since they complain about "pink tea poets" and "old lady reviewers" respectively while often ignoring the accomplishments of Texas women (p. 26).

The book, given its nature as an edited collection, is by no means the last word on the history of Lone Star women writers but instead should serve as a scholarly reference tool for future academics who choose to do more in-depth work on selected aspects of this literary tradition. To that end, the editors have compiled a most useful bibliography of primary and secondary texts. Because of the editors' attempted comprehensiveness, it is at times difficult to see the connections between the various different women whose lives and work was explicated in these pages. One possible solution for this dilemma rests with the realization that, whatever their time period or their genre, most if not all of the women included in *Texas Women Writers* lived and created on many different levels thus explaining their varied approaches and styles. Perhaps then the answer is not a forced Texas female "sameness" to replace the male "Texas Mystique" but instead recognition of a richer and more varied concomitance of several different women's traditions. Only with more detailed scholarship will this hypothesis be verified. Whatever the answer, Texas history is richer for this new source even if it complicates our knowledge of the cultural past.

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