

INTRODUCTIONS

Laurence Carr & Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

For several years, I've wanted to create a third anthology for Codhill Press, to be a companion book to the previous published volumes, *Riverine: An Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers* and *WaterWrites: A Hudson River Anthology*. For both of these volumes, I read hundreds of pieces of writing (fiction, memoirs, essays, and poems) by hundreds of regional writers. And in each case, I was struck by the depth and honesty of the women authors who offered up their work.

Early on, the thought of creating an anthology that brought together some of the most interesting and imaginative writing by women authors of the Hudson Valley struck me as a worthy project, but I realized that I could not make this journey alone. I would need someone to accompany me who knew the territory as a writer and editor and who also brought a perspective about the issues on which the anthology could focus.

I contacted my friend and colleague, Jan Zlotnik Schmidt, Distinguished Teaching Professor at SUNY New Paltz, and an accomplished writer and editor of prose and poetry. I prepared my speech to try to coerce her into the project. I think I was at the end of my first sentence when she said, "Yes, I'd like to be part of this; the time is right for this book." Without need for further coaxing, we immediately got down to the "nuts and bolts": themes, structure, and a vision that would speak to contemporary readers. In a few moments, the book had leapt into existence.

As the months passed and word spread about the volume, the submissions started to pile up. Soon, Jan and I were looking at

over 500 pieces of writing from over 150 Hudson Valley writers. We knew we couldn't include every piece, but tried to find those works that spoke to the five thematic sections that created the book's narrative: Mythos, Identity, Gender and the Body, Relationships, and Self in the World.

The title of the book emerged after months of reading: *A Slant of Light*, a nod to a poem by Emily Dickinson, our neighbor to the East.

Through research, I discovered how this volume builds upon the foundations laid by earlier writers who called the Hudson Valley home. The valley was fertile literary ground for many authors of prose and poetry from its early years, including: Susan Warner (*The Wide, Wide World* 1849, published under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell. It is often acclaimed as America's first bestseller.); Anna Warner (who sometimes wrote under the pseudonym Amy Lothrop. She wrote thirty-one novels on her own, the most popular of which was *Dollars and Cents*, 1852); Mary Isabella Forsythe (*The Beginnings of New York, Old Kingston, The First State Capitol*, 1909); the poet Mildred Whitney Stillman (*Wood Notes*, 1922; *Pioneers*, 1926; and *Queens and Crickets*, 1927); and Anya Seton (*Dragonwyck*, 1945).

We hope that *A Slant of Light* will add to the rich legacy of works written by Hudson Valley authors and that it will both entertain and bring insight to everyone who reads these pages.

—Laurence Carr

At 7 a.m. when I walk my dog on my country road, the Shawangunks almost pink in early morning light, I reflect, allowing myself to let go of those gnawing anxieties or “to do” lists that cloud the brain and drown out creative thought. In this space of quiet, one morning I was thinking about the volume Larry and I were editing, marveling at the richness and diversity of the works and the range of women’s voices. Indeed, the Hudson Valley is a nourishing place, it seems, for women writers to live and work.

I thought back to my own early days as a graduate student and poet in the 1970s—the dearth of women’s voices in the American literature anthology that I taught from, the lack of women’s literature courses, and the few dissertations that there were on my three chosen women writers, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, and Willa Cather. I remembered the passion and political verve of those second wave feminist scholars, determined to make visible the invisible lives of women and create a more expansive literary canon. These scholars wrote about the silences and anger of women, phallogocentric discourse, and the power of the patriarchy to suppress women’s voices and creativity. I thought of the many conversations I had with my peers, women who were struggling to unleash their voices, to feel entitled to write as women, to write about different experiences and create in different ways from men. During that time, several graduate students and I organized a colloquium on contemporary women poets, focusing on the work of Denise Levertov, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Adrienne Rich. The response from several of our male professors shocked us: “Why would you study these women? There are no women poets worth writing about. They are all minor figures.” We proceeded with the symposium; the room was packed.

That was 1973. In the past forty years, there has been an outpouring of both scholarship about women’s work, the discovery of voices lost to history, and women’s writing.

Certainly a more expansive and diverse literary canon has emerged. This volume is part of that expanding literary tradition. Adrienne Rich, who died this past year, would be pleased. In an early essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” she contends that “re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.” This process of re-envisioning applies not only to critiquing literary texts, but also to reading the texts of our lives: looking back on experiences from new perspectives, exploring new paths for our futures. This process of “re-vision” characterizes this volume. It contains re-imaginings of myths for women, explorations of identity, body and gender and relationships, and meditations on women’s place in the larger global world. We hope this volume adds to the conversations about the experiences of women, reflecting life in the Hudson Valley and beyond.

—*Jan Zlotnik Schmidt*