alienation but with which one lacks the familiarity necessary to manipulate it to one's own ends. Is there a trace of vanity here?

What do we learn about Porter from these poems? Like all writers whose voice predominates in one genre—in her case, finely chiseled prose, especially of the shorter variety—Porter used other genres—here poetry—as an experimental form. Unrue brings a wealth of scholarship and literary criticism to poems that, for their author, were primarily vehicles for ideas and tropes, not for form. Death, for example, a formative trope for Porter, appears with equal significance in her poetry and in her stories. Caricature and satire, of which critics have recently made much, is as prevalent in her verse as in her prose.

The “Bibliography” is the weakest section of Unrue’s book. The arrangement of Porter’s primary works is useful, especially because it provides a chronology and publication record of her poems. But the list of criticism, entitled “Other,” appears highly idiosyncratic. It is neither a complete listing of Porter scholarship to date—which would have gone beyond the range of this book—nor specifically geared toward scholarship about her poetry, since some important recent books receive no mention at all. In its entirety, the list of works might be said to conjure up the background for Porter’s poetic universe, but as it stands it fails to reach its scholarly potential.

Porter’s status as eminent Modernist is strengthened by this edition. Although the poems themselves may not be remembered for long, they speak to us of Porter’s literary life. The arresting image Porter borrows from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz may well serve as a preliminary judgment of her own poetry:

This which you see is merely a painted shadow
Wrought by the boastful pride of art . . .
It is an anxious diligence to preserve
A perishable thing.

(79)

Thomas Austenfeld
Drury College


Rarely have I read a group of stories as moving as Susan Koppelman’s newest edited collection of short fiction about battering and resistance. The cumulative anguish born of reading thirty stories about women battered by men they love makes ignorance or complacency impossible. If you find yourself with lingering doubts about literature’s social relevance, look no further than this book to dispel them. Those familiar with Koppelman’s long and impressive list of discovered
and recovered short stories by American women writers will not be surprised by the variety and historical reach of Women in the Trees, but they may be startled to discover how long—and how explicitly—United States women writers have been addressing what many think of as only a contemporary social problem. Indeed, this collection exposes the falseness of any argument that current violence against women is the result of some past social and familial coherence that is now presumed lost. Past and present, these stories argue, the battering of women pervades United States culture, knowing no bounds of class, race, value systems, or familial structures. As Koppelman observes in her fine introduction, all of these authors “know we cannot look to the victims to understand the choices of the abuser”; the victims’ only shared trait is “the random fact that they love men who have turned out to be batterers” (xxii).

Beginning with a selection from Caroline Kirkland’s 1839 narrative A New Home, Who’ll Follow?, Women in the Trees includes six stories written in the nineteenth century, six written in the first half of the twentieth century, and eighteen written since 1950. Some of the authors are readily recognizable to most scholars of American literature: Kate Chopin, Zora Neale Hurston, and Sandra Cisneros, for example. Many of the writers’ names, however, especially in the late-twentieth century, are not as familiar as their excellent stories suggest they should be: Hisaye Yamamoto, Constance Pierce, and Estela Portillo Trambley, to name only a few. Stories by these last three writers admirably demonstrate that stories collected because they share women’s battering as subject matter need not be any less “literary” than other stories. Yamamoto’s “The Brown House” (1951) experiments with narrative point of view and style as it tells the story of a Japanese-American family’s introduction to United States–style patriarchal structures, including an economic system that exploits immigrant workers as well as women and children. Pierce’s short, eerie “Woman Waiting for Train at Dusk” (1982) is a painterly description of a woman in the process of fleeing an abuser. The visual and narrative focus is on the “woman waiting,” yet the story’s psychological center shifts our attention to those who see, who suspect, but who do nothing despite their “unease” (214). Portillo Trambley’s “If It Weren’t for the Honeysuckle . . .” (1990) recounts the story of three women’s triumph over their abuser in a remote village in northern Mexico. The women, each about a decade apart in years, represent cycles of awareness in a battered woman’s consciousness: the youngest, who does not yet realize she’s in danger, sleeps for most of the story; the middle one, still terrorized by her batterer, goes through the daily motions of living while nearly paralyzed by fear; the eldest calmly and successfully plots the women’s escape.

Occasionally, stories show their roots in earlier and more familiar American women’s stories that protest against patriarchal domination. Fannie Hurst’s “Hattie Turner versus Hattie Turner” (1935) reads like the prequel and sequel to Susan Glaspell’s well-known “A Jury of Her Peers” (1917), which is also included in this collection. Where Glaspell picks up her story after a husband’s murder by his long-suffering wife and before her trial (which Glaspell makes clear will never happen), Hurst tells of a wife’s fantasies of murder, glosses over the murder itself, and skips to the trial, in which the wife is acquitted. Pat Murphy’s “Women in the Trees” (1990) is reminiscent of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-paper” (1892). In
both stories, women characters in large isolated homes take comfort (at least temporarily) in other women whose existences they imaginatively perceive in wallpaper and trees. “If Not for the Honeysuckle . . .” by Portillo Trambley resembles Mary Wilkins Freeman’s “Old Woman Magoun” (1909) with its determined older woman character who risks murder in order to protect younger women. A significant difference in two of these pairs (Glaspell-Hurst and Freeman-Murphy) is the later story’s more optimistic vision of the women’s escape from tyranny. As Koppelman’s introduction points out, this greater optimism in late-twentieth-century stories is in large part due to “the arrival of the battered women’s shelter” (xxiv), beginning with the first in London in the early 1970s.

Similar to these pairings that make late-twentieth-century optimism seem possible, the chronological organization of Women in the Trees has a serious purpose: to leave a reader, particularly if that reader is one of the battered women whose readership is explicitly sought, with a feeling of hope. By beginning with Kirkland’s relatively distanced description of the drunken innkeeper whose family lived in fear of his violence and ending with Barbara Harman’s “Happy Ending” (1994), which revises the story of battery by imagining alternative happy endings to it, Koppelman pulls the reader out of despair. Further, by framing the collection with an introduction and afterword, Koppelman signals the same move from grim acceptance to hopeful solution. The introduction describes not only the social and literary contexts for these stories, but also the personal story of Koppelman’s own survival as a battered woman. The final sentence of the afterword is: “WE CAN MAKE IT STOP.” This trajectory of hope, which is built into the very structure of the collection, cannot happen one woman at a time; it is not an individual problem. We can make it stop. This collection, as its editor emphasizes, is “one kind of intervention” (xviii). Reading, and especially teaching, these stories is another. I hope that everyone who teaches United States fiction—not just those who work on women writers or in women’s studies, and not just those who deal with issues of gender and sexuality in the course of their work—will pay attention.

Pamela R. Matthews
Texas A&M University


This gathering from the “Malamud Finding” housed at the Library of Congress includes speeches (many never before ushered into print), introductions, interviews, and a series of unpublished notes and responses about the nature of prose fiction. Taken together, they provide a glimpse not only into the working life...